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# REPORT

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## **IS THE ISRAEL-PALESTINIAN-ARAB CONFLICT INTRACTABLE?**

In addressing the above issue I shall start by referring to a quote from George Mitchell who recently said, "I believe there's no such thing as a conflict that can't be ended. They're created and sustained by human beings. They can be ended by human beings. No matter how ancient the conflict, no matter how hateful, no matter how hurtful, peace can prevail."<sup>1</sup>

He may be right in principle, but as John Maynard Keynes said, "In the long run, we're all dead" and he said that in a very similar set of circumstances. Mitchell is right in principle as no situation is forever, but it does not follow that peace can be gotten at any time.

Existing impediments to peace may befall any specific peace initiative. The right conditions must be created for efforts to be successful, and if these conditions are not right, then simply having a strong will is not enough.

In order to embark on this question of intractability, my feelings and my analysis are that I find it hard to believe that there is going to be a breakthrough in the Israeli-Arab conflict soon. Having said that, I am more than willing to eat my hat if it should happen!

It is important to recognize the difference between the world that President Bush inherited in 1990, and the world as it is today. At that time, it seemed to be the beginning of what was called "The American Century".

I do not think that there would be many who would predict the American century in 2010, and this illustrates just how fast things can change. President Obama finds himself in a very odd situation, as he is currently in the middle of an economic crisis, and outstretched in never ending wars; a position that was determined by the Bush administration. What we are facing now are limitations, and this is applicable even to American power.

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<sup>1</sup> Mitchell Report - April 2002

When I come to characterize the Israeli-Palestinian-Arab conflict, especially if you bear in mind the Cyprus conflict, it has three special characteristics which admittedly do feature to a much lesser degree in the latter conflict.

The first one is the permanent violence of the conflict. There are hardly any other major conflicts that I can think of that have had so many violent eruptions over such a long time. These violent eruptions on a large scale do not sum up the daily violence that occurs and subsequently becomes part of the new routine in that part of the world. So there are these highly intensive violent conflicts happening in a very volatile and central area to the economy, and the security of the world. Due to the location, these actions become more acute than if they were taking place elsewhere.

The second of these characteristics which is different is the dimension of holiness which is added to the conflicts. What I mean by this is that, as there is a strong symbolism attached to the Holy Land for three major world religions, its relevance far exceeds its locus and it is, therefore, a constant focus of world attention.

I may have given this example before, but an Israeli poet, Yehuda Amichai wrote in one of his pieces that Jerusalem is a place where everyone remembers that he's forgotten something, but does not remember what it is.<sup>2</sup> Jerusalem is, therefore, a very mythical place, and far exceeds any type of materialism. It is because of this religious aspect that the conflict is made even more difficult to resolve.

The third aspect that is unique to this conflict is that it has many actors, and arguably too many actors. As the proverb goes, "too many cooks spoil the broth", and here there are too many actors with their fingers in the proverbial soup. This means that although very few of them, if any, can resolve the conflict, it does not take very much for others to spoil the efforts to reach a resolution.

There are a number of reasons here why I believe there are too many actors involved in the conflict. In almost every conflict, you will find that those involved directly will seek alliances. Most commonly, at least in the context of the bi-polar world, the main actors will align themselves with a super power. In this instance the super powers contest the conflict, and it becomes subsumed within the bi-polar world, and its structure, and between the bigger structures which used to be called the cold war.

These alliances mean that the super powers become involved by proxy, by a transfer of finances, by a transfer of arms, and by the way in which they intercede on behalf of one or other of the sides in various international institutions or organizations such as the UN.

This is one level of seeking alliance, but there is another aspect to it. This is that both Israeli nationalism, which is also known as Zionism, and the Palestinian national movements are Pan-movements. Zionism is not the idea of securing independence to people who sit in a circle territory. It is the idea of moving people who were minorities in different places, and concentrating them in one place where they are a majority. In that respect, it differs from other nationalisms, because most other nationalisms, even if they have populations outside the state, they would like the territories to be adjacent or annexed to it. So this represents a different meaning of the word "Pan".

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<sup>2</sup> Yeshuda Amichai: published in the 1974 collection titled *Me-ahorei kol zeh mistater osher gadol* (Abramson's translation, 139)

The use of the word “Pan” can also refer to a nationalism which claims to represent all Jews, wherever they are. It is enshrined in some basic laws of becoming a citizen such as the law of return which was enacted in 1950. This legislation gives automatic citizenship to any Jew coming to Israel. In return, Zionism claims to represent all Jews, and since after the Second World War its main opponents have been within Judaism, and orthodoxy, and the Jewish socialist movement. It does gain the affinity of the majority of Jews as well, and it organizes Jews for the interest of the Israeli state.

It has chapters, youth movements, concessions and lobbies which work to mobilize and support the Jewish community. The Jewish lobby is not only made up of Jews in the US. It is a conglomeration of many different groups, some which are Christian, some fundamentalist Christians, who for various reasons try to articulate American policies in the direction of the support of Israel.

There is another level of support for Israel, and this exhibited itself mainly in 1947. It brought about the creation of the state of Israel and was in the aftermath of the Holocaust. If one looks at the vote in November of 1947 which partitioned Palestine in the General Assembly, there was a very interesting division. All the Arab and Muslim countries voted against the partition, and all the countries where there was a Christian majority voted for, including communist countries. Gromyko, who was then the representative of the USSR, spoke very eloquently about the suffering of the Jews.

I highlight the Holocaust at this stage because it has subsequently become an issue between Iran and Israel. My personal view is, however, that although the Holocaust did occur, the Palestinians were not responsible for the Holocaust. If it was not for the Holocaust, however, then the partition may not have happened as many of the Jews emigrated from Israel between Hitler's rise to power and 1939, which more than doubled the number of Jews in Palestine over 6 years. This created a critical mass for the building of the state.

So this kind of solidarity is something that Israel relies on, uses and wants, and evidence of this can be seen very clearly within the EU, as there is no common EU policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

I will give an example using the vote that happened in October based on Goldstone report, where countries such as Slovakia, Hungary and Italy voted against accepting the report, and some EU countries abstained altogether. Britain and France were not present at this vote, so this shows how the EU responds with regard to a common policy.

The Palestinians also have a Pan-movement. The Palestinians, like the Jews, have become a diaspora-nation, and they live not just inside Israel or in areas occupied by Israel, but they live in several Arab states, and in Jordan they are the majority. They live outside of the Arab states, and in that respect they also try to mobilize support from the surrounding states.

They are, therefore, relying on two movements. The Pan-Arab movement was a secular movement that defined anyone who spoke Arabic as Arab regardless of their religion. It saw all Arabs as belonging to one big nationalist movement, and hoped that there would be one incorporated Arab state. These were the ideals of Nasserism and Ba'athism, in Syria, Iraq and so on.

There were many clashes within Ba'athism, even between Iraqi and Syrian Ba'athists, but one thing they had in common was that they were all united on the issue of Palestine, so this solidarity formed the cornerstone of the fundamental axiom for the Pan-Arab movement. In this respect, Palestinians could rely on support from the Arab states.

Despite the apparent solidarity, there was also a negative effect to be garnered from this movement as although there was a feeling that all the Arabs were one family, this contained different ideologies, and different Arab states fought internal Arab competition. This presented struggles even within the Palestinian movement. Each fraction set up its different organizations, and each one supported, financed and trained their organizations which helped to create this plethora of chaotic and un-united forms of leadership. This has deteriorated further in the last few years into a schism between Hamas and Fatah, but it has been like this for some time. Reflecting upon this it can be seen that sometimes it is better to have one state rather than having many states in your family.

The third circle which the Palestinians tried to capitalize, and this goes back to the 1920s, was the Pan-Islamic circle which was much larger than the Pan-Arab circle. The golden dome in the Al-Aqsa mosque was mainly financed by donations from Muslims in India. In the United Nations there are now 57 Muslim states, and this means that almost automatically the Palestinians can rely on at least 57, plus other states, for suggestions to criticize or denounce Israel. This manifests itself as a distortion of world democracy. These movements have, therefore, led to Israel's attitude towards the UN, and their belief that it is of no use to them.

So it can be seen that both movements have created circles of support around Palestine which are much bigger than they are. It creates so many conflicting interests, and so many interventions that it is very difficult to see how all of these can be synchronized towards an agreement. Of course, this was not possible during the bi-polar structure of the world until 1989. Indeed in the Armistice in 1949, and the Rhodes agreements after the first Israeli-Arab war, there were many meetings and attempts, but very few results actually arising from the negotiations towards achieving peace.

If I now proceed to concentrate on the world as it emerged after 1990, I would say that short of one peace agreement, which was achieved in 1979 between Israel and Egypt, and was the result of Egypt shifting sides from the Eastern block to the Western block, there were hardly any serious negotiations between Israelis and Arabs during the period of the Cold War. So most of what has happened, has happened within the last 19 years.

One important thing to note is that during 1948-67, the Palestinians as an autonomous actor almost did not exist. It was a potential resolution that did not end up with a partition once state was created, and another state was partially swallowed up and conquered by three different other states, those being Israel, Jordan and Egypt. It is only after 1967 that Israel controls all of what used to be mandatory Palestine. Hence, the argument between the Israelis, and the others, over whether it is occupied or not and where is it occupied from.

This had a meaning though, which I will now illustrate. The first point which made it possible for Israel to talk to the Palestinians was the demand that the Palestinians renounced their occupation of Israel and renounced terrorism.

Arafat pushed Iran until in 1988, when in Stockholm he made, after several corrections, a statement saying that he recognized Israel. One of the first things that happened immediately

afterwards was that Jordan announced that it was renouncing all claims on the West Bank bit. Suddenly Jordan has said that it has no claims on the West bit, but that is after 1950 when Jordan had annexed the West bit. The space is, therefore, suddenly vacant and belongs to nobody.

As a result of this action the Palestinians issued the Declaration of Independence in order to immediately seize this vacuum that had been created, not that the state was a state at the time as it was occupied by Israel as it was before, but as a result it did not have anything to do with Israel. This declaration, however, created a claim over the territory, and it also made, since the re-declaration of Israel, a leadership partner with whom Israel, and the world, could give a legitimate status to and negotiate with.

Since this time we have had several major rounds of negotiations, and the world seized upon the situation after 1990, and the Madrid conference was convened in 1991. This was the first time that the Israelis and the Palestinians sat together, and Russia also participated. In 1993 the Oslo negotiations started, but they ended in the disaster in 2000 of Camp David. The last rounds after Camp David were in Taba, where both sides moved further towards what they wanted, but then the Second Intifada broke out, and there were subsequently a lot of suicide bombers.

In 2003 there was another attempt by the quartet, comprised of Russia, the UN, the EU and the US, who promoted the road map for peace. This still stands on what was accomplished. This demonstrates that there have not only been negotiations, but there have been lots of negotiations. Due to the thousands of hours that have already been spent in negotiations, it now means that there is nothing that has not been thought of that can suddenly appear. The parameters have been made quite clear in relation to what conditions each side expects in order for there to be any sort of solution.

The idea of a two-state solution is first of all implied in the petition, and then it is stated again in resolutions 242 and 338, 1967. One is made to wonder whether it is really possible to have two states, and now there are some people who have considered having a bi-national state as the state solution. I mention these things not because they are realistic, but because also in Cyprus there is the conflict between the two states.

The very simple reason for why it is not realistic is because for a two state solution there needs to be an agreement between the two states. Personally, as I belong to such extremist left wing groups, I support in principle the one state solution, however, I do not believe, like Mitchell, that it can be reached before I am dead. So I would be willing to compromise with the two instead in the hope that if after about 30 years, if the people have not killed each other, then they would be able to talk about the one state solution. We are still witnessing daily killings, so this must stop before we can even attempt reconciliation.

The elements of any two state solutions are, first of all, borders and disagreements, which are to do with the fact that the UN partition was supposed to be a 55 and 45% split between the Arabs and the Jews, with more going to the Jews, even though they were only one third of the population, because the refugees from Europe were supposed to come in shortly afterwards. The war did not end with that kind of situation, but the Israelis captured 79%, so what we refer to as the West Bank in Gaza today is 21% of what used to be British land. Now, the Israelis are negotiating about this, but the Palestinians claim to have already made the biggest sacrifice. This is not particularly because they are kind hearted, but due to the situation after 1948, so

no-one could tell what result would come of it. Time has played a very big role in this process, and after two or three generations have passed it becomes very difficult to distinguish between who is native, and who is not. So the territory and the borders are one major thing.

Since 1967, Israel started deliberate state activity settling Jews in the newly occupied territory, and that is the main hurdle that we encounter now. What was more or less agreed in Tama is that the territory of the two states should roughly be the borders that were in place before the 1967 war, and that if any corrections should need to be made, then land should be exchanged on more or less a one-to-one basis.

The second aspect is in relation to independence and its meaning. Lately Netanyahu said at last for the first time that a ruling party could say that they accept the Palestinian state, but that it is demilitarized and other conditions. Previously things have been said about not having military alliances with others, and Israeli control over the air space and so on. All of these things may have their justification in the interests of security. Indeed, that was always Israel's position, and it came out for the first time during the negotiations with Egypt, because Egypt always saw itself as a patron of the Palestinians. During the negotiations, even during Bevin's time, he was willing to grant autonomy, but not state. Basically, what Netanya says now is not very different to what Bevin said.

The third, but partially combined element is security. In security, the Israelis understand first and foremost that there must be a cessation of hostile activities. Israel is extremely sensitive to this because irregulars or non-competence have always been a major problem in Israel, not when there have been major conflict relations, but on a daily basis. This situation where there is a lack of security, porous borders and daily incursions and retaliations by Israelis, has been a major part of the Israeli mentality and their lifestyle.

So for Israeli security it means a cessation of all the conflicts that are occurring on a low intensity level. Palestinians, of course, demand the same thing about the Israeli army, and what the Arab countries call state terrorism. I would say that the results are irregular in Israel, although not to the same extent, but there are armed groups who take the law into their own hands and provoke, kill and so on. The continuation of this situation, therefore, is a hazard for the state losing in monopoly on the means of coercion.

Security for the Palestinians means also a very important thing, which is the stoppage to the Israeli settlement. They perceive that land will be taken, and once this has happened they will never get it back. The Palestinians, therefore, make an equation between stopping the right to resist by way of arms and the stopping of settlements.

In Israel, stopping settlements is a very difficult issue for any government, but perhaps even more so for a government of the left because it is subject to more attacks by the right, and it can lose its majority if it prevents settlements. A government of the right, however, cannot lose its majority if the people from its own camp attack it because they will not break down the government to give it to the left. Security means that there is now, especially after 2000, the removal of all of the barriers, road blocks and terminals within the West Bank, and so on. It also means removal of the siege on Gaza. All of these things are equal to having security for the Palestinians.

Another important aspect concerns Jerusalem, and there are two aspects to be discussed here. It was previously a divided city until 1967, but then the Israelis annexed it and started building



all around it, and have extended the territory of Jerusalem so that the Jerusalem of today is many times bigger than it was in 1967. Jerusalem now includes a large part of the West Bank, so if you extend the municipal borders of Jerusalem, and understand the idea that it must not be returned, then it means that there is less and less possibility of there being negotiations about borders. Both sides claim that Jerusalem is their capital.

This is not an insurmountable situation. In the last negotiations it was agreed that Jerusalem would be divided, and after Camp David in Tabá improved versions were accepted. The government did not have the majority, and so there is a question as to whether a government that does not have a majority has the power to make binding decisions. So we must look at the territory of Jerusalem, but also at the heart of that territory is, of course, what we call the Holy Basin. There is also Temple Mount. The whole of the old city with all of its holy places is just one square kilometer. During the partition decision by the UN in 1948 a solution was found. It was found that Jerusalem should be united, and should be under the supervision of the UN.

There have been various attempts to resolve the question of the holy places, however, an idea that I like very much is that the sovereignty of these places should be left to God.

Another thing that the Palestinians cannot accept is resolution 191, which provides that refugees have a right to return to Israel if they are willing to live in peace. However, the Israelis stick to resolution 181, which is the provision of Palestine.

At this point I will say a few words about the problem of the refugees. From the Palestinian point of view, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) is not just an organization of people living in the West Bank area. It regards itself, very much like the Zionist organization, as the representative of all the Palestinians regardless of where they are. Jordan is the only state which gave citizenship to the Palestinians. All of the Arab states, in order to leave the question burning, and in order to make sure that they can represent the Palestinians, they refuse citizenship. One of my friends from Lebanon who participated in the conference last year said that everyone loves Palestine, but they hate the Palestinians. The PLO, which aims to represent all of the Palestinians, finds it extremely difficult to abandon part of its constituency by saying that they resolve the problem of the West Bank. Therefore, the Palestinians find it extremely difficult to leave the question of refugees out of any agreements. We are now talking about roughly 3.5-4million people. To return these people would be that Israel would not have the same character as a Jewish majority anymore and, therefore, it is a non starter for the Israelis.

So it is known now by all sides that, if there is going to be a resolution, then this problem will have to be solved by settling these people elsewhere.

I have now outlined the main issues that must be resolved, and accordingly any feasible solution will have to deal with these.

In the meanwhile, we have had many changes which have been very important. In 2005 there was an actual Israeli decision to evacuate Gaza. From the Israeli point of view this evacuation should have been sufficient, and they did not understand what more was required of them as missiles were still being directed at the Israelis.

From the Palestinian point of view, even though the Israelis have left, they have taken the parameter of Gaza and sealed it off, besieged it and basically nothing can go in or out unless it

is over the border with Egypt where there are now apparently more than 1,500 tunnels. They break in through these tunnels to obtain fuel, animals, missiles, and anything else that they need.

In 2006, President Bush was exerting pressure on us to democratize. There were, therefore, elections by the Palestinian Authority which was founded as a result of the Oslo Agreement. There was also a split between Hamas and Fatah, which deteriorated into a very horrific civil war. What you see here is not just two groups within the Palestinian movement, but in the appearance of Hamas you can see the influences of different movements within the Islamic border. Hamas is an offspring of the Muslim Brotherhood which is the main opposition in Egypt. Hamas now gains a lot of support from Hezbollah and from Syria, so it has a plethora of connections. Because of the siege, and because they have never accepted Israel's right to exist, Hamas goes back on the Stockholm Agreement of 1988 as they believe that they gained no benefit from it, so why should they renounce their agreement. So now within the Palestinian movement there are two groups with different policies operating. One tries to make amends with the US and the EU in order to reach a possible agreement and the other sticks to the old politics of only using force.

I believe that ultimately - and many academics would agree with me - that the arms struggle has caused the Palestinians more harm than good because through the use of arm struggling they created a justification for Israel to use its much superior power and inflict upon them much heavier losses. In the cycle of blood and retaliation it becomes so that everyone forgets who fired the first shot.

In December 2008, there was an operation called "Molten Lead", which the Israelis claim was the right to self-defense because for years there was a barrage of missiles and psychological warfare from the Palestinians. So then, when the Israelis could not stop it they went in. I am very critical of what Israel did next, and I do not believe that they were justified. The way they used power came from a very simple way of thinking.

The high capital warfare that we have today is that in order to save lives, your side has to be able shoot from afar. The technologies, however, are not that accurate and subsequently there is a lot of collateral damage meaning that many ordinary citizens are killed. This is true not just about Israel, but it also applies to what the US did in Afghanistan and Iraq. War has become asymmetric as most of the wars nowadays are not between two armies, but now you usually have an army against what we call non-combatants.

As we know from revolutionary warfare and guerrilla warfare, the guerrilla should be like a fish in water. No longer are battles conducted face to face in uniform, but they are carried out under the cover of camouflage, and one of the best forms of camouflage is where you cannot tell who is military and who is civilian. Hamas used civilian places to hide or to hide their arms. The Israelis adopted an approach where they would not risk soldiers, but instead when they approached a house they would fire missiles, and when they can detect no movement they would proceed to investigate. However, they would sometimes find that children had been killed.

This is what also happens in Iraq and Afghanistan all the time, so there is an impossible situation which the world will have to address.



In order to round up, I would just like to say a few words about the above situation, and also about President Obama. The Gaza conflicts were continuing right up to the day that Obama was inaugurated. However the day that he was inaugurated it stopped. We have seen that Obama has made a difference to the US, both with the economy and with the unilateralism of the US, and so perhaps, the Israelis could copy the unilateral system from the US, and do on a regional level what the US has done throughout the world. Suddenly we can see that the world is changing because Obama, maybe by inclination - and I really do believe that he has a different predisposition than President Bush - or whether it is because of the restriction on the power of the US, it has taken a different turn.

In relation to the conflicts, what we have seen is that he does not believe in resolving the problem by tackling it directly. He shows a capability of understanding the much wider implications of who aides and abets, and in turn considers all of the surrounding issues.

The second thing is that he cannot continue with unilateralism and he is moving into multilateralism, and that is one of the reasons why he got the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009, because he has already achieved a lot.

The third point is that he is taking a much more indirect approach. In the Israeli-Arab conflict, one of the things that Obama is trying to do is understand that in order to resolve the Israeli Arab conflict he has to resolve a lot of other conflicts that stand in the way. For example with Iran, he has to get the support of Russia to have a resolution of functions in the Security Council. This cannot be achieved if he puts strong radars on the borders of Russia. He understands this, and won't put these things in place. He also sees the advantages of negotiating in order to make things happen. Through coming to an agreement with Russia, suddenly the possibility arises of more trade negotiations.

This approach is as applicable with the Israeli-Arab conflict as with regard to many of the problems I have highlighted. The solution does not just lie with the Palestinians, but many other Arab countries are also involved. If there are problems with the supply of arms to extremist groups such as Hamas, then you have to try and resolve it at the source.

So negotiating with Iran is not just a question of enriching. It also concerns resolving Iran's attitude towards its place in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia is part of the solution in order to sort out the troubles with Gaza, and it demands a lot of investment, and the resolution of the Arab conflict, not just the Palestinian conflict.

So there are now much wider discussions between all of the states involved in order to resolve the conflicts gradually, piece by piece. I would just like to finish by saying that I have great hopes for the action that Obama is taking. His plans are admirable, but they are very complex and very difficult to synchronize. Whether he will be able to bring all of the pieces of the puzzle together before he is out of time is questionable. I just hope that the next election will not happen before that. That is the problem that I can envisage, but if he does succeed then what he will bring about is not just peace between the Israelis and Palestinians, but a much wider solution to all the problems in the Middle East. It does, however, depend on some many other variables in relation to the length of negotiations and his time in office.

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