

## **"The Gulf War (1991) and the Prospects of Peace in West Asia (1991 - 1994)"**

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### ***Introduction***

Perhaps the most perplexing problems raised by the new nationalism occur when it takes different and hostile forms in the same geographical area. In such cases, its energies are divided between the struggles against colonialism on the one hand and, on the other the struggle for dominance among the emerging nations themselves. This has most notably been the case in the West Asia Region, which has in fact been undergoing a threefold nationalist struggle: Arabs against Arabs, Arabs against Israel and Arabs against Western colonialism.

The factors which led to the West Asian conflict broadly fall into two groups, viz., internal and external. In the internal sphere the core factor was the conflict between the Zionist and the Arabs regarding the possession of the same territory. To the Zionists it was the question of Israel while to the Arabs it was the question of Palestine. In view of the conflicting and irreconcilable claims the clash was projected as a clash between theocratic politics and indigenous nationalism, the Jews representing the concept of radical and religious unity, and the Arabs representing the secular and nationalistic concept. It may be noted that all the Arabs, do not belong to a single religion, even though a majority of them are followers of Islam. There are a sizeable number of Christians as well as Jews among them. The Arabs made it clear that their quarrel was against Zionism which rested on religious and radical bigotry and not the Jews because the Jews have always lived happily in the Arab lands. Even now there are a sizeable number of Jews in many of the Arab countries and they are enjoying full religious freedom.

As regards the external factors, in view of the power vacuum created in the region in the post World War II period both the superpowers, USA and USSR, were keen to increase their influence in the region. The situation became serious because the two powers supported the rival parties and thus, the West Asian crisis virtually became a battle by proxy between the two superpowers. As Richard Cox has put it "The Arab-Israel war was a battle by proxy between the superpowers in which Russia and the United States tested many of their weapons that would be used in an European conflict". It is noteworthy that though both the superpowers wanted to acquire influence in the region they were also keen to avoid a direct confrontation which could pose a threat to the world peace. The external factor included the policy of the imperialist states after the World War II, primarily of the United States, which has directly backed Israel's policy of expansion and is using the regional conflict in its struggle against the region's national-liberation forces and world socialism.

Arab Nationalism and the Palestine question have been holding an important position in the political and cultural history of the region for a number of centuries. As we know the Arab -Israel conflict is one of the most important features of regional politics. After the World War II there was great tension in the region. The creation of the Jewish State of Israel in the heart of the Arab world and the defeat of Arabs created a very critical situation in the region. In order to save the region from a great disaster, many peace initiatives for a settlement were taken. In March 1979 the Camp David peace agreement was signed between the Arabs (Egypt) and Israel. It was aimed at ending the state of war and establishing peace in the region.

The West Asian peace talks that were resumed subsequently at Madrid in October 1991. Those talks finally produced a peace pact between Israel and the PLO signed in Washington on 13 September 1993.

The pact was in the form of a Declaration of Principles which included mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO and limited self-rule to Palestinians in the West Bank town of Jericho and the Gaza strip. The declaration officially entered into force on 13th October 1993.

The pact also said that by December 1993, Israel would have to withdraw from the Gaza strip and Jericho. Israeli forces would hold responsibility for the security of the Israeli settlers. Both sides agreed to establish a permanent settlement in the region. The Palestinians began to see light at the end of the tunnel in as much as they aspired to set up an independent state of Palestine with east-Jerusalem as its capital.

On October 26, 1994, Jordan also signed a peace treaty with Israel in that they came to end the situation of no war no peace for more than half a century. We all hope that Syria and Lebanon will follow the same with a formula of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region in order to save and serve the region and its generations from a huge expected disaster. This will involve the return of occupied territories, the rehabilitation of displaced persons and a guarantee of security, livelihood and dignity to all peoples within recognized boundaries.

Oil Diplomacy is one of the factors which were playing an important role in the changing policies of West Asia. The Gulf war of 1991 was an example of Oil politics. The oil business of the whole Gulf region was affected by this war and the big Powers were concerned about it.

As we know, religion and politics are pitted against each other in many regions of the world. For example, in West Asia, the Islamic Resistance Movement (HAMAS) is the strongest group against the PLO-Israeli peace agreements of (Oslo); Washington 1993. It continues to launch attacks against Israelis in order to destroy such agreements, and refuses to accept them. A clear instance is its boycott of the elections held on 20th of January 1996, to the Palestinian National Council. If HAMAS had taken part in that election it would have meant that HAMAS accepted the agreement where as according to its ideology the Israelis have no right to stay in any part of Palestine and Palestine is for the Palestinians only. This would have created major problems with the PLO and with those who favor the peace process in its ongoing stages.

### **Academic Importance**

Hence it would be interesting and worthwhile to study why this region (especially the Palestinians) has not witnessed the blessings of freedom, peace and security whereas other regions or countries of the world have been more fortunate in this regard. The study becomes all the more important if we consider the intensity and duration of the problem which is perhaps more humanitarian than political in nature.

The Arab - Israeli conflict has made the region unstable over many decades leaving a legacy of various issues like (i) the Arms race, especially in weapons of mass destruction, (ii) the Refugee problem, (iii) the Water problem, (iv) the problem of terrorism and (v) the problem of poverty. Hence the peace process means much more than avoidance of war. It means drawing up and implementing blueprint for overall development of the region. For this a just and comprehensive peace deal is necessary.

### **Time - Frame**

The research covers a period of 3 years 1991 - 1994. The logic of choosing 1991 is that the peace process in the region begins seriously after the 1991 Gulf War. The developments in the region since then have some features distinguishing this period from earlier periods in contemporary history. Precisely during this period, with peace in the region being the main issue to discuss among the regional states, the bilateral content of Arab-Soviet as well as Israeli-American relations had acquired specific attributes of a structured antagonism between the superpowers in the region. The year 1994 is chosen due to the changing scenario of hopes among the peoples of the region after the signing treaty between Jordan and Israel on 26th October 1994.

### **The Gulf War (1991) and the Prospects of Peace in West Asia (1991 - 1994):**

Miracles do happen. It seems especially so in the decade of the 1990's. The Soviet empire collapsed like a pack of cards ending the Cold war between the superpowers. On September 13, 1993, Israel and the Palestinians (PLO) Palestine Liberation Organization) agreed to recognize each other's right to exist, offering hope for an end to the Israel - PLO conflict that has remained intractable for many decades. The Arab-Israel conflict has defied a solution ever since 1948. Israel has been insisting on certain conditions for ending the conflict viz., (i) the Arabs have to accept the independent statehood of Israel, (ii) Jerusalem has to be annexed to Israel, (iii) Golan Heights should be left to Israel and that Syria should live in peace with it, (iv) Palestinian refugees should be rehabilitated on the West Bank of the Jordan river, (v) free and uncontrolled movement of Israeli ships should be guaranteed through waterways passing through West Asia; and (vi) the Arab nations should declare an end to all hostilities against Israel.

Initiatives were taken from time to time to solve the West Asian Conflict, but none of these was successful. Since 1982 there have been efforts to bring about reconciliation in the region. But such efforts were halted when Israel launched an air raid on the PLO headquarters in Tunis in October 1985. By the end of 1987, the Palestinian uprising on the West Bank and Gaza strip exacerbated the situation.

In February 1988, the United States announced a new plan for the resolution of the Palestinian issue. It called for a six-month period of negotiations, starting on 1st May 1988 between Israel and a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation to determine the details of an autonomy arrangement for the West Bank and Gaza. The Plan was rejected by the PLO as it did not provide for the creation of a Palestinian state or recognize the right of the PLO to engage in the peace process. In Israel, the Plan evoked mixed reactions. While a section led by Shimon Peres welcomed the plan, but Yitzhak Shamir, then Prime Minister of Israel said that Israel was not willing to negotiate about the autonomy issue. Thus, the US plan failed.

Efforts toward a peace settlement meanwhile continued. But hard-line Jewish opposition to any accommodation of Palestinian demands remained and the uprising continued. Israel attacked PLO bases in the Gaza strip and West Bank and the animosities continued.

By 1990, the United States had begun to change its overall Mid-East Policy. Former American President George Bush gave the region high priority, declaring in 1989 during a visit by president of Egypt Hussni Mubarak that the USA and Egypt shared the goals of security for Israel, the end of occupation of Arab lands and the achievement of Palestinian political rights.

In February 1990, when then Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Shamir publicly affirmed the need for a "Greater Israel" to accommodate the influx of Soviet Jewish immigrants and sought to mislead George Bush in a private conversation about the number of immigrants being moved into houses in the occupied territories. Bush is said to have gone "ballistic" when he learned that two percent of the Soviet Jews were moving to East Jerusalem which Israel had annexed whereas the United States had been privately told that less than one percent were to be housed there.<sup>1</sup>

Two issues have become central to Arab political discourse since the beginning of the 1990's are, "Soviet quake"<sup>2</sup>, which concerns the shape of the international system after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and, "Arab quake"<sup>3</sup>, which concerns the impact of the Persian Gulf crisis on regional politics. International and regional political developments are issues for serious discussions by policy makers and political analysts alike. These two issues were debated in such think tanks as the Arab Thought Forum in Amman, the Center for Political Studies in Cairo and the Center for Arab Unity Studies in Beirut.<sup>4</sup>

The mighty Soviet Union disintegrated within a short period leaving the USA as the only surviving super power. With the USSR ceasing to exist and the Russian Federation reeling under a host of problems, the Palestinians suddenly lost a powerful benefactor. The Arabs were also divided among themselves and could not put up a united front. With the end of the Cold War Israel also realized that it could not depend upon the United States for continuous military and moral support. The Gulf War proved to be a great disaster for the PLO. Its blind support to Saddam Hussein resulted in its complete isolation from influential Muslim Countries such as Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries. Iraq's defeat in the 1991 Gulf War had crippled one of the most powerful Arab states, reducing its ability to threaten either Israel or the Oil-rich Arab Sheikdoms of the Arabian Gulf.

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(1) Glenn Frankel, "The widening Gulf of Distrust between the US and Israel", Washington Post National Weekly Edition, 3-7 May 1990.

(2) Mohammad Heikal, "al-Zilzal al Suvvati (The Soviet quake)" Cairo, dar al-Shuruq, 1990 (Arabic).

(3) "The `Arab quake' is just Beginning", The Los Angeles Times, January 16, 1992.

(4) The Arab Thought Forum, established in 1985 under the direction of Jordan's Crown Prince al-Hassan bin Talal, publishes a monthly journal, "al-Muntada", in addition to some occasional monographs. The centre for political studies, established in 1985 as a research affiliate of Cairo University under the direction of Ali Eddin Hillal Dessouki, publishes a book series. The centre for Arab Unity Studies, established in 1975, under the direction of Khayr al-Din Hasib, publishes a monthly journal, al-Mustaqbal al-Arabi, in addition to various book series. These centers, in addition to others such as al-Ahram centre for political and strategic studies, play a significant role in shaping the attitudes of the attentive elites and publics towards regional and international politics and provide certain opportunities for interaction among academic experts and policymakers.

Nor could it pose any threat to western supremacy in West Asia.

During the 1991 Gulf War, the Arab World was divided into two blocs, one siding with Iraq and the other with Kuwait. Jordan and the PLO supported Iraq, not for occupying Kuwait, but because they were against any military attack against Iraq by the West. The Gulf countries disapproved of the stand taken by Jordan and the PLO, expelling their expatriate workers and cutting of oil supplies to them. More than 350,000 Jordanian workers were repatriated by the Gulf countries. Jordan had to suffer, seriously due to increased unemployment and its economy became unstable. It was very necessary for it to find a quick solution to the crisis and opted for peace talks with Israel in order to end the "no war, no peace" situation in the region.

As for the PLO, during the Gulf crisis, the media and officials in the West portrayed the PLO as a supporter of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. The PLO policy was deliberately distorted. In its first official statement in August 19, 1990, the PLO said that "there was a planned and ferocious political media campaign against its Chairman and its leadership", as well as against the Palestinian people and their national question.<sup>5</sup>

After the Gulf War, the PLO confronted many of the same dilemmas that other governments in the Arab world faced. It had a serious economic crisis on hand that threatened its continued position at the helm of Palestinian affairs. The loss of remittances, subsidies and trade deprived the Palestinians of hundreds of millions of dollars that annually came from external sources, cutting their per capita income to half its 1987 level. In the Gaza strip, supplementary feeding programs were initiated by the UN Relief and Works Agency as 10,000 families were added to the list of Palestinians needing emergency food relief.<sup>6</sup> This was a sequel to the veiled threat from Saddam Hussein to the PLO not to join the Arab states in condemning Iraq.<sup>7</sup> After all, Iraq subsidized the PLO to the tune of \$ 48 million annually and had become its second base after Tunis.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the prominent role that the Palestinians had played in the professions and in the bureaucracy, Kuwait's government and most of its citizens came to see Palestinians as a security risk. Cases of abduction and harassment of Palestinians following Kuwait's liberation have been chronicled by human rights organizations. The size of the Kuwaiti Palestinian community dropped to less than a third of what it was before August 1990.<sup>9</sup>

Some 250,000 Palestinian refugees from Kuwait fled to Jordan bereft of resources. The Gulf crisis, especially the embargo on trade with Iraq and the end of trade with Saudi Arabia, hurt the Jordanian economy severely. The cost to the 1.6 million Jordanian-Palestinians in 1990-1991 amounted to \$ 2.5 billion.<sup>10</sup> Thus financial and political support to the PLO was an early casualty of the crisis. According to the PLO, its annual external assistance had consisted of \$ 72 million from Saudi Arabia, \$ 48 million from Iraq, and \$ 24 million from Kuwait.<sup>11</sup>

For the Pan-Arabists, the Gulf crisis of 1990-91 was to be viewed within the context of the conflict with Israel. This conflict was not about the Hudud (borders) but about the Wajud (existence) of Israel. The Iraqi regime, proclaiming itself as "the Sword of the Arabs" took the fateful decision to annex Kuwait as a first step towards forging Arab unity. But its defeat undermined the very foundations of the Arab political order.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the Arab states have never been or divided as perplexed over their relationship with the international system as they have been since the start of the decade of the nineties and it is too early to assess the long-term impact this will have on Arab nationalism and on hopes for Arab unity.

The PLO, along with other regional states, rejected foreign intervention believing that it would be harmful to the economic strategic interests of the Arab states and would open the door to Israeli expansion.

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(5) See, "PLO statement on the Gulf Crisis, Tunis, 19 August 1990", *Journal of Palestine Studies* 20, No.1, (Autumn 1990), pp. 167-8

(6) Philip Mattar, "The PLO and the Gulf Crisis, the Middle East Journal", 48, no.1 (Winter 1994), p.43.

(7) Beirut Domestic Service, August 19, 1990, in FBIS, August 20, 1990, p.2; Svenska Dagbladet (Stockholm), September 5, 1990, in FBIS, September 7, 1990, p.2.

(8) "New York Times", January 19, 1991.

(9) Ann Lesch, "Palestinians in Kuwait, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 20, no.4, (Summer 1991), pp. 42-54; and *Middle East Watch, A Victory Turned Sour* (New York, September 1991), pp.7-13, 54.

(10) George T. Abed, "The Palestinians and the Gulf Crisis", *Journal of Palestine Studies* 20, no.2, (Winter 1991), p.37.

(11) "New York Times", March 15, 1991.

(12) Hani Faris, "The Arab Political Order After the Gulf War", in Ibrahim ed., *The Gulf Crisis* (Washington DC : Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1992), p.216.

External forces would seek to control the area's wealth and its destinies, eradicate the Palestinian issue and balkanize the area.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, it called for the withdrawal of US troops and their replacement by UN forces.<sup>14</sup>

The lesson to be learned from the 1991 Gulf War is that regional political fragmentation is unlikely to be reversed through the use of force by one Arab state against another. For example, in an attempt to find a Pan-Arabist rationale for Syria's support to massive US troops deployment, late President of Syria Hafiz Assad, argued that "if force is to be used against Iraq, then it will be for (our) own good that foreigners should be fighting against the Iraqi army, instead of having Arab killed by Arab".<sup>15</sup>

During the 1991 Gulf War, two critical lessons emerged for Israel. Firstly, late Saddam Hussein was not deterred from attacking Israel with conventionally armed Scud missiles. In fact, the reverse was true; he wanted to draw Israel into the war. A case can be made that Saddam was deterred from using chemical weapons against Israel for fear of Israeli retaliation with nuclear weapons. On the other hand, Israel now fears that the reductions in the U.S. budget will lead to cut backs in American aid, training and valuable US-Israeli technical cooperation. Also, there is some fear that with America's new-found friendship with its Arab military partners, it will be difficult for Israel to campaign against US arms sales to friendly Arab countries. The fact that the United States came to Israel's aid with its own forces suggests that its support of Israel is strong and that American deterrence is credible.<sup>16</sup>

During the Gulf War, most analysts believed that Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in order to kick start the peace process.<sup>17</sup> It has even been suggested that if the peace process had not collapsed Saddam might not have sent Iraqi forces into Kuwait in August 1990. As William Quandt observes, it is difficult to imagine Iraq making such an audacious move if Israelis and Palestinians had been engaged in peace talks.<sup>18</sup>

After the Gulf War, the Palestinians were frustrated and desperate over the harsh 23-year Israeli occupation. More than 800 civilians had been killed in the Intifada since 1987. About 200,000 Soviet Jewish immigrants had come to Israel and a million more were waiting to be brought in over the next few years. In this context, the then Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir even spoke of a "Greater Israel"<sup>19</sup>, Israel had already peopled more than two percent of the West Bank, where 90,000 Israelis, together with 120,00 in East Jerusalem and 4,000 in the Gaza strip settled among, respectively, almost one million, 150,000 and 750,000 Palestinians <sup>20</sup>. In June 1990 Shamir formed the most radical right wing government in Israeli history, one that included "Tzomet", a party that advocated the expulsion of Palestinians from the occupied lands and whose leader, along with Shamir, had described Palestinians in sub-human terms.<sup>21</sup>

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(13) PLO Statement on the Gulf Crisis, August 19, 1990, pp. 166-67.

(14) Voice of Palestine (Algiers), August 29, 1990, in FBIS, August 30, 1990, p.4.

(15) Ann Lesch, "Contrasting reactions to the Persian Gulf Crisis, Middle East Journal 45, no.1, (Winter 1991), pp. 41-43; Raymond Hinnebusch, "Asad's Syria and the New World Order", Middle East Policy 2, no.1, (1993), pp. 1-14.

(16) Both before and after the Gulf war, an intense debate has raged among Israeli specialists as to the role of deterrence in Israeli political-military doctrine. The issues at stake include: the extent to which Israeli deterrence relies on nuclear weapons, despite the official refusal to acknowledge their existence: how nuclear deterrence was affected by the war, how conventional deterrence is being undermined by new technology; and the costs and benefits of an overt nuclear policy. For more details, see : Shai Feldman, *Israeli Nuclear Deterrence : A Strategy for the 1980's* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1982), Gerald M. Steinberg, *Deterrence, Defense or Arms Control? Israeli Perception and responses for the 1990's* (Santa Monica, California : California Seminar on International Security and Foreign Policy, 1990); Gerald M. Steinberg : *Does Deterrence Work?* Jerusalem Post, March 13, 1991.

(17) Yasir Arafat's number-two man Salah Khalaf told William Quandt in June 1990 of his belief that the raid had been an Iraqi operation and his concern that Arafat was coming under Saddam's influence. See, William Quandt : *Peace Process : American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967* (Washington: 1993), p. 393.

(18) William Quandt, "The Middle East in 1990", *Foreign Affairs* 70, no.1, (1991), pp. 49-69.

(19) Clyde R. Mark, "Soviet Jewish Emigration", Congressional Research Service Brief, January 5, 1993, p.14; "Intifada Human Rights Violations", *Journal of Palestine Studies* 20, no.3, (Spring 1991), p. 115.

(20) Foundation for Middle East Peace, "Report on Israeli Settlement in the occupied Territories", March 1991, p.4.

(21) *Ibid*, Winter 1991-92, p.1

Because of its past and present connections and its current status in the region, the United States has a key opportunity to promote the stability and security of the region, by protecting its allies and encouraging greater regional political liberalization.

Peace in the region has been a major item on the foreign policy agenda of every American President for the last quarter century. A comprehensive regional peace has eluded all who have pursued it. Conditions in the region after the Gulf War were ripe for a new peace initiative. Even those who traditionally rejected a negotiated peace, Iraq, Libya, Palestinians opposed to a compromise and others, were in disarray. Thus the willingness of some Arab states to break away from the pack and act in their own interest became an important factor, in any successful peace negotiations.

Changes in the international balance of power have accompanied favorable conditions in the region since the October 1973 War. The United States has emerged as the sole superpower with close ties, to the most important regional military power (Israel), the most important economic power (Saudi Arabia), and the most important political power (Egypt). American interests can no longer be narrowly focused on Oil sources and on Israel's security and well-being. The latter needs to be placed within the context of a comprehensive plan for the entire region. Three major challenges now face the United States, (i) to turn the Arab-Israeli peace process into 'peace making'. (ii) To contain Iran and Iraq and, (iii) to combat the rise of violent movements cloaked in religious garb.

After the 1991 Gulf War, the time of peace in the region has come. By defeating Iraq, the US has ensured that no regional radical power can pose a danger to its interests in the region. It now needs to reassure its Arab friends and allies that it is serious about a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. By moving in that direction, the US will (i) safeguard its energy supplies in the region and (ii) ensure a stable peace for both Israel and its neighbors.

The collapse of Communism played a very important role in pushing the contending parties towards the conference table. The Israelis could not go on counting on their strategic relationship with the United States indefinitely. The Arabs too, had been profoundly affected by the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Syria, the main military power confronting Israel, had lost its chief patron and arms supplier. Iraq, the only other significant Arab power capable of confronting the Israelis, had been devastated by the Gulf War.

The conference held in Madrid 22 at the end of October 1991 established a new framework for continuing negotiations, replacing the 1973 Geneva Conference as the benchmark for future discussions of regional peace.

By spring 1991 cooperation had replaced rivalry between the US and the USSR. This cooperation has been central to the success of the peace process. The co-sponsorship of the Madrid Conference by the two superpowers and the subsequent negotiations differed from co-sponsored conferences in the past. Previously the Arabs wanted the Soviets present in order to have a superpower on hand that would most likely support their position. Superpower rivalries meant that Arab leaders could be played off against one other. In the current process, close cooperation between Moscow and Washington has brought additional pressure on the regional parties to address the basic issues. Therefore, dual sponsorship of the peace process has proved to be a catalyst for successful negotiations.

Thus we can say that there were three factors responsible for the pre-negotiations: (i) the 1991 Gulf War, (ii) the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and (iii) the US pressures. From the Gulf War the concerned parties learned two things: First, that owing to new technology and the possession of sophisticated conventional weapons, any new war would be most destructive and would be very difficult to prevent from escalating, Second, the international community and especially the USA needed to delegitimize war as a means of managing conflict given that the political costs of war would exceed its benefits. The dissolution of the Soviet Union also minimized the prospect of any successful war being initiated from the Arab side. Without Soviet patronage, war would become very costly. Therefore, the only way left to accomplish some of the political objectives was conflict-resolution.

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(22) The Sides had chosen Madrid for two reasons, (i) It would be cheaper than other places, and America alone would pay all the bills; (ii) Spain has good political and cultural historical relations with both Jews and Arabs. Mohammad Heikel. *The Gulf War, Illusion of the Power and victory*, First edition, Alahram Center, 1992, p. 591 (Arabic).

Moreover, US pressures employed on both sides of the conflict pushed the sides to reconsider their options in the conflict. Both sides realized that their refusal to take part in the attempt to resolve the conflict would make them face international criticism, and would weaken their case in the conflict.

The Gulf War may have strengthened Israel's case for a nuclear deterrent, but from the Arab perspective, Israel's clandestine nuclear arsenal far exceeds its defense needs. It is seen as evidence of Israel's determination to remain the predominant military power in the region and to retain control of the West Bank, the Gaza strip, the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem<sup>23</sup>. As Arab nuclear capabilities are limited and are unlikely to match Israel's for many years, reliance on chemical weapons as a counter-force appears a tempting option.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the Gulf War has put the issues in sharp focus. The Soviet Union seems to be more willing than ever to go along with the United States, while the latter now has less reason to act principally as Israel's patron.<sup>25</sup> The Palestinians find themselves diplomatically handicapped after antagonizing their principal Arab benefactors, though their support to Saddam Hussein.

The convening of the Madrid peace conference in October 1991 represented a breakthrough in a long history of efforts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian problem and as such constituted a significant achievement for the American administration. It established the principle of direct negotiations between the Arabs, including the Palestinians and Israel. The 22 months of talks that followed also produced achievements which were neither foreseen nor guaranteed and still remain barely acknowledged.<sup>26</sup>

The Madrid peace conference laid down some principles that were enunciated by President George Bush and President Mikhail Gorbachev.<sup>27</sup> These were, (i) direct bilateral and multilateral negotiations would follow the general conference, (ii) the conference would have no power to impose a solution nor to veto decisions taken by the parties, (iii) the goal of negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, who were to be part of a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, would be to reach an agreement followed by negotiations a final solution, and (iv) negotiations between the Arab states and Israel would take place on the basis of UN resolutions 242 and 338.

The Madrid Conference was the pivotal event that the United States had envisioned while developing a post-Gulf War strategy. The framework for negotiations called for bilateral discussions between Israel and the surrounding Arab states. Five multilateral groups were established to discuss arms control and regional security, water resources, economic development, the environment and refugees.

Despite the hopes generated by the ceremony at Madrid and the election of a Labor-led government in Israel in 1992, talks had ground to a halt by the summer of 1993 after eleven rounds. There were serious flaws in the process. The Madrid terms of reference reflected Israeli conditions for concessions by the Palestinians, who were weak in the aftermath of Iraq's defeat and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The formal goal of the process was a comprehensive peace, but the terms of reference established no link among the separate bilateral talks, thereby enabling Israel to potentially play one Arab party against another. While Israel and the Palestinians were to negotiate a transitional phase without knowing the final destination of the process, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon were to conclude a final settlement with Israel as quickly as possible thereby undermining the principle of a comprehensive peace deal.

The Palestinians (PLO), through and after the peace talks with Israel, have come a long way from their original position in 1964 that Israel had no right to exist.

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(23) Walid Khalidi, "The New Middle East Security Environment", Paper prepared for the American Academy of Arts and Science Conference on Restraining the Middle East Arms Race: Post-Gulf War Prospects, June 6-8, 1991.

(24) For an in-depth look at Arab strategies against Israel, See, Abdel Monem Said Ali, "Quality vs. Quantity: The Arab Prospects of the Arms Race in the Middle East", in Shelley A. Stahl and Geoffery Kemp, editors, *Arms Control and Weapons proliferation in the Middle East and South Asia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).

(25) Thomas L. Friedman, "A Window on Deep-Israel - US Tensions", "New York Times", 19 September 1991.

(26) Nabil Saoath's assessment is one of the exceptions. See, "The Oslo Agreement: An Interview with Nabil Shaath", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, no.1, Autumn, 1993.

(27) "The Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev was not allowed to attend the Madrid Conference unless, he gave some guarantees to Israel in order to open the doors of Jewish immigrations from Russia into Israel, while restoring diplomatic relations with Israel. More crucially Gorbachev went to Madrid for economic and political support from George Bush against his rival Boris Yeltsin in the forthcoming Presidential Elections. Mohammad Heikal, Op.cit, p. 596.

The original PLO Charter staked a claim to all of Palestine from Jordan to the Mediterranean. It dubbed the creation of Israel "entirely illegal, regardless of the passage of time". It proclaimed that "armed struggle is the only way to liberate the occupied lands".

#### PLO – Israel peace Agreement:

While the peace process was nearly dead, the Norwegian initiative brought the PLO and Israel together for secret talks. These talks were hosted by then Foreign Minister Johan Jorgen Holst since April 1992. While Washington knew of the Norwegian negotiations, it did not take them seriously, and continued to insist that the Madrid talks were the only game in town. But the Oslo agreement between the two sides was a big surprise for the entire world, and was seen by observers as "an instrument of Palestinian surrender, a Palestinian Versailles".<sup>28</sup> For the critics, the Oslo talks lacked legitimacy because of their secret nature and lack of mandate from the wider Palestinian movement.<sup>29</sup>

The secret Declaration of Principles on Palestinian self-rule was revealed at the end of August 1993. While Arafat and the Palestinian leadership generally had lost hope in the peace process, they discovered that the Israeli negotiators in Oslo under Shimon Peres and Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Belin, were distinctly more reasonable than the Israeli delegation in Washington. During the Oslo talks, Israel and the PLO reached a tentative agreement envisaging a PLO takeover of Gaza and Jericho a transitional period of Palestinian local self-government elsewhere in the West Bank. The thorny questions of Israeli settlers and of Jerusalem were to be reserved for later discussions. Late Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat accepted Israel's right "to exist in peace and security" and appealed for an end to the Intifada (uprising) while the Israeli government recognized the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people, Rabin told the Knesset that there was no Palestinian interlocutor besides the PLO and that though it was an enemy, it was necessary to conduct negotiations with enemies.<sup>30</sup>

The eight months of secret talks in Oslo provided for elections to a Palestinian council to run the West Bank and Gaza for a five-year period. Rabin and Arafat signed this new agreement at the White House, Washington, on 13 September 1993 and it was clear that the Arab-Israeli conflict had now taken a new turn. But the course that lay ahead was not yet clear to the parties involved.

According to the Palestinian Charter, Judaism is not an independent nationality. Nor do Jews constitute a single nation having an identity of its own. They are citizens of the states to which they belong.<sup>31</sup> The Charter insists that "Palestine is an Arab homeland and an indivisible part of the Arab nation".<sup>32</sup> But every thing has changed with the Oslo talks. The PLO has now to accept Israel's to exist and with it, a whole series of renunciations: viz., of certain sections of the PLO Charter, calling for violence against the State of Israel and for its destruction. It also has to accept Resolutions 242 and 338 which do not explicitly mention the right to self determination.<sup>33</sup> For Israelis, it was the first genuine recognition in the history of Zionism of the Palestinians as "a people".<sup>34</sup>

The Preamble to the Oslo Declaration states that the Government of the State of Israel and the PLO team, representing the Palestinian people, agree that it is time to put an end to decades of hostility and to strive for peaceful coexistence. The Declaration of Principles (DOP) was based on a shared vision for the future which both Israel and the PLO needed to sell their respective publics and to their neighbors if the latter were to support the peace process. The Declaration aims to establish "a Palestinian interim self-governing Authority with an elected Council for the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza, towards a transitional settlement based on Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338".

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(28) Edward W. Said, "Palestinian Versailles", *Progressive* (December 1993), p.22.

(29) For an appraisal of the Palestinian-Israeli talks, see Camille Mansour, "The Palestinian-Israeli Peace Negotiations an Overview and Assessment", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, no.3, spring 1993.

(30) "The Independent", 10 September, 1993, p.1.

(31) John Norton Moore, ed., *The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Vol.III: Documents* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, Article 18, 1974), pp. 702-3.

(32) *Ibid.*, Articles 1 and 3, p. 701.

(33) Edward W. Said, *op.cit.*, p. 116.

(34) Israeli-PLO Declaration of Principles. Text in "Journal of Palestine Studies" 23, no.1, (Autumn 1993), p. 116.



Thus, the agreement, widely praised as the best that could be achieved at the time, is not a peace accord but a declaration of principles, providing a framework for future negotiated agreements and a tight time-table for implementation. The declaration only concerns interim self-government, a first phase in a two phase settlement, and as such leaves the most controversial questions of the Jewish settlements, refugees, Jerusalem and the final status of the occupied lands to be negotiated in the 1996-1999 period.

The key to Arafat's participation in any proposed settlement would be land the PLO would have to be given territory on which it could begin to exert its authority and on which it could hope to build. The inclusion of Jericho on the West Bank in the interim agreement allowed the PLO to establish its presence in a historic West Bank city close to Jordan. The withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza and Jericho was intended to be the first stage in a wider transfer of authority to the Palestinians of the West Bank. Israeli negotiators however, made it clear that Israel would maintain responsibility for security of the Jewish settlements on the West Bank. After decades of bloody confrontation, both sides were charting a path that offered the possibility of a solution.

The historic handshake between the two enemies carried an emotional appeal that breathed new life into the stalled peace talks. The PLO and Israel recognized that a fresh step was required on their part demonstrating their reciprocal, deliberate and public commitment to a lasting peace. But there were some other factors that contributed to the timing of the agreement: (i) the Washington talks, where the participants were inserting demands that prodded the Oslo negotiators into finding an alternative formula; (ii) the replacement in Israel, in 1992, of Yitzhak Shamir's, government with its ideological commitment to the possession of entire land of Israel by a Labor-led government, whose leaders were committed to accelerating the peace process; (iii) the weakening position of the PLO which faced financial collapse and international marginalization as a result of Arafat's support for Saddam Hussein and (iv) the diplomatic skills of the Norwegian team.<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, the historic and heroic struggle of the people of Palestine has reached an important turning point with the signing of the historic Accord of Principles. Though the people have started seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, a long way is still ahead for the people of Palestine to reap the fruits of their liberation struggle. Although the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority on parts of Palestinian soil, and the return of Yassir Arafat and his PLO cadres to the occupied territories has been a remarkable step, the realization of the Palestinian goal of establishing an independent state of Palestine with holy Jerusalem as its capital and of achieving a just and lasting peace in Palestine as well as in the whole region has yet to occur.

The Palestinian acceptance of a mini-Palestine was supported by many Arab countries, especially Egypt and Syria, for whom the prospect of peace in the region meant willingness to come to terms with reality. But any pressure that the Arab leaders might bring to bear on the PLO would be worse than useless unless the Americans under took a similar effort to pressurize Israel to vacate the occupied Arab lands and to co-exist with a mini-Palestine under Yassir Arafat. A moderate Rabin and a moderate Arafat held the key to a West Asian settlement.

After the Oslo (Gaza/Jericho) agreement, both the Israeli and the PLO leaders found themselves challenged by those opposed to any negotiated settlement. But both the Palestinian National Council and the Israeli Knesset eventually ratified the accord, while public opinion on the ground appeared to move in its favor, because most Israelis and Palestinians seemed ready to give peace a chance. The critics of the accord point out that the peace deal gives very little to the Palestinians in exchange for their recognition of Israel.

The Israeli right-wingers see the accord as a sellout. On the other side of the divide apart from Hamas and the Palestinian projectionists based in Damascus, who oppose the whole Madrid peace process, a growing number of Arafat loyalists also criticize the accord because it does not include an Israeli renunciation of its claim to the occupied lands and has provided Israel with time to consolidate its settlements. The Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine believe in the liberation of the whole of Palestine extending from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River and they do not believe in negotiations with the Jewish state. In short, these formations fear that the implementation of the (DOP) will diminish their chances of gaining control over their own land.

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(35) Jane Corbin, *Gaza First: The Secret Norway Channel to Peace between Israel and the PLO*, (London: Bloomsbury, 1994).

After the signing of the agreement of 1993, attacks on Israel increased, putting the agreement under stress. Rabin's government with its small Knesset majority had to face the opposition of Likud, which had done much to build up the Jewish presence on the West Bank. Right-wing leaders pointed to the attacks on Jews by Hamas as proof that no concessions should be made to the Arabs. The settlers started moving into certain areas of the West Bank, especially Kiryat Araba 36 on the outskirts of Hebron.

Thus, the Israeli-PLO agreement was in critical danger. In May 1994, Rabin, Peres and Arafat met in Cairo to resolve some disputes which faced them after signing the Oslo agreement. After they agreed to remove some obstacles to the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza and Jericho and to give the Palestinians a limited degree of autonomy in those places, the way was cleared for Arafat's emotional return to Gaza and Jericho in July 1994. The ironical thing was that Shimon Peres was in a position to congratulate Arafat with the words: "You were a terrorist. Today you are an ex-terrorist". The negotiations had brought to the fore a significant change in the Israeli attitude to the peace process. "Not only have we changed our way of relating to you", Peres told Arafat, "You also have changed".<sup>37</sup>

The benefits to Arafat and his regime (PLO) were immediate. One week after the accords, then US Secretary of State Warren Christopher announced that a "conference to support peace in the region" would be convened to raise \$ 3 billion for economic development in the West Bank and the Gaza strip. Secretary Christopher drew a parallel with the earlier mobilization for the 1991 Gulf War when he stated that, "just as the United States organized a successful international coalition to wage war in the Gulf, we will now organize a new coalition, a coalition to breathe life into the "Israeli-Palestinian declaration". The immediate goal, he said, was to produce results, "quickly and vividly"<sup>38</sup>. At the donors' conference held in Washington on 1st October 1993, around 43 countries pledged \$ 2 billion in emergency aid over the next 5 years, for the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza strip. As Secretary Christopher reminded the group, "we must demonstrate the tangible benefits of peace and we must do so quickly if the advocates of peace are to be strengthened and the enemies of peace to be discredited".<sup>39</sup>

After the PLO reached its agreement with Israel, the reaction of the Arab states was different from what late Egyptian president Anwar El-Sadat had encountered. Arab League members, with the exception of Iraq, supported, or at least did not oppose, the agreement openly.

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(36) (Kiryat Araba) : The first settlement allowed for non-security reasons after the 1967war, set out to recreate the Jewish presence in Hebron, one of the four Holy cities of Judaism besides, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, whose Jewish community had been wiped out by the Arabs in 1929. The city (Hebron) itself was deeply holy for both, Jewish and Muslims because of the Tombs of the Patriarchs, Abraham, Ishac and Jacob, with their wives, Sarah, Rebecca, and Leah. The Jews believed that Adam and Eve rested there, hence the ancient name Kiryat Araba ("The Town of the Four", in honor of the four couples). The atmosphere in the city was and is still uneasy. To the Jews the city is the Tomb of the Patriarchs, while to Muslims it is the Mosque of Abraham. Tension was always sparking there; the Jewish settlers were heavily armed for their own protection. Hence, the attack on the Hebron Mosque on 25 February 1994 by a Jewish doctor in which twenty-nine Palestinian worshippers were killed before the gunman was himself beaten to death was a tragedy waiting to happen. On 6th April 1994 the expected retaliation for the Hebron Massacre took place when a suicide car bomber drove into a school bus line in Afula killing seven and injuring over fifty Israelis.

(37) Howard Goller, "Israelis say Arafat now an Ex-Terrorist", Reuter Library report, 20 February 1994.

(38) "Middle East International", no. 459, (24 September 1993).

(39) "Middle East International", no. 460, (8 October 1993). The \$ 2 billion included contributions from the European community (\$ 600 million), the U.S. (\$ 500 million), Japan (\$ 200 million), Saudi Arabia (\$ 100 million) and Israel (\$ 25 million), among others.

(40) "The Beirut Daily", "Al-Safir", Known for its Arab nationalist Orientation, lamented the Israeli-Palestinian agreement as representing "the end of the era of the Arabs", Mohammad Heikal, "Israel and Palestine", "The Independent", September 13, 1993.

(41) In the absence of publicly available census figures, estimates have varied widely. East Bankers have tended to claim figures as low as 35%, while Palestinians have put the number at 60 to 70%. Since the disengagement of the West Bank in 1988, it is likely that the population is split about 50-50, with the Palestinians having a slight edge since the return of Jordanian nationals (most of them Palestinians) during the Gulf crisis of 1991.

According to Mohammad Hassanein Heikal, the most likely impact of this development on Pan-Arabist movements will be that "more and more people will return to the original identity of the region, an identity not of nationalism, not of Arabism, but the identity of religion".<sup>40</sup>

### **Jordan-Israel Peace Agreement**

The presence of large numbers of Palestinians in Jordan, who today probably comprise about half of the population<sup>41</sup>, dates to the 1948-1949 Palestine war, when more than 700,000 Palestinians were expelled or fled from their homes, some 70,000 going directly to the East Bank of the Jordan River (Jordan). Relations between the Palestinians and the Jordanians have tended to be strained but have been largely contained within the bounds of PLO-Jordanian diplomacy.<sup>42</sup> The Palestinian people today may be divided into four groups. The first comprises refugee camp dwellers or those who have recently left the 1948 and 1967 refugee camps. The second group comprises the Palestinian Middle Class of small merchants and lower-level government employees. Hostility to a Jordanian identity has been less pronounced, except among those who played a prominent role in the Palestinian resistance movement. In the past few years, this group has come to feel more comfortable expressing some form of attachment to Jordan if not identifying themselves as Jordanian - or, at the very least, expressing loyalty to Jordanian Leadership. The third group includes those Palestinians who have achieved notable success in business. Many of them are from West Bank families who threw in their lot with King Abdullah I (grandfather of King Hussein) at the time of his unification of the West Bank and Jerusalem in April 1950, in which Jerusalem was considered the spiritual capital of Jordan. These are the Palestinians who tend to see no dilemma or contradiction in identifying themselves as both Palestinian and Jordanian.<sup>43</sup> Jordanian Palestinians who went to the Gulf oil states for work constitute the final group.<sup>44</sup> These Palestinians largely viewed their Jordanian passports as a convenience, not as a basis of identity or belonging. They generally avoided Jordanian consulate offices in the Gulf and kept their visits to Jordan to a minimum. Since their return from the Gulf States in 1990-91 this group numbers perhaps 200,000,<sup>45</sup> and has difficulty in adjusting to life in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

For Jordan, the influx into the East Bank of more than 250,000 Palestinian refugees in the wake of the 1967 war, less than twenty years after the first refugee wave of 1948, led to heightened sensitivity to Israeli claims of "Jordan is Palestine and Palestine is Jordan". Moreover, during the Gulf crisis of 1991, the influx of some 200,000 Jordanians (most of them Palestinians) mainly from Kuwait exacerbated what was already a serious unemployment problem, strained state services and drove up food and housing prices.

Jordan maintains that Palestine is an Arab country that Palestinians constitute a distinct Arab nation and that Jerusalem is their rightful capital. No Arab country may barter away the rights of the Palestinian people through separate bilateral agreements with Israel.<sup>46</sup> Following the Madrid conference of 1991, the Jordanian delegation served as an umbrella for the Palestinians, who had been denied by the Israelis and the Americans the right to a separate team.

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(42) For some of the recent discussions of the question of intercommunal relations in the Jordanian Press, see Tahir Adwan, "Al-Ghayra al-Qatila", "al-Dustur", 20 June 1994; Mohammad al-Subayhi, "Fil-Alagat bayna al-Urdunniyyin W-al-Filastiniyyin", "al-Dustour", 11 July 1994, and the speech of then Crown Prince Hassan to a meeting of the Council of Higher Education, al-Ra'i 21 June 1994.

(43) The word Urdustiniyya, a combination of Urdunniyya (Jordanian) and Filastiniyya (Palestinian), has been used by some from this group to define their identity.

(44) Statistics on Jordanians in the Gulf did not distinguish between Jordanians and Palestinians. The percentage of Palestinians among the Jordanians listed in Kuwait, the largest community, was estimated at 85-95%. See, Bilal al-Hasan, al-Filastiniyyun f-il-Kuwait (Beirut: PLO Research centre, 1974), p.11, (Arabic).

(45) The estimate is based on a number of factors including repatriation claims. See National Centre for Educational Research and Development, "The Socio-Economic Characteristics of Jordanian returnees: Part 1, Statistical Analysis and Indicators" (Amman - Jordan, July 1991).

(46) Hani Faris, op.cit., p.219.

However, as the Palestinians began to operate as a separate delegation, reports of dissatisfaction over lack of coordination were increasingly voiced on both sides. This situation continued until Arafat was caught playing a secret game with Israel by his signing the Oslo peace accords. Late King Hussein of Jordan was clearly angry about not having been informed of the sensitive Oslo negotiations. By the end of 1993, tensions between the Jordanians and the Palestinians were so high that the King, speaking to a group of military officers on 1st January 1994, virtually issued an ultimatum to the PLO on the question of coordination.<sup>47</sup> While tensions had reached new heights in mid-June 1994, just prior to the arrival of US-Secretary of State Warren Christopher in Jordan, King Hussein railed against those working to plant "seeds of discord in this country among its people" and vowed that "any person who attempts to harm national unity will be my enemy until Judgment Day".<sup>48</sup>

On 26 October 1994, Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel. The Washington Declaration signed by King Hussein and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on 25 July ended the state of belligerency between Jordan and Israel, prompting the PLO to express its own "concerns" about lack of consultation. Boundary disputes were apparently resolved in Jordan's favor, 135 square miles were returned to Jordanian sovereignty with certain areas leased back to Israel. The article in the Washington Declaration giving the Hashemite a special role in the Islamic holy places in Jerusalem, combined with rumors of an impending royal visit to that city, greatly angered the PLO and many Jordanian Palestinians.<sup>49</sup> However, the Palestinians should have realized that Jordan, as a sovereign State, was only exercising its prerogative to reach a deal with Israel the same way as Arafat's PLO had done through the Oslo accords. Even so, the article giving Jordan a special role in the holy places in Jerusalem was a sticking point with the Palestinians who hold Jerusalem to be the capital of their proposed state and would view themselves as the legitimate custodians of the holy places.

The ultimate benefit of the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel was thought to be economic. Problems relating to trade and the sharing of water resources were expected to be solved. And the most immediate benefit of the treaty for Jordan was the writing off by President Bill Clinton of some \$ 980 million owed to the United States.

Other Arab states were willing to sign peace treaties with Israel since the past several decades. In April 1976, Syria and Israel reached a secret agreement through U.S. Mediation to minimize the chances of a confrontation in Lebanon. Syria agreed to Israeli "red line" conditions allowing Syrian military intervention in Lebanon provided that it was restricted to ground forces and that these did not move south of a line between the Zaharani estuary on the Mediterranean and the village of Mashki in the Bekaa Valley. As part of this agreement, Syria was to respect Israel's legitimate security concerns in Southern Lebanon and to avoid air attacks against Christian targets.<sup>50</sup> Even before the Gulf crisis there was some talk of exploring ways to establish an Israeli-Iraqi "hot-line", possibly using the good offices of Egypt. Egypt's main role in the peace process seems to be to counsel and educate the Arab delegations. Shortly before the 1991 Madrid peace conference began, Hosni Mubarak, President of Egypt, stated "If any one wished to benefit from the Egyptian experience, we will not hesitate to help".<sup>51</sup> So, Egypt has been host to numerous visits of Arab-Israeli delegations in the peace process, and the latter have praised Egypt's role and assistance.

### **Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks**

The changing balance of regional forces following the Gulf War made it difficult for Syria to remain outside the process. The Israelis had overwhelming military strength, and Syria's Arab allies in the 1991 Gulf War were pushing hard on Syria to participate in the negotiations.

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(47)FBIS-NESA, 3 January 1994 (Foreign Broad Cast Information Service near East South Asia).

(48) "Al-Dustur", 10 July 1994, (a Jordanian Newspaper).

(49) See, "The Washington Declaration, paragraph B.3, as reproduced in *The Journal of Palestine Studies*" Vol. 24, no.1 (Autumn 1994), p. 129.

(50) Moshe Ma'oz Asad : *The Sphinx of Damascus* (New York : Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1988), p. 138; and Avner Yaniv, *Dilemmas of Security : Politics, Strategy and the Israeli Experience in Lebanon* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 60-61.

(51) Cairo Middle East News Agency (MENA), October 19, 1991 as reported in FBIS-NES, (Foreign Broadcast Information Service Near East South Asia), October 21, 1991.

(52) William Quandt, "Cold War Metaphors: Their Impact on the Arab Israeli Conflict", (Keynote address, Middle East Studies Association Annual Meeting, Portland, October 29, 1992), pp. 12-13.

Syrians faced their most difficult international challenge, their superpower sponsor; the Soviet Union was in a state of collapse. So, Syria came to realize that under these changed circumstances it needed good relations with the United States.

Unlike the former Soviet Union, Russia today is in no position to offer an alternative to the United States, which it classifies as an ally and not as a rival. Under these conditions, Syria's interests are now served by studiously avoiding a clash with Israel. No threat of a superpower confrontation can limit the scope of military defeat as it did in the past.<sup>52</sup> Another defeat may spell disaster, not only in terms of the Syrian state getting weaker against other regional actors, but also in terms of its ability to retain control over domestic politics. This explains Syria's policy shift toward the peace of the brave with Israel by entering into bilateral talks and accepting the principle of "total peace for total withdrawal" both which constitute major alterations in its well-entrenched, frontline, anti-Zionist positions of the past.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, the Syrians entered the peace process because in so doing they would strengthen their international position and move back into the mainstream of the Arab world. Their goal appears to be reclaiming all of the Golan Heights while also achieving an Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon.

In a major breakthrough, the Israeli and Syrian leaders demonstrated a growing interest in conflict de-escalation during the course of their bilateral talks in Washington from October 1991 to August 1994. Both the sides discussed issues of trading land for peace. Yet, major obstacles remain. The Syrians are interested in discussing full Israeli withdrawal, while the Israelis prefer to concentrate on the nature of peace and normalization of relations. On different occasions, both sides exercised self-restraint, floated diplomatic trial balloons, engaged in conciliatory gestures and in the public domain, discussed the requirements for peace.

Following the Jordan-Israel peace agreement of 1994, the Clinton administration was well placed to reap the benefits of mediating in the Syria-Israel conflict. Syria's leaders no longer had generous access to Russian financial and military aid and, since the Gulf War, wished to be more fully integrated into the international community. For Israel, the May 4 1994 Cairo agreement with the PLO and the October 26 1994 peace treaty with Jordan, along with persistent fears of another quantum leap in the regional arms race, made Israeli leaders more amenable to serious peace-building negotiations with Damascus. Both sides are now publicly exchanging views on the general formula -full peace (to be offered by Syria) in exchange for full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. Israel is willing to Withdraw from the Golan Heights but refuses to commit it on just how far until Syria agrees to establish normal ties.

To date, Damascus has rejected the Israeli overtures arguing that they are neither consistent with the meaning of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 nor integral to the spirit of the October 1991 Madrid Peace Conference. Anxious to forestall full normalization with Israel, Syria has with minor periodic modifications, insisted on the full return of the Golan Heights before opening diplomatic and trade relations with Jerusalem.<sup>54</sup>

In order to break the impasse US mediation must focus on the discrete phases of peace-building with demands and obligations on the disputants and the mediator weighted and sequenced differently in each phase. Specifically the following need to be looked into very carefully: (i) the package of security arrangements and compliance measures to be integrated into each phase; (ii) the scope and timing of the withdrawal of Syrian and Israeli forces from Lebanon; (iii) the management and control of water resources; (iv) the removal of Israeli settlements on the Golan Heights; (v) the adjustment of international borders; (vi) post-treaty compliance measures; and (vii) potential cultural barriers to mediated agreement.

Thus, the negotiations between Israel and Syria have their stakes for both parties : for Israel the negotiations are expected to accomplish a number of confidence-building tasks leading to new security arrangements (in the context of a phased withdrawal from the Golan Heights) and full normalization of relations with Syria underwritten by US military and financial guarantees.

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(53) "Middle East Journal" 48, no.1, (Winter 1994), p. 63, See also As'ad Abukhalil, "Syria and the Arab-Israeli Conflict", *Current History* 93, no. 580 (February 1994), pp. 83-6 (Arabic).

(54) "New York Times", December 31, 1994.

For Syria, by contrast, mediated negotiations are expected, among other things, to underline Syria's pivotal strategic and Arab leadership role in the peace process, ensure equality of status in negotiations with Israel, remove the stigma of Syria's alleged support for international terrorism, and produce a more stable military relationship with Israel along with limited forms of political cooperation.

However, neither party has as yet been willing to negotiate on a basis that would include full peace and full military withdrawal. The Israelis have not accepted the Syrian view that full withdrawal from Golan is a possible outcome of this approach. Conversely the Syrians have not accepted the Israeli view that full peace is a possible result of the negotiations.

Questions of security and territory bring out the differences between the foreign policy outlooks of Likud and Labor. Likud is committed to the ideology of Greater Israel which claims the West Bank - "Judea and Samaria" in its terminology-as an integral and inalienable part and which places security above all other considerations. For Likud, the Land of Israel is sacred, while for Labor, Israel's security is sacred. This is not to suggest that Likud is indifferent to security or that Labor is untouched by the ideal of Greater Israel, but simply to point to the different emphasis of their respective worldviews.

Moreover, both parties have suffered from a general Israeli "blind spot" when dealing with the Palestinians: both have been extremely slow to come to terms with the reality of Palestinian nationalism. Both parties, when in power, have preferred dealing with Palestinian representatives, other than the PLO. Both are still opposed to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.

Despite differing emphasis, both Labor and Likud governments have built settlements on the West Bank. The settlements have been repeatedly denounced by the international community as illegal and as obstacles to peace. This issue remains delicate; the settlers form only a tiny minority of the Israeli public roughly 10,000 on the Golan Heights, 5,000 in the Gaza strip, and 120,000 on the West Bank excluding the Greater Jerusalem area. As many as 80-85% of the settlers were attracted to the occupied territories not by ideology but by material incentives such as cheap housing and a better quality of life. By 1992, the Jewish population rapidly increased in the occupied Arab lands, for example, in the West Bank it had grown to 97,000 and to 129,000 in and around East Jerusalem. This large number of Jews in the occupied Arab lands led U.S. President George Bush, in September 1991, to veto \$ 10 billion requested by Israel to build a new settlement for Soviet Jewish immigrants. And this led the two countries into a heated war of words.<sup>55</sup>

Today, there are 800,000 Palestinians in Gaza, one million in the West Bank, two million in Jordan, and 400,000 in refugee camps in Lebanon, making a total of 4.2 million Palestinians living in lands close to their former homes. The Jews among of Israel's population number about the same, including settlers in East Jerusalem, Gaza, the West Bank and the Golan Heights.

Several concerns formed the basis of Likud's distrust of the American sponsored peace process. First, the process would require Israel to make the more tangible concessions of land for the less tangible concessions of peace. Second, an international conference would produce a situation in which a large number of participants would be aligned against an isolated Israel. The Americans for instance, believed that a settlement under UN Resolution 242 would require the Israelis to withdraw on all fronts. In contrast the Likud believed that the withdrawal from Sin satisfied the territorial requirements of Resolution 242. Their policy was one of creeping annexation. As a result, negotiations under UN Resolution 242 as envisioned in the Camp David accords, were unlikely to lead to a settlement that the Shamir government and its supporters would want.

The Israelis made significant gains during the negotiations prior to the Madrid Conference. They reestablished diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. They made no concessions on the issue of Palestinian representation and obtained de facto recognition from a majority of Arab states who agreed to negotiate with Israel. And they were able to continue settlement activity in the territories. For example, then Housing Minister Ariel Sharon announced two new settlements as the Madrid Conference concluded.

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(55) The USA was particularly concerned that it should not finance the use of ex-Soviet immigrants - 185,000 in 1990, 142,000 (less than half the total originally expected) in 1991 to colonies the West Bank. For Israel's current economic situation see "Israel - Run Mess", "Time, and International", December 9, 1991, p. 51-2.

Arms control played a very important role in preventing an arms race among the regional states. By supporting a ban on all weapons of mass destruction the Arabs forced Israel to be more open about its nuclear weapons program. On the other hand, by agreeing to participate in regional discussions on weapons of mass destruction and by supporting a separate conference on conventional weapons, Israel put pressure on the Arabs to either enter into direct negotiations or be seen as obstacles to peace. Thus, the relationship between the Arms control process and the peace process will vary according to the status of the conflict and the level of political dialogue among the parties. In the best of circumstances, arms control talks, might themselves be the precursor to wider ranging peace talks.<sup>56</sup>

The most difficult questions between the parties relate to geographic borders, political legitimacy, the right of return of the Palestinians, reparations and compensation, access to resources such as water, the status of Jerusalem, relations between Israel and the Palestinian entity as also the Arab countries, and security questions, including arms control, mutual force reductions and weapons limitations.

The return of occupied Arab lands is seen as the key to an Arab-Israeli peace, particularly parts of the territory known as historic Palestine or Eretz Israel.<sup>57</sup> This will be the most difficult issue to resolve during peace negotiations. Territorial compromise will not be possible unless there are security guarantees on all sides. These security guarantees must include peace-keeping forces, force deployment limitations and inspection and verification regimes. There must be agreements between Israel and the Palestinians concerning the internal security of a new Palestinian regime and its relationship to Israeli security. Since territorial compromise is the key to a lasting Arab-Israeli peace and since security guarantees are necessary before, there can be any withdrawal by Israel from the occupied lands, the linkage between these two subjects is of the utmost importance.

Israel's borders with its neighbors following a peace settlement will be influenced by three basic considerations: (i) military relations with the Arab world, (ii) the external and practical day-to-day relations with the Palestinian regime, and (iii) the internal security problem. The issue of external security raises questions about strategic relations between Israel and Syria, and between Israel and Jordan. In the former case, the key issues relate to the control of the Golan Heights and the Israeli-Lebanese border. While in the latter case, the key question concerns Jordan's eastern border with Iraq and Israel's likely insistence that Jordan agree to limit Iraqi or other Arab military access to this border.

Because the Palestinians sided with Iraq during the 1991 Gulf War, most Israelis at this time do not believe that Palestinians and Jews can live together. Israeli hardliners will continue to argue that the creation of a Palestinian state based on the withdrawal of Israel from the West Bank and Gaza would inevitable lead to another Arab-Israeli war.<sup>58</sup> They cite the proximity of the West Bank and Gaza to Israel's cities and industries, and the West Bank's strategic advantage of high ground as two reasons to retain the territories.<sup>59</sup> The return of the West Bank would also eliminate Israeli control of the Jordan River as an obstacle to any possible attack from the east of that river.<sup>60</sup>

Concerning the external security threat, many Israelis believe that the Arab states will eventually upgrade their military potential to rival Israel's both quantitatively and qualitatively, thus leaving Israel with only its territorial advantage.<sup>61</sup>

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(56) A more pessimistic argument would be that arms control talks might diminish the prospects of a larger Arab-Israeli dialogue by meeting the basic demands for negotiations without compromising the various positions of the parties on matters such as recognition and territory for peace.

(57) Bernard Lewis, "Palestine: On the History and Geography of a Name", *International History Review* 11, January 1, 1980.

(58) Michael Widlanski, "Current Debate: How Dangerous would a Palestinian State be? Very Dangerous," *Tikkum*, July/August 1990, p. 62.

(59) Michael Widlanski, (Ed.), *Can Israel Survive a Palestinian State?* (Jerusalem: Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies, 1985), p.10.

(60) *Ibid.*, p.11.

(61) *Ibid.*, p.14

This argument has been temporarily undercut by the defeat of Iraq in the Gulf war. However, over time, Iraq could re-emerge as a threat. So the best way for Israelis to enhance Israel's security may now be through a land-for-peace settlement that removes some of the sources of tension in the area and creates a more stable security environment. In the October 1994 Taba talks, divergent views arose on who would maintain control of international border crossings into the autonomous Palestinian areas, the security to be provided for Jewish settlers, the size of Jericho, and the timing of the release of political prisoners. These divergences emanated in part from the ambiguities in and omissions from the DoP, and also from negotiating tactics.<sup>62</sup>

For a brief moment after the Taba agreement, the international community was reminded that for all Israel's military strengths it had only won the battle and not the war, that the Arab parties remain undefeated, with unresolved grievances, and that as a result of the Intifada Israel had recognized that the political question of the Palestinians was not amenable to a military solution. Peace would have to be negotiated. Thus, on this analysis, neither the Madrid peace talks nor the talks at Oslo constitute a normal peace conference where the winners invite the losers to discuss settlement terms.<sup>63</sup> Such terms have served to strengthen Israel and to put the PLO at a clear disadvantage, which latterly, led to a hard debate among the Palestinian factions, between Al Fateh and other political groups, between those based in Tunis and those in the occupied territories.<sup>64</sup>

As a result, many Palestinians came to believe that the unintended consequence of Oslo and the internal debate that it has triggered may be to undermine the Palestinians' ability and commitment to achieve an independent state.<sup>65</sup>

Late Anwar Sadat did not sell the peace by recognizing Israel. His betrayal lay in making peace at the expense of the Palestinians by declining the Egypt-Israeli accord with progress in the Palestine-Israel peace process. Late Yasser Arafat had a weak hand to play, but not as weak as he imagined it to be. Taber Shash, an Egyptian diplomat and legal expert, told Arafat, "This is Camp David, only even worse", only to add "But I don't think that you could have got any more, and if you want to go ahead, I wish you God's blessing". In Hassanien Heike's expressive phrase, the Oslo accord, is a bandage stuck to the three "no's",<sup>66</sup> and brought to bear a combination of limited military pressure and perseverance.

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(62) For Israel, the issue of border crossings was clear in the declaration which gave it responsibility for external security, but Arafat wanted a formula which provided the Palestinians with some symbol of their newly acquired status. For the Palestinians, the issue of political prisoner release was important as a sign of Israeli commitment to reconciliation.

(63) David Astor, *Peace in the Middle East: Superpowers and Security Guarantees* (London: 1978), Valeric York, "Imagining a Palestinian State: an international Security plan, *International Affairs*, Vol.66, no.1, January 1990, pp. 115-136.

(64) By mid-November, 1993, Five leading PLO figures had been killed - violence which reflected a mix of difference over the peace process and the settling of inter and intra-factional scores.

(65) Nasser Aruri, "Oslo and the crisis in Palestinian Politics", *"Middle East International"*, 21 January 1994.

(66) During the Arab Summit Conference held in Khartoum from 29 August to 1 September 1967, the Arab Heads of States agreed to unite their political efforts at the international and diplomatic level to eliminate the effects of the aggression and to ensure the withdrawal of the aggressive Israeli forces from the Arab lands which had been occupied since June 1967. This would be done within the framework of the main principles by which the Arab states abide, three no's, namely (i) no peace with Israel, (ii) no recognition of Israel, (iii) no negotiation with Israel, and insistence on the rights of the Palestinian people in their own country, Palestine.

(67) Walid Khalidi - a Research fellow at the Harvard Center for International Affairs and closely affiliated to the Palestinian National Council.

(68) Walid Khalidi, "Thinking the Unthinkable: A Sovereign Palestinian State", *"Foreign Affairs"*, July, 1978, Vol.56, no. 4, p. 701



With regard to the peace process talks, some scholars like Walid Khalidi,<sup>67</sup> wrote in 1978 that "there is no reason why the concept of Palestinian sovereignty should not accommodate provisions designed to allay legitimate fears of neighbors on a reasonable and preferably reciprocal basis."<sup>68</sup> He added that a Palestinian state would pose little threat to Israel even if it has a small military because it would be geographically separated from most Arab states, and almost completely surrounded by Israeli territory. According to Khalid, a future Palestinian leadership would have few illusions about the efficacy of revolutionary armed struggle in any direct confrontation with Israel.<sup>69</sup>

Trust between the Arabs and Israel will not be easy to achieve since the regional conflict involving Israel has an important religious component. Also, the potential hostility of non-Arab Muslim countries such as Iran cannot be ignored. For instance, it is difficult to imagine an Arab-Israeli agreement to limit nuclear weapons that ignored the nuclear capabilities of Iran. Thus, the establishment of a nuclear free zone will be subject to different considerations from those governing an Arab-Israeli peace deal.

The Oslo accords provide for drawing the international community and regional states into a network of economic ties with Israel without the latter either renouncing its claim to the West Bank and Gaza or committing itself to a full withdrawal. Using the international and regional support for the DOP to strengthen its argument, Israel has pressed for an end to the Arab boycott, to which the Arab states' official response has been that such a decision can only be taken by the Arab League once Israel commits itself to withdrawal on the basis of UN Resolutions 242 and 338. Full diplomatic relations with Israel, can only be forthcoming with a final peace treaty, and the reaching of prior mutually satisfactory agreements with Israel.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, the ideal solution to the Arab-Israel conflict should be a permanent peace settlement. To be permanent, this peace must not be imposed by force. It must be one that is accepted by both sides, not just on paper, but engraved in their hearts. Only a peace settlement that is recognized by both sides to have been genuinely accepted can open the way for reconciliation and cooperation between them. On these terms an era of good relations between the Arabs and Israelis may dawn without delay.

The benefits from a positive peace process could be very great both for the regional countries and for external investors. On the other hand, failure of the peace process will lead the region into violence and continuation of political and economic instabilities, which can pave the way for future intervention by outside powers.

### ***Conclusion***

The Arab-Israeli conflict and especially the Palestinian question are very complex. The current peace process will not lead to a final solution to the Palestinian problem until and unless certain basic issues are addressed which will satisfy Palestinian aspirations while at the same time meeting Israeli security needs. Otherwise, a peace agreement between Israel and the Arab states will only hinder both economic and political development in the Arab world, as well as weaken the Arab states' military position vis-à-vis Israel. Meanwhile, Israel's economy will be considerably strengthened and the Israelis will be able to lessen their economic dependence on the US and western countries.

In contrast to the emergence of normalization in the Arab-Israeli relationship, expressed in important policy statements on the bilateral and multilateral fronts and in international organizations, there looms the threat of violence and terror supported by religious fanaticism and by political radicalism. The peoples of the region must unite to act against this threat. The success of the peace process depends on two factors. Firstly, the sides should conduct the process at a pace which will assure its immediate visibility in the field. The nations of the region must be able to perceive the dwindling of the animosity and distrust and the establishment of a new climate of relations to prime and reinforce the collective hope for peace. The dialogue must move forward, the sides must reach constructive compromise and new policy perceptions must be set in place.

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(69) Ibid. p. 713.

(70) The approach leaves the way open for consideration by the Arab League of an easing of the embargo against Israel, provided that barriers to Jordanian and Arab exports to the occupied Territories are also removed.

This is the task of the bilateral track. Secondly, the sides should go on cooperating, with the goal of establishing a basis for a shared existence. They need to work together to find solutions to regional challenges. Such as refugees, water, economic growth, disarmament and environmental issues. It is very important that the states in the region have come to a point that peace is a strategic goal; peace serves the interests of all the nationalities of the region. Every one in the region must fight for peace.

Open borders, economic cooperation leading to economic growth, free movement of persons, products and services across borders, are the hope of every inhabitant in the region. The emergence of a network of regional contacts is very important for the purpose. It must begin with infrastructure, highways, flight paths and seaways, water pipelines and electricity grids spread out in a web uniting all from east to west and from north to south. It must continue in the establishment of mechanisms for consultations and design of development projects. The peoples of the region have to live a life of freedom, a freedom from obstacles, and from the threat of violence and terror. They have to be free to travel and to trade, to develop joint ventures and generally to live together as good neighbors.

Shared development will bring about a revolutionary growth in tourism in the region, growth in mutual trade among the regional states in the region and the expansion of trade with the rest of the world. Cooperation can lead to purposive action in preserving the quality of their natural environment, a benefit to the region and to all of the surrounding regions. Economic development will bring prosperity to the people of the region, ushering in a period of stability and halting the otherwise almost perennial drift towards crisis and conflict. Prosperity counter balance the threats against societies and governments of the states. It will help the underwrite and foster human and civic rights, build confidence in economic and political processes and encourage the trend towards disarmament and maintaining a realistic military balance in the region. All sides must leave the region free from nuclear weapons and remove the threat of weapons of mass destruction. All sides must believe in good relations and in strengthening their ties with the world around them.

The spirit of regional cooperation permits a frank assessment of reality. The economies of the region differ from each other, some are wealthy in fuel resources, and other lacks such resources. Some are based on industries, others on agriculture. These differences add to the difficulty of developing mutual trade, and the several economies might develop in undesirable directions, widening the gaps instead of bringing the sides together.

A lasting peace in the region will flourish in response to two parallel and essential efforts: on the one hand, removal of the atmosphere of hostility and political and military enmity; on the other, opening up and integration of markets so as to promote the maximum regional economic development. Resources that were diverted to support militaries and purchase of arms were thus far not available for the development of national and regional economic infrastructure on all sides of the divide. And all parties to the conflict have paid the price for it. One can envisage how the regional states will use the peace to stimulate regional development. There are many possibilities. Firstly, peace will bring about a reduction in the need for arms in countries that were involved in the conflict. It will aid in reducing the armaments which were required for mutual deterrence within the Arab world.

Secondly, peace will topple artificial barriers that were put up in an era of hostility. The region without hostility, terror, or political agitation will attract outside investment. Thirdly, peace in the region will allow multilateral cooperation on projects related to infrastructure, industry, agriculture, transportation, tourism, energy, water and science. Opening the borders will enrich all, spiritually, culturally and economically.

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