

PROSPECTS OF PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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ABSTRACT

The Middle East has been the scene of bitter struggles for millennia and in the region; the Arab-Israeli conflict has been the core of the disputes. It has been one of the most difficult conflicts to resolve in terms of its complexity and long history. The conflict is a continuation of the struggle between the Jews of Israel and the Palestinian-Arabs over the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The Palestinians had lived in the region long before the Jews began moving there in large numbers in the late 1800's. However, Palestine today consists of Israel and the areas known as the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The increased movement of a large numbers of Jews into the area incurred the hatred of the Palestinians. This resulted in several wars between Israel and its Arab neighbours that have opposed Israel's existence. It also precipitated a struggle by the Palestinian Arabs to establish their own country in some or all of the land occupied by Israel. The wars escalated the dispute and drew the attention of International bodies.

INTRODUCTION

The developments in the international arena in the 1990's produced a change in the basic political order of the Middle East, which prompted the Arab world to reassess its attitude towards Israel and to enter into negotiations for resolving the dispute. On the other hand, a series of Palestinian uprisings in 1985 also convinced Israel that the continued occupation of Gaza and the West Bank was not its long-term interest. In October 1991, a conference was convened in Madrid to inaugurate direct peace talks. Subsequently, bilateral and multilateral negotiations were initiated. Until Madrid, only Egypt accepted Israel's offer to negotiate face-to-face and the two countries embarked on historic bilateral negotiations, which led to the 1979 Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty.

The Madrid negotiations resulted in a peace treaty between Israel and Jordan and the Oslo Accord with Palestine. The Oslo diplomatic process had brought together people who were normally unwilling to talk to each other and reached a series of interim agreements. However, eight years have elapsed since Oslo and no peace appears in sight. Today, the situation in Israel and the Palestinian territories is frighteningly close to war. It is a savage irony that this threat comes after some remarkable progress towards a comprehensive settlement. The thorny issues before a final

peace settlement can be reached, however, remain the problem of borders, the question of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, the return of Palestinian refugees and the status of Jerusalem.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Palestine region is bounded on the east by the Jordan, on the west by the Mediterranean, on the north by Lebanon, on the northeast by Syria and on the south by the Sinai Peninsula. The region has been known as Palestine for 2,000 years, and was occupied by a predominantly Palestinian population. The total area of Israel and Palestine between the Jordan River and the sea is slightly over 10,000 square miles (26,000 sq km)¹. The area of the entire West Bank is about 2,200 square miles while that of the Gaza strip is approximately 140 square miles. Jewish intellectuals in Europe at the beginning of the 19th century began to support the notion that Jews should settle in Palestine, which they believed was their Biblical homeland. This idea became known as Zionism. They were driven by two aims in their quest to find a place safe from anti-Semitism. These were the return to Jerusalem and the establishing of a nation state. For the Jews inside and outside Israel, Zionism, as a way to restore the dignity and safety of the Jewish people has in the hundred years since its conception, been an ideology, both historical and social. Zionism, in a sense, is a form of nationalism. In the 1800's, Palestine was controlled by the Ottoman Empire, which was centred in present-day Turkey². In Europe, because of the increasing anti-Semitism, which resulted in violent attacks on Jews and their property, the immigration of European Jews to Palestine accelerated. Zionists established dozens of colonies in Palestine amidst a population that was largely Arab and Muslim. By 1880, there were 24,000 Jews out of a total population of 525,000. The Jewish population swelled to 90,000 out of almost 600,000 by 1915 and a third of the total of almost two million by 1947. At first, many of the immigrants and the Palestinian Arabs lived together peacefully. But as more Jews arrived, conflicts between the two groups increased, with the Arab leaders wanting to put an end to Jewish immigration and land acquisitions³.

At the end of World War, I in 1918, Britain gained control of Palestine from the Ottoman Empire. In the Balfour declaration of 1917, Britain had supported the creation of a national homeland for the Jews. In 1937 a British commission recommended that Palestine be partitioned into Jewish and Arab states, with the British controlling Jerusalem. The Zionists accepted the idea, but the Arabs rejected

¹ Fahmy, I., *Negotiating for Peace in the Middle East* (Routledge Revivals). 2013: Routledge.

² Khalidi, R., *Brokers of deceit: How the US has undermined peace in the Middle East*. 2013: Beacon Press.

³ Owen, R., *State, power and politics in the making of the modern Middle East*. 2013: Routledge.

it. With World War II on the horizon, the British government realized it would need Arab support in the Middle East and thus put the idea on hold ⁴.

After the war, as Holocaust survivors and other Jewish displaced persons streamed toward Palestine, the partition idea was revived. In November 1947, the UN approved a plan to divide Palestine into two states. Zionist leaders once again accepted the plan. Arab governments and the Palestinians however saw the division as the theft of Arab land by Zionists and the governments that supported them. British rule over Palestine ended when Zionists proclaimed the state of Israel on May 14, 1948. The Palestinians were infuriated as their homeland was taken, against their wishes and mostly by force. The reaction was immediate, in what was to be a precursor to four armed conflicts. On May 15, 1948 the armies of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq attacked the new country with the declared intent of destroying it. By August 1949, Israel and all five Arab states had agreed to end the fighting. As a result of the war about 700,000 Palestinians became refugees in Jordan, the Gaza Strip, Lebanon and Syria ⁵.

The Suez Crisis of 1956. During the 1950's nationalist feelings suffused the Arabs of the Middle East. Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and his followers sought to rid Arab lands of the influence of Western nations. On July 26, 1956 Nasser took over the Suez Canal from its British and French controllers. Britain, France and Israel secretly plotted to regain the canal and on October 29, they attacked the Egyptian forces in the Peninsula and along the Suez Canal defeating them. However, they were forced to pull back due to the international situation ⁶.

The 1967 War. The most dramatic of all was the Six-Day War, which lasted from June 5 to 10, 1967. Responding to what it perceived as an imminent attack by Egypt, Syria and Jordan, Israel launched a large-scale occupational war under the cover of a pre-emptive strike against all three countries. Israel won stunning victories on all fronts. It took the Sinai and Gaza from Egypt, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the West Bank from Jordan including the Old City of Jerusalem ⁷.

The 1973 War. After the 1967 War, Egyptian and Israeli troops continued to attack each other across the western border of the Sinai Peninsula. On October 6, 1973, Egypt and Syria launched a massive assault on Israeli forces in the Sinai and Golan Heights. The attack took Israel by surprise, in part because it came on Yom Kippur, the holiest day in Judaism. At first, Egypt drove Israel's forces out of the western Sinai and Syria regained the eastern Golan Heights. However, the United States rushed large supplies of military equipment to Israel and by October 24, Israeli forces had crossed the Suez

⁴ Cohen-Chen, S., et al., Hope in the Middle East: Malleability beliefs, hope, and the willingness to compromise for peace. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 2014. **5**(1): p. 67-75.

⁵ Lynch, M., *The Arab uprising: The unfinished revolutions of the new Middle East*. 2013: PublicAffairs

⁶ Bligh, A., *The United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), 1956–67: Past Experience, Current Lessons*. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 2014. **50**(5): p. 796-809.

⁷ Schulze, K.E., *The arab-israeli conflict*. 2013: Routledge.

Canal, surrounded the Egyptian Third Army, repulsed the Syrian advance and recaptured the Golan Heights⁸.

The Israeli Invasion of Lebanon. Due to the PLO guerrilla attacks on Israel, especially from Southern Lebanon, Israel invaded the country in 1982. It drove the PLO out of the southern part of Lebanon and established a 40-km buffer zone.

The Intifada. In 1987, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip began an uprising against Israel's military rule. The uprising became known as the 'Intifada', an Arabic term meaning uprising or shaking off. Demonstrations occurred throughout the occupied territories. Entire towns refused to pay taxes. Palestinians quit their jobs with Israeli employers. Most of the demonstrations were peaceful, but a few became violent. The Intifada grabbed international attention and triggered criticism of Israel for its continuing control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and for its excessive use of force in trying to suppress the Palestinians⁹.

INTERNATIONAL INTEREST

Geo-strategic Importance of the Middle East. The geo-strategic centrality of the Middle East, being at the crossroads of three continents; Europe, Asia and Africa, means that maintaining access to the region will continue to be an important global interest. Also, the area is located on the most convenient routes linking the populous regions of Europe and North America with the East. Fringed by five seas; the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the Black Sea, the Gulf, and the Arabian Sea, the Middle East is easily accessible and provides many important transit maritime waterways such as the Suez Canal, the Strait of Hormuz and the Turkish Straits¹⁰. Additionally, almost 65 percent of the world's proven oil reserves are located in this region. The cost of importing this oil is among the lowest in the world. The region also has large reservoirs of natural gas that can significantly alter the international supply picture. In 1996, natural gas reserves accounted for about 30.5 percent of the world total, which alone is sufficient to satisfy current worldwide consumption for more than twenty years¹¹.

Role of UN. The UN has been at the forefront of resolving Arab-Israeli conflicts in a number of ways. First, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) have been providing social services to the Palestine population, which has made it one of the well-educated communities of the world

⁸ Behar, M. and Z.B.-D. Benite, *Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought: Writings on Identity, Politics, and Culture, 1893-1958*. 2013: UPNE.

⁹ Jones, D.M. and M. Smith, *Myth and the small war tradition: Reassessing the discourse of British counter-insurgency. Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 2013. **24**(3): p. 436-464

¹⁰ Mansfield, P., *A history of the Middle East*. 2013: Penguin

¹¹ Hayward-Jones, J., *Big enough for all of us: Geo-strategic competition in the Pacific Islands*. 2013: Lowy Institute for International Policy Sydney

today. Secondly, UN has from time to time passed resolutions to resolve the problem. Four of its major resolutions are: -

- a. **UN Resolution No 194.** Resolution No 194 of 1948 established the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland or be resettled with compensation, if they so preferred.
- b. **UN Resolution No 242.** This resolution called for the withdrawal of the Israel armed forces from the territories it occupied in the 1967 war.
- c. **UN Resolution NO 338.** NO 338 reaffirmed resolutions 242 and called for the end of the fourth Arab-Israeli war of October 1973. It also urged the parties to establish immediate negotiations for a just and durable peace in the region.
- d. **UN Resolution No 425.** This resolution called for Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon and the creation of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

Notwithstanding these endeavours, the UN has frequently been criticized for failing to enforce its resolutions and play a more effective political role in the conflict. The main reason for this is that the important members of the UN have not agreed to perform such a role¹².

US Interest. Despite the changes brought about by the end of the Cold War and the Gulf War, America's traditional interests in the region have remained the basis for its involvement in the Middle East. First, the United States will continue to have a vital interest in maintaining access to Middle East oil, which constitutes 22% of its supplies, at reasonable prices. Second, since it has a close strategic relation with Israel as an ally, it will continue supporting Israel's survival and security. Third, the US will ensure the security and stability of friendly Arab states either for their centrality to regional stability or for the provision of access to oil¹³. Supporting Egypt and Jordan will continue to be an American interest because of their commitment to peace with Israel. Also it will support preservation of the independence of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf oil producing states. Fourth, as the world's greatest maritime power the United States requires freedom of the sea. US trade is overwhelmingly water borne. Freedom of navigation and over flight also ensures that the US military can maintain an effective regional presence in peacetime or respond rapidly in a crisis¹⁴.

Interest of the European Union. Europe's interest can be seen from its vantage point of being closer to the potential trouble spots of the Middle East. For Europe, the region is a near neighbour and its view is coloured by this relationship. From the security point of view, the danger of war would be uncomfortably close to home, were it to threaten the region again. For the EU, the Gulf war was felt

¹² Malmvig, H., Power, identity and securitization in Middle East: Regional order after the Arab uprisings. *Mediterranean Politics*, 2014. 19(1): p. 145-148.

¹³ Richards, A., et al., *A political economy of the Middle East*. 2013: Westview Press.

¹⁴ Shambaugh, D.L., *China goes global: The partial power*. Vol. 111. 2013: Oxford University Press Oxford

more keenly, whereas, it was an overseas adventure for USA¹⁵. Europe also has a close historical concern with the Middle East, as most of the countries were former colonies. Besides, maintaining peace and stability in the region serves its economic interest. EU has clearly perceived that the key dispute is the clash between Israel and Palestinians and that other aspect of the Middle East peace process would follow a resolution of that central issue. It stresses the importance of its economic aid and cooperation as an incentive for the peace process¹⁶.

Russian Interest. There was one overriding strategic goal from which the erstwhile Soviet Union never deviated. This was preventing hostile powers from having paramount influence in or from the occupation of Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan. These three countries constituted a 'zone of denial', flanking the southern borderlands of the USSR. In implementing this strategic goal, the Soviet Union had been supported by the military facilities and its influence in Egypt and Syria. Although the Soviets had theoretically no need for Middle Eastern petroleum, its interests in the area's hydrocarbons lay in exploiting the low-cost resources while preserving its own reserves and by denying them to the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Japan¹⁷.

Peace Process

The Soviet Union, which was the main foreign supporter of anti-Israel governments and the PLO, disintegrated in 1991. Thus, the Arabs found themselves with drastically reduced international support for their fight against Israel. On the other hand, a series of Palestinian uprisings in 1985 convinced the then Israeli Prime Minister Rabin that the continued occupation of Gaza and the West Bank was not in their long-term interest. The stage was therefore set for negotiations and the subsequent peace process¹⁸.

The Camp David Accord. Prior to the Middle East peace process, Egypt had normalized relations with Israel in 1978. The Egyptian President Anwar Al-Sadat joined the Israeli Prime Minister Menahem Begin and U.S. President Jimmy Carter in signing the Camp David Accords. Under these agreements, Egypt recognized Israel's right to exist. In return, Israel agreed to give back part of the Sinai it annexed in the 1967 war. Sadat and Begin also agreed that there was a need for the independence of Palestine. During the talks, Egypt and Israel received promises of large amounts of US economic and military aid. In 1979, Egypt and Israel signed a treaty that confirmed their new

¹⁵ Keukeleire, S. and T. Delreux, *The foreign policy of the European Union*. 2014: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁶ Howorth, J., *Security and defence policy in the European Union*. 2014: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁷ Stent, A., *The limits of partnership: US-Russian relations in the twenty-first century*. 2014: Princeton university press Princeton, NJ

¹⁸ Halpern, M., *Politics of Social Change: In the Middle East and North Africa*. 2015: Princeton University Press

peaceful relationship. Most Arab leaders strongly opposed the Camp David Accords and as a result, Egypt was expelled from the Arab League¹⁹.

Madrid Conference. The Madrid Conference hosted by the Government of Spain and cosponsored by the US and Russia was convened on October 30, 1991 to inaugurate two negotiating tracks - i.e. the bilateral and the multilateral. Bilateral negotiations were conducted between Israel and its neighbours including Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians. The multilateral negotiations were focused on region-wide issues, such as arms control, regional security and water. The follow-up negotiations resulted in a peace treaty between Israel and Jordan and a series of interim agreements with the Palestinians. While the talks with the three Arab states were aimed at achieving peace treaties, the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians were based on a two stage formula: a 5-year interim self-government arrangement, and negotiations on the permanent status of Jerusalem. The Madrid negotiations between Israel and Palestinians gave birth to the Oslo Accord two years later²⁰.

Oslo Process. In 1993, Israel and the PLO, encouraged by Norway, began secret peace talks in Oslo. As a result, the PLO and Israel signed an agreement in Washington, D.C., in September 1993. Under the agreement, the PLO stated its recognition of Israel's right to exist while Israel, in turn, recognized the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people. Israel also promised to withdraw from part or all of the West Bank and Gaza Strip as well as to allow the creation of a Palestinian state. In 1994 as a first step, Israel gave the PLO control of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank City of Jericho. In 1995 and 1996, the Palestinians were given control of most cities and towns of the West Bank. Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994. Only Syria failed to reach any agreement with Israel²¹.

Wye River. As an aftermath of the Madrid Conference, Israel and the Palestinians signed the Wye River Agreement in October 1998. In this, the Palestinians agreed to remove language from their founding charter that called for the dismantling of the Jewish state while the Israelis agreed to cede an additional 13 percent of the West Bank and allow the opening of a Palestinian airport in the Gaza Strip. Simultaneously, the parties set a deadline of September 13, 2000 for reaching a final peace accord. By mid-year 2000, with the deadline approaching and no agreement in sight, US President Clinton invited Barak and Arafat to a three-way summit at Camp David. The talks began on July 11 and ended 15 days later without an agreement, because of the deadlock over sovereignty and the

¹⁹ Quandt, W.B., Camp David: peacemaking and politics. 2015: Brookings Institution Press.

²⁰ Jamin, J.-B., The Madrid conference (1934). History of an international event at the origin of modern museography. *CAPITALE CULTURALE-STUDIES ON THE VALUE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE*, 2017(15): p. 73-101.

²¹ Savir, U., Oslo: Twenty Years After. *Negotiation Journal*, 2014. 30(1): p. 115-123.

control of Jerusalem. Since then, there has been no significant progress towards peace and this resulted in the current state of violence ²².

Israel-Syria Peace Track. After more than twenty years, the Syria track is still the most complicated part of the peace process. There has been a total stalemate in negotiations for five years. Since 1967, the Golan Heights dispute has passed through several negotiations. However, impediments such as issues of settlements and pull back procedures blockaded the talks. Other obstacles included disagreement on the extent of disarmament and the volume of international forces that should intervene. Israel declared its readiness to pull back from the Golan under severe security conditions, which include prohibiting the Syrians from ever reaching Tabaria. Syria on the other hand insisted on complete and unconditional withdrawal. These complications turned the Syrian Israeli negotiations into a thorny matter ²³.

CURRENT SITUATION

Today, Israel is at peace with Egypt and Jordan, and has withdrawn its forces from Southern Lebanon. While negotiations with Syria have been deadlocked, the road to permanent peace between Israel and the Palestinians is still dotted with numerous pitfalls. The failure of the Camp David II talks held in July 11-24, 2000 has caused the moderate elements in the Arab world to question the reason for continuing the peace process with Israel ²⁴.

It was therefore not surprising that the controversial visit of the Likud party Ariel Sharon to Al-Aqsa Mosque on September 27, sparked off the outbreak of violence in West Bank and Gaza. In the ongoing Intifada, hundreds of people have been killed, all but a few of them Arabs. The subsequent spillover effects of the violent clashes based on suicide attacks by the Palestinians and military retaliation by Israel has raised fundamental questions about the future of the Arab-Israeli peace process ²⁵.

Since the violence erupted, a number of emergency talks were initially held. These were aimed at ending clashes and putting the peace process back on track. Since then, there has been a total breakdown of talks and the violence has begun to spin out of control. The involvement of Lebanon, Syria and other Arab countries accounts for the gravity of the situation. The most far-reaching development in the peace process was the US proposal of December 2000. It proposed the handing over by Israel of over 97% of the West Bank and Gaza including East Jerusalem and the Old City,

²² Leonard, J., et al., Wye River/Separation Creek Post-bushfire building survey findings. 2016, CSIRO Client Report EP16924

²³ Perthes, V., The advantages of complementarity: The Middle East peace process, in *Revival: The New Transatlantic Agenda* (2001). 2017, Routledge. p. 111-130.

²⁴ Brecher, M., Arab-Israel Perceptions, in *Dynamics of the Arab-Israel Conflict*. 2017, Springer. p. 35-42.

²⁵ Lehrs, L., Private Peace Entrepreneurs in Conflict Resolution Processes. *International Negotiation*, 2016. 21(3): p. 381-408.

home to such revered sites as the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Israel would annex blocks of Jewish settlements and give Palestinians tracts of land inside Israel in exchange. It was also suggested that the Palestinians make concessions on the right of return of most of the four million refugees who were forced to flee in 1948²⁶.

GROUPS OPPOSED TO PEACE

In addition to the difficulties faced in negotiations by parties to the peace process, there are a number of groups opposed to the peace process from both the Palestinian and the Israeli sides.

Hamas. Hamas is the main Islamist movement in the Palestinian territories and was founded soon after the Intifada erupted in 1987. Hamas is a Sunni Islamist Palestinian group based in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This organisation opposes the Oslo peace process and ultimately wants to establish an Islamic state of Palestine in the whole of the territory originally mandated as Palestine. It demands a complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and believes that Chairman Arafat is too "eager" to compromise with Israel. The Hamas has a 'military' wing that engages in attacks against Israel and a 'civilian' wing that confines itself to education and social programmes. Its Charter declared that all of Palestine belongs to the Muslims and that it can only be liberated by a holy war – Jihad²⁷.

Hezbollah. Hezbollah is a Lebanese political movement created in June 1982 with the help of Iran as a reaction to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. It quickly became the main military organisation fighting against Israel in the South of Lebanon. It is also the most important social organisation in predominantly Shia regions. At the outset, it was financed by Iran. The bulk of its financing now comes from local fund raising. The Hezbollah never stopped harassing the Israeli occupation forces in South Lebanon. The unconditional Israeli withdrawal from the area in May 2000 has considerably boosted the popularity of this resistance movement, which is also a major player in the Lebanese political life²⁸.

PFLP. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) is another Islamic group opposed to the peace process. It declares that any agreements that do not respect the basic and legitimate rights of the Palestinians, {i.e. the right to return, the right for self-determination and the building of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital), are doomed to fail²⁹.

DFLP. The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) is a Marxist-Leninist organisation founded in 1969 when it split from the PFLP. It believes that the Palestinian national goals can be achieved only through revolution of the masses. It broke into two factions in 1991. The majority and

²⁶ Podeh, E., Chances for peace: Missed opportunities in the Arab-Israeli conflict. 2015: University of Texas Press.

²⁷ Graf, C., The Gaza War 2014. Hamas' Response towards Israel in Times of Cold Peace. 2015.

²⁸ Sullivan, M., *Hezbollah in Syria*. 2014: Institute for the Study of War

²⁹ Cobban, H., *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation: people, power and politics*. 1984: Cambridge University Press.

more hard-line faction joined with other rejectionist groups to form the Alliance of Palestinian Forces (APF) to oppose the Oslo Agreement signed in 1993³⁰.

Likud. The Likud party opposed the Oslo Agreement between Israel and the PLO. It upheld Israeli sovereignty over the whole of Jerusalem, rejected the establishment of a Palestinian state and promised to expand Jewish settlements. Besides that, it opposed the withdrawal from the occupied territories, the right of Palestinian presence in Jerusalem and the refugees' right to return to any part of the Land of Israel west of the Jordan River. Even the first round of withdrawal by the Likud leadership following the Wye River agreement, led to strong protests inside the coalition and in the Party itself³¹.

Impediments. The key issues to be covered during permanent status negotiations are Golan Heights, Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements, borders, and relations with other neighbours. Four of these key permanent status issues, which have the potential to impede the peace process, are Jerusalem, refugees, borders and settlements, [f agreements can be reached on these issues, peace would be guaranteed.

Palestinian Refugees. Many Arabs claim that 800,000 to 1,000,000 Palestinians became refugees in 1947-49. Still more were displaced after the 1967 war. On the whole, the UN registered more than 3.7 million Palestinians refugees and their descendants, who had been taken in by other Arab states. There are 1.6 million in Jordan, 383,000 in Syria, 376,000 in Lebanon and 1.5 million in the West Bank and Gaza. An additional two million refugees, living in other neighbouring countries such as Iran and Iraq, have not been registered. The United Nations adopted Resolution 194 on December 11, 1948 stating that refugees wishing to return to their homes and live in peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so. Compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return. However, Israel has refused to respect the Resolution for fear that it would mortally challenge the Majority-Jewish character of the state³².

Jerusalem. Jerusalem has both Arab and Jewish inhabitants. They are bound to Jerusalem with the same intensity for the reasons of religious, historical and political attachment. The Arab part of Jerusalem that is integral to the West Bank was annexed after the 1967 conquest by Israel. Hardline Israeli elements want Jerusalem to remain a part of Israel, but some of the moderates suggest that the city should be recognized as sacred for the followers of the three major religions in the region;

³⁰ Baumgarten, H., The Three Faces/Phases of Palestinian Nationalism, 1948—2005. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 2005. 34(4): p. 25-48.

³¹ Shindler, C., *Israel, Likud and the Zionist dream: Power, politics and ideology from Begin to Netanyahu*. 1995: IB Tauris

³² Zureik, E., *Palestinian refugees and the peace process*. 1996: Inst for Palestine Studies

Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. An open and united Jerusalem should be the capital of the two states living side by side³³.

Borders. Israel annexed the Palestinian territory of the entire Gaza Strip and West Bank, including East Jerusalem in the 1967 war. The Israelis do not wish to relinquish all the conquered land for security reasons. Besides a presence in strategic parts of the West Bank, it wants some of the Jewish settlements built during the years of occupation to be incorporated into Israel,

Jewish Settlements. Between 1967 and 1995, one hundred and thirty-six Jewish settlements were established in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These settlements contained 138,600 residents and 365 localities. The localities in each District are as follows: Jerusalem 37, Gaza 45, Tulkarm 10, Ramallah 54, Jaffa 19, Haifa 45, Akka 25, Taburiya 24, Jenin 6, Nazareth 4, Safed 76 and Beisan 22. The vast majority of these settlements were established directly by various "Israeli" governments, and they all received governmental subvention for infrastructure, construction and establishment of public institutions. In accordance to the agreements between Israel and the Palestinians, the future of the settlements will be determined only at the final stage of negotiations. The establishment of permanent civilian settlements in the occupied territories contravenes international humanitarian law. According to that law, an occupying power is prohibited from transferring population from its own territory into territory that it occupies, and from performing any act that is not intended to meet its military needs or benefit the local population. In addition, international law prohibits creating permanent change not intended for the benefit of that population.

Palestinian Position. The Palestinian position on all these key issues is clear and simple. Hitherto, they relied on international legitimacy, international law and UN resolutions. These are the Security Council Resolution 242 with respect to Jerusalem and borders, Resolution 194 with respect to refugees, and the Fourth Geneva Convention with respect to settlements. If honoured, international law and the relevant UN resolutions would require Israel's withdrawal to its June 4, 1967, borders, the return of all Palestinian refugees and displaced persons to their homes and compensation if any chose not to return. The dismantling of all settlements on Palestinian lands occupied in 1967 and the departure of all settlers would also be implemented.

Israeli Position, The Israeli position on the key issues is reflected in their response to the US proposal and Camp David II talks. In the US proposal, Israel would cede control over the Palestinian neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem, but sovereignty over the Temple Mount is non-negotiable. The Israeli military is reluctant to leave the Jordan River valley, which is currently Israel's first line of defence against threats from the east. In the Camp David II talks, Israel would guarantee the

³³ Gupta, A. and J. Ferguson, *Culture, power, place: Explorations in critical anthropology*. 1997: duke University press.

establishment of a Palestinian state in most of the West Bank and the entire Gaza strip. The state would have no army with heavy weapons and would not make alliances with other countries without Israeli approval. Their reservations on remaining issues are as follows: -

- a. Refugees.** Israel would not accept any legal or civilian responsibility for the displacement of refugees but would allow the return of around 100,000 of them on "humanitarian" grounds in the form of family reunions. It would consider such a step as compliance with UN Resolution 194. An international fund would compensate refugees for which Israel, the U.S. and Europe would contribute.
- b. Status of Jerusalem.** Palestine would obtain sovereignty over suburbs in the north and the south of Jerusalem that would be annexed to the West Bank. Within East Jerusalem there would be a civilian administration affiliated with the Palestinian Authority with the possibility of linking it to West Jerusalem through a municipality covering both sectors. The Palestinians would be a branch municipality within the framework of the Israeli higher municipal council while depriving them from planning and construction jurisdictions. The Palestinians would be allowed to hoist the Palestinian flag over the Islamic and Christian shrines along with a safe passage linking northern Jerusalem. These areas would be annexed to the West Bank so that Palestinians and other Muslims would not pass through lands under Israeli sovereignty.
- c. Borders and Settlements.** The initial area of the Palestinian State would comprise about 73% of the land area of the West Bank and all of Gaza. In later stages (10-25 years) Israel would cede additional areas, particularly in the mountains overlooking the Jordan valley, to bring the total area to slightly under 90% of the West Bank. Isolated Jewish settlements including the settlement in Hebron would come under Palestinian jurisdiction and would probably be abandoned.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

The problem is indeed extremely thorny and complicated. The positions of the various parties to the conflict have tended to become stratified over time. Furthermore, the emotionally charged atmosphere surrounding the issues involved, does not lend itself to a straightforward solution. An attempt has however been made to find an unbiased answer to the impasse, which may be workable in light of the ground realities.

Palestine State. A Palestine State should be established and be permanently de-militarised, with no persons other than the Palestinian police permitted to bear arms on its territory. Israel and the Palestinians should facilitate the talks to achieve this as soon as possible. The pre June 1967 border,

subject only to truly minor and reciprocal adjustments, should be acceptable to both parties. Israel and Palestine should constitute a single economic unit with free, nondiscriminatory movement of people and products between and within the states. EU could serve as the model for economic relations between the new sovereign states.

Jewish Settlements, The Palestinian leader should grant all Jewish settlers currently living in Palestine, as well as their descendants, a right of permanent residence such that no settlers would be compelled to move, that no settler's homes would be demolished and that no settlements would be dismantled. Those settlers choosing to remain in Palestine would be treated as Palestinian citizens with full rights subject to Palestinian laws. Settlers and settlements would cease to exist and be replaced by towns. Similarly, the one million Palestinians living in the state of Israel should be equally treated as Israeli citizens. Israel should offer tracts of their land adjacent to West Bank as compensation for the settlements.

Refugees. Israel would have to comprehend and accept the enormous moral significance of the Palestinian refugees' right to return to their homes or receive compensation as enshrined in UN Resolution 194. The modalities, including numbers and timings of the exercise of this right of return would have to be negotiated. The numbers admitted each year might be modest, but the principle would have to be accepted by Israel with no limitation on the time period during which such right of return would be exercisable.

Status of Jerusalem. The core issue in the search for Middle East peace is the status of Jerusalem. In seeking a solution to the status of Jerusalem, the geography and the associated historical names provide a ready solution. The city has three names: Al-Quds in the Arabic, Yerushalaim in Hebrew and Jerusalem as it is to the rest of the world. The proposal emerges from these names. First, the true and holy Jerusalem, the Walled city, would belong to no single nation or religion. Rather it would belong to the whole world and to the three religions: Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Thus, no state would have political sovereignty over it, so that Jerusalem would remain a spiritual basin, as it was originally. Second Al-Quds, which would be the urban areas that stretch beyond the ancient walls to the East, Northeast areas and Southeast, would be the Arab part of the city. Third, Yerushalaim, which would be the urban areas that stretch beyond the walls to the West, Northwest and Southwest, would belong to the Jews. The Palestinian flag would be raised in Al-Quds and the Israel flag would fly over Yerushalaim. Over the old city of Jerusalem, however, no flags would fly, for the sacred shrines would be the symbol of the city. The holy walled city of Jerusalem would be open to all; as Muslims, Christians and Jews must not be separated from their holy shrines. A council representing their highest religious authorities would govern it. Each authority would be responsible

for running and maintaining the holy sites of faith and participating on equal footing in the administration of the walled city.

Golan Heights. The Middle East peace process cannot be fully achieved without solving the problem of Golan Heights. Israel would have to withdraw its troops to the pre 1967 border and remove all settlements in the Golan Heights. In return, Syria would have to guarantee the security of Israel in accordance with Israel's demand under supervision of the UN. Furthermore, both countries should respect international law regarding the water issues.

CONCLUSION

Over the years, the UN has made several attempts to end the Arab-Israeli conflict. Unfortunately, its main Resolutions on the issue have not been implemented. However, a just and honourable solution of the problem must be found, as it is crucial to world peace and stability. This will not be possible without a spirit of accommodation. All the concerned parties would have to make genuine efforts to find an answer, which is not only acceptable but also workable. This framework for peace in the Middle East is more or less based on UN Resolutions. It proposes the rapid establishment of a fully de-militarised Palestinian state in the West Bank and if implemented, has the basic ingredients of a durable solution.