



## **THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT**

### *The Developent of Quagmire*

The Jews have a religious belief that Israel is the Promised Land for them. Based on this belief Theodor Herzal's Zionist Movement, in the 1<sup>st</sup> International Zionist Conference of 1897, declared the establishment of Israel as a Jewish state in Palestine. After the defeat of Turkey in World War-I Palestine went under the Control of Great Briton which, through the Balfour Declaration of 02 November, 1917 promised the Jews to create their national home in Palestine. During the World War-II the Jews suffered great atrocities in areas under Nazi control and when the war came to an end and United Nations came into being, it was decided through resolution 181 of 29 Nov. 1947 to partition Palestine into a Jewish and a Muslim state. Later on, when the Jews overthrew the British mandate and declared the establishment of Israel on 14 May, 1948, the neighboring Arab states, Syria, Iraq, Transjordan, Lebanon and Egypt attacked it. The West Bank came under the control of Jordan and Gaza Strip under the control of Egypt, whereas, the Jews occupied some more territory than sanctioned for the Jewish state in the UN partition plan of 1947. Hence, there started the Arab-Israel conflict which caused above 700,000 Palestinians to flee to neighboring countries and become refugees. The UN resolution 194 of December, 1948 called for a ceasefire which actually took place in the beginning of 1949 and the return of the refugees, but Israel refused to allow the return of the refugees.

In the Arab League's annual summit of 1964, it was decided to create a unified organization as the sole representative organization of the Palestinian people. So, Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) came into being and in 1969 Yasir Arafat, whose Fatah party had already merged with PLO, was chosen as its president.

In 1967 efforts of Egypt, Syria and Jordan to settle old scores with Israel resulted in the six days' bloody war of 5 June, 1967 in which Israel captured Gaza, Sinai Peninsula, Golan Heights, Jerusalem and the West Bank. UN Resolution 242 called for exchange of territory for peace & resettling of refugees. But Israel did not pay heed to these demands though it had to stop war. The humiliating defeat of Egypt in 1973 war only served to make Israel appear invincible and cement its relations with US.

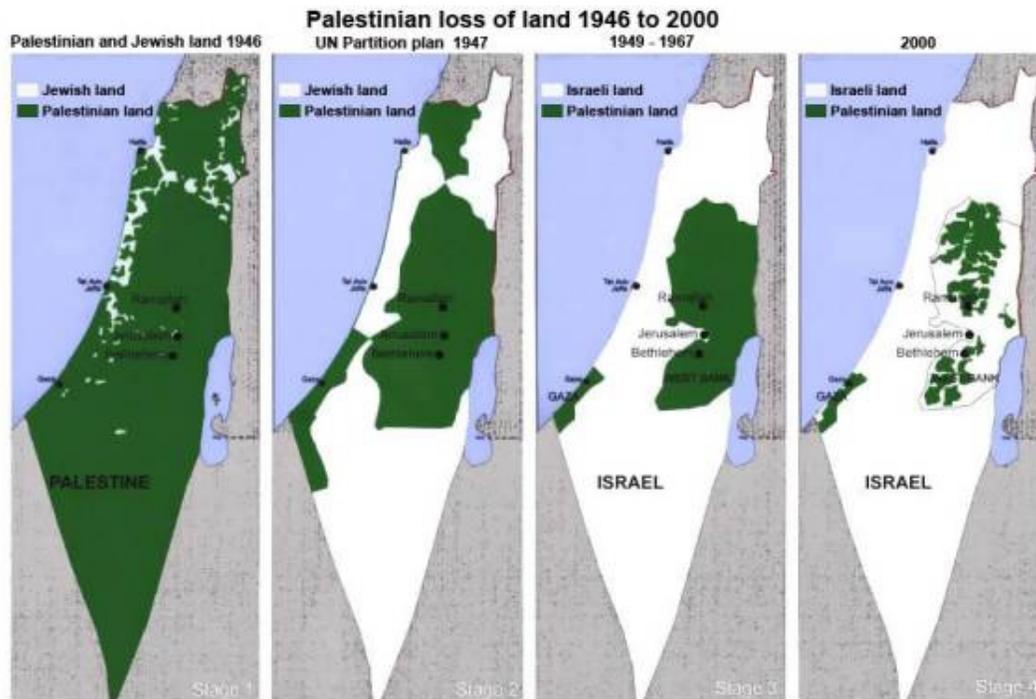
Yasir Arafat accepted the Oslo Accords of September, 1993 recognizing the state of Israel and renouncing all acts of violence against it in return for the headship of Palestinian National Authority (PNA)—the envisioned administrative set-up for the would-be state of Palestine—deferring the settlement of core issues. Certain Palestinians viewed this settlement as a U-turn from the cause of Palestine. This led to polarization of the Palestinians into moderate PLO and radical Islamists group, Hamas.

When Hamas, which was long before declared a terrorist organization by the international bodies, won 76 seats defeating Mahmood Abbas's Fatah which got only 43 seats in the Legislative Council of 132 members the western world and US put many a spoke in the wheel of Hamas to obstruct it to make government declaring it a terrorist organization. However, Mahmood Abbas had to ask Ismael Haniyeh of Hamas to form government on 29 March, 2006.

After Ismael Haniyeh's swearing in as PM, President Mahmood Abbas stopped cooperating with the Haniyeh Administration and the western bloc stopped releasing the payable funds to Hamas government. This state of affairs led to the logical consequence of clashes between Hamas and Fatah from 7 June to 14 June, 2007 after which Mahmood Abbas deposed Ismael Haniyeh unconstitutionally and the latter occupied Gaza forcefully expelling all Fatah activists, and claimed his legal government in there. Later on, Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) blockaded Gaza and the already going on skirmishes between Hamas and IDF gave Israel a pretext to invade Gaza in late 2008 with tanks, gunship helicopters and other heavy weapons. Though the UN observers' Goldstone report alleges IDF of war crimes in Gaza, yet the blockade continues to date. In 2011 the Palestinian Papers were released by the Al-Jazeera which carried 1700 papers containing the diplomatic correspondence detailing the inner workings of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The leaks authenticated the main issues and reservation of both parties over the same issues that have been debated over for years. Let us now have a look at the core issues creating hinderence in the progress of peace in Middle East.

## THE CONDUNDRUM

The core issues that are needed to be addressed for the sake of an ultimate settlement of Arab-Israel conflict are as listed below:



- Status of Jerusalem
- The question of Palestinian refugees
- Israeli settlements
- Borders and international status
- Security
- The division of resources and Water
- Measures for Palestine's viable economy

Let us see divergent point of views of the conflicting parties on each one of the mentioned issues.

### STATUS OF JERUSALEM

Jerusalem (Al-Quds) is sacred to the followers of all three Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam because of their respective attachment for the Wailing Wall, the birth place of Jesus (AS) at Bethlehem and the Dome of Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque. Since its takeover in the war of 1967, Israel has systematically deprived Muslims of their control and claims to these sights. The Muslims including Hamas who were initially wary of any Israeli control of the city are now ready to take the Eastern Jerusalem as the capital of their proposed state of Palestine. However, the current Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu has declared “united Jerusalem as the capital of Israel”. Israel has, with every passing day, done all what it could do to change the demography of the city by establishing Jewish settlements and grabbing more control of the city with the help of barrier wall and other tactics.

### THE QUESTION OF PALESTINIAN REFUGEES

UN resolutions to date particularly Resolutions 194 and 242 declare that the people who became refugees as the result of Arab-Israel conflict have the ‘right of return’ to their ancestral places and claim their properties or get compensations. But Israel fears that if the existing 4.7 million refugees are allowed to resettle in their ancestral areas, they will cause demographic changes and it will alter many a stance of Israel on other related issues. Therefore, it does not accept their right to return and always comes out with varying objections to this provision of UN resolutions.

### ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS

In its efforts to alter the demography in the favour of a Jewish state Israel started establishing many settlements of Jews in the occupied West Bank and Gaza. Though in 2005, the then prime minister of Israel, Ariel Sharon dismantled all Jewish settlements in Gaza, but he did not demolish them in West Bank. These settlements are termed illegal by the successive US administrations, UN, EU and Russia. However, ignoring all demands from international community, the current Israeli government has embarked on constructing twenty thousand new housing units in the West Bank.

### *BORDERS AND INTERNATIONAL STATUS*

The Muslims, particularly Hamas, were not ready to accept a Palestinian state inside the Armistice Lines of 1949—the Green Line. However, now they have shown some flexibility in their stance after realization of ground realities and In July 2009, Khaled Meshal, Hamas's political bureau chief, stated Hamas's willingness to cooperate with a resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict which included “a Palestinian state based on 1967 borders, provided that Palestinian refugees be given the right of return to Israel and that East Jerusalem be recognized as the new state's capital.” However, now Benjamin Netanyahu has announced “a united Jerusalem” as the capital of Israel. This shows how Israel shifts its stance to complicate the issues and defer a solution.

### *THE ISSUE OF THE SECURITY OF ISRAEL*

Israel is apprehensive that the neighbouring state of Palestine will soon fall into the hands of hostile Hamas organization. Therefore, when in possession of complete state machinery with heavy weapons and regular troops, it may try to erase Israel from the face of the earth. It, therefore, does not accept the right of the proposed state to have complete sovereignty. It won't allow Palestine to develop security forces and go into arms deals like sovereign states with other states.

### *WATER AND OTHER VITAL RESOURCES*

Most reliable source of subsistence in this part of the world being farming and orchards water remains one very important resource for the two peoples. Currently most of the water reservoirs and irrigation channels are under the control of Israel and obviously the Palestinian farmers remain at the mercy of Israel to irrigate their fields and feed their herds. Therefore, a just division of these resources is also an important issue.

### *GUARANTEES ABOUT PALESTINE'S VIABLE ECONOMY*

The Palestinian government also wants to get guarantees from international community to help them establish a sustainable economy. It demands that international monetary institutions pledge funds to sustain the Palestinian economy and certain foreign countries make trade agreements with Palestine.



### OBAMA'S FRESH START

A renewed effort to negotiate peace was initiated by United States President Barack Obama in 2010. Obama was able to generate a sense of promise in the Arab world when he addressed in Cairo. He also mentioned to the United Nations in 2010 that he is hopeful of a diplomatic peace within one year.

In December 2009, the Israeli government ordered a 10-month halt in permits for new settlement called the "freeze" in the West Bank. Israeli government said the move was aimed at restarting peace talks, but Palestinian officials said it was insufficient. Palestinian officials had refused to rejoin peace talks unless a total building halt was imposed, including in East Jerusalem. The announcement followed calls by the US government for a total freeze in settlement building. The US government, the European Union, Russia and the UN criticized Israel's plans to continue building in East Jerusalem, but both the US and the EU stated that neither the Palestinians nor Israel should have preconditions for resuming the suspended peace talks. The Palestinian militant groups led by Hamas initiated a violent campaign to disrupt peace talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. A series of attacks killed and wounded eight Israelis, including two pregnant women, between August and September 2010. In December 2010, Palestinian spokesmen rejected Binyamin Netanyahu's attempt to reach a "interim agreement" that did not cover borders or refugees

### SOLUTIONS WITH A REALITY CHECK

The first urgent challenge is, of course, the existing matrix of Hamas, PLO and Israel which is a major hurdle in serious negotiations on four basic points. First, Palestinian refugees can not be granted the right of return to what is now Israel, because Israel cannot be expected to commit suicide for the sake of peace. The refugees will have to be resettled within the Palestinian state, with compensation and maybe some expression of regret for their suffering. This will be very difficult for the Palestinian national movement to swallow, but there is no alternative.

Second, Jerusalem has to be shared, and shared genuinely. The Israeli capital, of course, would be in West Jerusalem, but East Jerusalem should be the capital of a Palestinian state, with the Old City shared under some international arrangement. If a genuine compromise on Jerusalem is not part of a settlement, resentment will persist throughout the West Bank and the Palestinians will reject the peace process. Although such a compromise will understandably be difficult for the Israelis to accept, without it there cannot be a peace of reconciliation.

Third, a settlement must be based on the 1967 lines, but with territorial swaps that would allow the large settlements to be incorporated into Israel without any further reduction of the territory of the Palestinian state. That means some territorial compensation for Palestine from parts of northern and southern Israel that border the West Bank. It is important to remember that although the Israeli and Palestinian populations are almost equal in number, under the 1967 lines the Palestinian territories account for only 22 percent of the old British mandate, whereas the Israeli territories account for 78 percent.

Fourth, the United States or NATO must make a commitment to station troops along the Jordan River. Such a move would reinforce Israel's security with strategic depth. It would reduce Israel's fears that an independent Palestine could someday serve as a springboard for a major Arab attack on Israel.

Had Obama embraced this internationally favored blueprint for peace when he addressed the UN in September, he would have exerted enormous influence on both the Israelis and the Palestinians and instantaneously gained global support. Failing to endorse this plan was a missed opportunity, especially since the two-state solution is beginning to lose some of its credibility as a viable formula for reconciliation between the Israelis and the Palestinians and within the region. Moreover, there are indications that the United States is already losing the goodwill and renewed confidence of the Arab world that Obama won with his speech in Cairo in June.

The most important solutions that have remained under consideration are:

- a. A one-state solution which envisions a sort of federation of the two peoples.
- b. A two-state solution that proposes establishment of Israel and Palestine with borders of 1967 war.
- c. A three-state solution which suggests the returning of Gaza to Egypt, of West Bank to Jordan and a third portion remaining as Israel.
- d.

From Peel Commission's report of 1936-37 to UN Resolution 181 to date the consensus solution has been a two-state solution which envisions two separate states in the historic region of Palestine with Israel remaining a Jewish state, and the establishment of another Arab state to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Though each side has reservations, yet this solution has the patronage of US, EU, UN, Russia and many Arab as well as other countries.

### PEACE PROPOSAL

If we study all of the peace proposals and resolutions of different peace talks/conferences, like G. W. Bush's Road Map for Peace-2002, The Geneva Accord of 2003, The Arab Peace Initiative of 2002/2007, Annapolis Peace Conference of Nov. 2007 and Resident Obama's Middle East Peace Initiative then it becomes easy to understand that the consensus peace proposals are a two-state solution with the borders of 1967 war with

either independent Jerusalem under international control or a divided Jerusalem with East Jerusalem as capital of Palestine and West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, complete withdrawal of Israelis from relinquished territories, the acceptance of refugees' right of return but in limited numbers and the settlement of remaining refugees in host countries along with compensation to both the host states and the settlers, international securities for the safety of the Jewish state, international measures for Palestine's economic survival, and one-one-one meetings between the state heads of Palestine and Israel to settle other minor issues regarding, water, resources, prisoners and the access of the people of either community to visit their respective holy places.