Conclusion
CHAPTER- VI

CONCLUSION

The Arab-Israeli conflict over Palestine originated as a clash of ideologies. It began at the end of the nineteenth century as a struggle between two national movements, the Zionist and the Palestinian, over the same bit of land. Zionism, the dream of Jews to return to their ancient homeland, spawned waves of migration of European Jews to Palestine before World War I. Arab nationalism, by contrast, infused the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine with a burning desire to achieve political independence from foreign rule. Britain took responsibility for governing Palestine after World War I. During the British Mandate, Zionists and Arab nationalists clashed, with intensifying violence, for control of Palestine. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a direct outgrowth of the World War II and the Holocaust, of which the Jews were victims. The Palestinians Diaspora is a direct result of the creation of the State of Israel.

Palestinians strongly refuted the idea that Palestine was ‘a land without people for the people without a land’ as the Zionist slogan proclaimed. Jewish interpretation portrays Zionism as an attempt to ensure the return of Jews to the land of Israel (Eretz- Israel), which God promised to Abraham and his seed. But the problem Zionist faced in Palestine was that it was an inhabited country at the time of Basle programme in 1897.

During the 1947-48 War and the Arab-Israeli hostilities of 1948, Palestine was politically transformed into Israel. The subsequent armistice agreements failed to solve the Arab-Israeli problem. The root cause of the Palestinians’ disadvantage lies in two political decisions made in Europe. First was in 1897 by the World Zionist Organisation, which resolved to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. Second was the Balfour Declaration, which undermined the right of the indigenous Palestinian population. The fundamental nature of Israeli-Palestinian conflict has changed in very little over the years, yet has been powerfully affected by trends in international politics. As a matter of fact it is among the most longstanding and intractable conflict of the contemporary era.

The issues surrounding the question of Palestinian people became obscured in the Arab-Israeli conflict with the creation of Israel. It seemed US policy consciously ignored the political dimension of the Palestinians’ right to self determination and
independence in the post 1948 period. The United States foreign policy towards Palestine until recently have treated the Palestinians as one of the problems to be solved in ending the Arab-Israeli dispute rather than as participants in the peace process. When the PLO was created in 1964 the US did not pay much attention. Palestine and Palestinians emerged as the centre of the conflict after 1969 when Yasser Arafat and his Fatah organisation assumed control over the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

6.1. United States Mediation Predicament

America continued to support the existence of Israel and its security. The US diplomacy has become the motor behind nearly all efforts to reach Arab-Israeli peace after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. The defeat of Arab states in the war, made the Palestinians realise they had to carry on the struggle on their own. Meanwhile, US government pledged not to recognise or negotiate with the PLO until the organisation officially accepted UN Resolution 242.

President Jimmy Carter shifted the terrorist-refugee perception of the Palestinians when he acknowledged publicly the legitimate rights of the Palestinians and supported their participation in any deliberations about their future. In a speech on 4 January 1978, he said that they deserved a homeland. Anwar Sadat, President of Egypt, came forward to establish diplomatic relationships with Israel through American good offices which he thought would offer enhanced security as well as return of the lost territories. His option for peace with Israel under US mediation led to the signing of the Camp David Accords in September 1978.

The Camp David Accords were more of a tripartite military pact than a true peace agreement. This marked the beginning of a succession of bilateral arrangements resulting maximum American influence in West Asia region. The United States changed its policy toward the PLO in 1988 after the later had expressed its willingness to accept a small Palestinian state living in peace alongside Israel and made it official in 1988. The Madrid Conference in 1991 was set up to conduct within a bilateral format designed to keep Israelis and Palestinians separated by an American chaperon yet, the US continued to reject calls for international conference under UN auspices.

The US went as far as excluding the PLO from the talks, allowing for Palestinian participation only on the grounds that they came as part of the Jordanian
delegation, that they had no direct affiliation with the PLO, and that their representatives were not from the Palestinian diaspora (meaning many of the community's most powerful and wealthy members were excluded, not to mention Arab-American lobbyists) or even from the Palestinian capital of Jerusalem (meaning local Palestinian politicos).

Progress was made on the Israeli Palestinian track only when Israel and the PLO did an end-run around the restrictive US formula and met secretly in a third country, talks which resulted in the Oslo Accords. The Oslo Accord on 13 September 1993 was the first Arab-Israeli agreement since 1967 to be negotiated without significant involvement by the United States.

The Oslo, unlike Camp David 1978, was not an American-designed agreement; and therefore parties had less reason to turn to Washington when disputes arose. Palestinians entered the peace process on the understanding that (1) it would deliver concrete improvement to their lives during the interim period, (2) that the interim period would be relatively short in duration - i.e., five years, and (3) that a permanent agreement would implement United Nations Resolutions 242 and 338. But the peace process delivered none of these things. Instead, Palestinians suffered more burdensome restrictions on their movement and a serious decline in their economic situation.

6.1.2. West Asian Oil Interest

The protection of West Asian oil from internal or external hostile control has been one of the primary US foreign policy determinants towards the region. Securing the flow of the region's oil to the world economy has always been a central priority. American interest in this region has primarily been to ensure continued freedom of access to the regions' oil supplies. And the US government had utilised every means at its disposal to make certain that the property and the right of access of the Americans are fully protected. The US has been increasingly becoming more reliant on imports of oil, (although its percentage of dependence on oil from West Asia remains much lower than that of Japan or Europe.) The US interests revolved around the economic resources of the region, in view of the fact that over 60 percent of the global oil reserves are located in the gulf regions.

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6.1.3. Clinton Diplomacy and its Setbacks

President Bill Clinton came to office with a promising set of circumstances for promoting peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours. The long-awaited breakthrough seemed to have occurred, and to have done so without any American involvement whatever. For about a year, the Madrid conference went on without progress on any significant issue. The proceedings of the principal business (the bilateral talks) were moved to Washington, but in the bilateral setting it became clear that the Jordanians and Palestinians were really two distinct groups with distinct issues to pursue.

Clinton’s role at Camp David was unmistakable and both negotiating parties seemed to have a degree of confidence in him. Clinton avoided taking stand on many of the most controversial issues such as refugees, borders, and security, urging the parties to strike a deal between themselves. The unequivocal Palestinian rejection of the American proposals at Camp David in July 2000 upset Clinton’s calculations. Clinton realised the assessments presented by his aides had nothing to do with the reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The positions of the Israelis and the Palestinians on the key issues reflected wide differences. Though President Clinton listened with great attention and understanding to the Palestinian viewpoints, he was restrained by America’s known foreign policy stance of supporting Israel.

Although they were unable to resolve crucial differences the negotiations were unprecedented both in scope and detail. America’s offer of financial aid package for the Palestinians upon the signing of an agreement failed to convince and conciliate the Palestinians to the above mentioned suggestions. The Camp David summit showed clearly that the peace envisioned by Palestinians was not the peace Israel was prepared to offer.

Nevertheless, Camp David provided the Palestinians an opportunity to present their version and positions directly to the American President whereby, the US understood the limits of the Palestinian position. Israel began seriously considering compromises on the issue of Jerusalem and was prepared to agree on withdrawing from over 90 percent of the occupied territories. Despite the failure of the summit, Camp David certainly transformed the character of the peace process. It created a favourable environment where each side for the first time got a glimpse of the other’s bottom line.
Clinton offered his proposals to Israeli and Palestinian negotiators at a meeting in the White House on 23 December 2000. His plan addressed the most contentious issues such as; Palestinian refugees, Jerusalem, security, and end of the conflict. But it failed to satisfy the conditions required for a permanent peace. The proposals remained silent on certain issues that are essential for establishment of a lasting and comprehensive peace such as the future relationship between the two parties and future economic relations.

Clinton could not do much in bringing the conflicting parties together for a comprehensive final status agreement. He hardly had three weeks from leaving his office when he met Arafat in January 2001. As a result, sufficient progress was not made in the peacemaking. Pressure from the US Congress was a problem for him. The Republicans controlled both houses, and pro-Israeli resolutions regularly commanded near unanimous support in the Senate and the House of Representatives. President Clinton had his own calculations and restraints: America’s known foreign policy stance on supporting Israel. Corporate interests and personal political agendas not real intentions for peace seemed to have ruled the day throughout the Clinton Administration's attempts to broker peace. It was this critical structural flaw that led to so many crucial failures in the pursuit of West Asia peace.

Clinton peace effort was thwarted by the untoward violence that erupted in the late September 2000, which unravelled much of what had been achieved in the previous years. Although Clinton declared that he was committed to reaching an agreement between Barak and Arafat in the waning days of his administration, neither Barak nor Arafat was prepared or able to end the crisis on mutually acceptable terms. Consequently, Clinton’s credibility as a mediator was not sufficient to bridge the differences.

Though the US remained adamant from 1972 onwards in its opposition to Palestinian statehood, the Clinton administration was the first in US history to see the West Bank and Gaza as disputed territories, insinuating that the Israelis and Palestinians had equal claim to the land.

6.1.4. George Bush Peacemaking Dilemma
George W. Bush and his team did their utmost to disown Clinton’s legacy. The new administration made it clear that it had no intention to becoming immersed in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remained peripheral for the
Bush administration, as the war in Iraq constantly persisted to be its foremost concern in West Asia. The legitimacy of Palestinian concern and the Palestinian perspective on the conflict had a very insignificant place in Bush’s vision of peaceful settlement to the problem. The clear implication of his approach with regard to Israel-Palestinian conflict was: to calm the situation; pressurise the Palestinian Authority to undertake reforms and halt violence. He demanded from the Palestinians to change their leadership, reform their institutions and ‘fight terror’ before they could even come to the table.

Bush administration’s approach towards the conflict had been largely influenced by certain factors; for instance Bush’s apparent personal rapport with Ariel Sharon—the administration’s concession to Sharon on almost all the major peace initiatives. Strong domestic political pressures influenced him by the so-called neoconservatives who were a highly ideological group of pro-Israeli policy analysts. Bush administration assumed that:

1. Firstly, Clinton administration had excessively involved in wanting peace more than the parties;
2. Secondly, Yasser Arafat was pampered too much;
3. Thirdly; the newly elected Ariel Sharon-led government in Israel meant little would be possible diplomatically;
4. Fourthly, the American interests in the region were threatened much more by Iraq than by ongoing Israeli-Palestinian troubles.

The Bush administration assumed that ‘nothing could be accomplished to end the conflict and therefore the United States should make no effort.’ Having considered these hypotheses and the hesitancy to get involved, the Bush administration missed opportunities for containing the intifada and restoring a peacemaking path. Before 11 September, the policy of Bush administration towards the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation consisted of minimal American involvement: Contain the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation so as to keep it from spilling over at the regional level and negatively affecting American policy toward Iraq.

6.1.5. Policy Paradigm Shift since 9/11

The 9/11 attacks and the subsequent US war on terror caused a significant shift in the US foreign policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Washington reshaped its strategic policy towards war on terror, which had far-reaching consequences on the
international politics, especially in the West Asian region. Since 9/11 the Israeli law-enforcement authorities worked closely with their American counterparts to track and tackle West Asian terrorism and continued to play significant role in containing radicals, be it Islamic or secular. The events of 9/11 altered US perception regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

1) The US reviewed its relation with Arab regimes as well as its approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

2) Arafat was seen as part of the problem. It demanded the PNA to dismantle terrorist infrastructures and threatened to cut off aid to the Palestinians.

3) Strategic policy towards war on terror became the prime focus in US approach toward West Asia. It designated the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine as "Foreign Terrorist Organisations."

4) US incorporated in its defence posture the principle of pre-emption, as the most appropriate tactic in the war against the hidden world of terrorism.

The US tends to stipulate a policy statement based on 'overwhelming power should be used against either tyrants or terrorist organisations worldwide.' It abandoned or Downgraded traditional tools of diplomacy but concentrated on the strategy of military pre-emption as the means of establishing a peaceful, democratic, and durable world order. Its national interest in the region is perceived to be best served by replacing Islamist expansionism with the promotion of liberal democratisation across the region- even if this means direct military intervention to achieve regime change and impose democracy from above. Successive US administrations tried to remain an active partner in the Arab-Israeli peace process to make existence of Israel acceptable to Arab governments. But of late, peace process has been used as a method to deter anti-US terrorism.

The September 11 attacks placed the US in a sticky situation: Bush's "war on terror" required at least tacit support from the Arab and Muslim states, but these states, viewed Israeli actions against the Palestinians as state terrorism. They were reluctant to legitimise the US military action against Bin Laden and Taliban unless the US made efforts to restrain Israel. Since 9/11 the administration has hesitatingly adopted a seemingly contradictory West Asia policy. In order to set up a global anti-terrorist coalition, it worked hard to win support from the Islamic world and simultaneously exerted pressure on Israel to restrain itself while dealing with
Palestinian resistance forces. Thus even after the 9/11, the US continued to take action on the Israeli-Palestinian situation only when necessary to protect other policy goals.

Bush outlined his policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on 24 June 2002. The policy statement includes: Two states, living side-by-side, in peace and security and with the provisional Palestinian statehood based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338. However the speech offered no guidelines for achieving the aims set forth, but Bush said that the final status agreement could be reached in three years. There was considerable scepticism on the dubious concepts of “provisional statehood” and “how the Palestinians could be expected to carry out elections or reform themselves while in a total lockdown by the Israeli military.”

Palestinian reform was not achievable unless the Israelis would relax their hold on the territories so that reformers could move, meet and plan. Despite the reshuffle of the Palestinian Cabinet, Arafat remained under pressure from Europe and the US to carry out wide-ranging ‘reform’ of his government. The Quartet decided to adopt the Bush vision as the basis for a phased programme to stop the cycle of violence and terror and settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by peaceful means and thus launched its roadmap for peace.

The roadmap for the first time had included a global commitment that had a genuine third-party participation to provide verification and accountability. However, the roadmap, practically speaking, had been dead since the Israeli government posed its fourteen-point reservations, of which the US administration had accepted twelve. ‘Sharon plan’ made the death of the roadmap evident- there would be no negotiations with Palestinians unless there was a change in leadership. Both Israel and the PA had failed to implement their roadmap requirements in order to avoid embarrassment. Bush’s endorsement of Sharon’s unilateral disengagement plan marked a major shift from traditional US policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It reflected a dramatic departure from the formal policy positions of all previous administrations and from the UN Resolution 242.

The Bush administration believed America’s efforts in West Asia should be invested in the region’s eastern border, where the job begun in Iraq in 1990 had yet to be completed. Iraq and Iran, they felt, should be denied access to weapons of mass destruction. This was a goal that could most likely not be reached without regime change in both countries. The administration directive was issued by Secretary of State Colin Powell to his subordinates that they were no longer to use the term “peace
process”- a term that was particularly current in the vocabulary of the Clinton administration. The post of ‘Special Middle East Coordinator’ was abolished, the term “peace process” was discarded, and the conduct of the State Department’s West Asia policy shifted back to the ‘Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs’.  

Some of the factors that were responsible for the failure in the US peacemaking efforts during George W. Bush’s administration could be outlined as:

1) The administration’s fixation on Arafat and its obsession with terrorism blinded it from the outset to the true root of the conflict.

2) There were strong domestic political pressures on him, specially the influence put by the highly ideological group of pro-Israeli policy analysts.

3) President Bush and his policymaking team have been almost totally uninterested in any serious effort to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

4) Bush undermined the negotiating power of the Palestinians.

Bush and his team failed to foresee that peace plans selectively implemented could not possibly bring real peace between Palestinians and Israel. The above argument suggests that the US during the Bush administration had fundamentally undermined the negotiating power of the Palestinians, who were not even consulted, while formally stating its sympathy for Israeli claims. The Bush administration adjusted its policy according to foreign and domestic pressures by increasing criticism of Israel and giving some consideration to Palestinian demands whenever the international community grew too critical. But whenever the Congress and the American Jewish community declared that the administration was going too far in support of Arafat, the administration moved the opposite direction.

6.1.6. Domestic Political Concerns versus Peace
Domestic political concerns of the PLO, the US and Israel override the goal of a lasting peace. Domestic political setting in the US and Israel constrained both Clinton and Barak to convene a hurried Camp David II Summit. US exercised its role according to the needs, requirement, and immediate Israeli government domestic political concerns. Members of the Palestinian delegation were constantly irritated

with Barak's coalition problems. The Palestinian delegates questioned whether the summit was to salvage the peace process or to rescue Barak's government.

For the timing and context of the affair, the internal Israeli political situation had to be considered. Most of the coalition parties had resigned from the Labour Party Government and put Prime Minister Ehud Barak in an intolerable predicament. His domestic problems were aggravated by the failure of Camp David. Meanwhile, Sharon's position as head of the Likud Party was being challenged by Benjamin Netanyahu, who hoped to seize the party reins for a second time. Sharon used every available platform to portray his party as a true alternative to Labour and his personal endowment for head of state as superior to any other candidates.

On the other hand, the internal power struggle within the Palestinian political structures such as the insider versus outsider political divides were often articulated with aggressive attacks directed against the Israelis in the form of suicide bombings. Palestinian political fracture had been characterised in part by the virtual loss of the PA as a political institution or governing authority capable to care or protect its population against abuse. The PA constantly failed to defend its people against the most damaging politics of the occupation regime and sometimes collaborated with it. The Palestinian regime became synonymous with corruption and tyranny, sacrificing Palestinian national goals.

Palestinian National Authority became known for authoritarianism, centralisation, personalism, neo-patrimony, violence, lack of rule of law and arbitrariness in decision-making. Fatah activists thus entered the scene from this angle, i.e., challenging the Authority's credibility as a revolutionary force. Internal Israeli political situation had aggravated the immediate cause of the intifada. Palestinians feared that internal struggle would degenerate into bloody civil war.

6.2. Extremist Elements Thwart the Peace Process
The existence of extremist elements among Israelis and the Palestinians thwarted the peace process and that created potential constraints to a peaceful settlement. The strategy of suicide bombing used by the Palestinian organisations had a considerable influence on the political process. The US mediation attempts had been overshadowed by the escalating violence between the two. Anthony Zinni realised that there was no point in continuing his efforts to broker a ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinians.
1) Hamas was successful in significantly damaging the Oslo Accords.

2) Fatah's use of suicide bombing during the time of the al-Aqsa intifada was the last nail in the coffin of the Oslo Accords.

3) Assassination of Rabin in November 1995 by Yigal Amir an Israeli right-wing religious fanatic severely damaged the hope for further steps towards peace following the Oslo Accords.

4) Kach and Kahane Chai members protested- threatening violence at the announcement of Ariel Sharon's plan to disengage Gaza settlements. The State Department lists Kach and Kahane Chai as foreign terrorist organisations.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad declared that they would oppose further talks with Abbas until he withdrew his statements acknowledging Jewish suffering throughout history. In Aqaba summit Mahmud Abbas promised to end terrorism and the armed intifada and acknowledged Jewish suffering throughout history, Palestinians across political spectrum denounced Abbas for acknowledging Jewish sufferings without a parallel mention of Palestinian sufferings.

6.2.1. Al-Aqsa Intensified the Conflict

The conflict had arisen to a new level of bloodshed and destruction in the form of the al-Aqsa intifada. Since the outbreak of the al-Aqsa intifada on 29 September 2000, Israeli Defence Forces and the Palestinians have been engaged in a violent confrontation. The peace talks stalled at Camp David II in July 2000, and remain suspended since the Palestinian uprising began in September. Palestinians demonstrated their frustration at the lack of progress in the peace process and their failure to achieve statehood. Despite various allegations, the al-Aqsa intifada was not planned or shaped as part of the policy of one side or the other.

1) Fatah's suicide tactic was not a vehicle used to promote strategic or political interests but rather a necessary means of political survival. Although the uprising was directed primarily at Israel, it was also directed against the Fatah dominated Palestinian Authority and its failure to establish a viable state institution engaged in a process of national reform and reconstruction and democratic practice
2) Suicide bombing forced Israel to pull out of Palestinian territories that were not part of the peace agreements and without requiring the Palestinians to yield to any of its (Israeli) original demands.

3) Threat perception of Israel intensified drastically. Consequently, it adopted deliberate and coercive counter measures to curb Palestinian militancy.

4) IDF inflicted severe damage on Palestinian governmental and civilian infrastructures but far worse was the damage done to the idea of a “partner”.

5) The US consequent launch of its ‘war on terror’ appeared to encourage Israel to step up the Israeli army assaults on PA targets and ultimately reoccupied six major Palestinian cities.

The al-Aqsa intifada was a reaction to Israeli and the US attempt to impose unacceptable permanent-status settlement on the Palestinians and force them to concede on two major issues: Jerusalem (including control of Haram al Sharif) and the refugee problem. Furthermore, the failure of Bush administration in solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through its peace plans led to more violence. The resumption of violent conflict brought the most fragile peace related activities to a virtual standstill. The demise of the Oslo process was seen as the failure of the peace movement in its entirety. The occupation of Palestinian territories, with its settlement construction and colonial policing, undermined not only the future Palestinian state but also Israel’s democratic ideals.

Israel claimed that Arafat instructed the dominant Palestinian political faction, Fatah, to incite the Palestinian public to demonstrate and throw stones at soldiers. But Fatah's ability to mobilise the Palestinian street was circumscribed by widespread disillusionment with the PA and a more general political apathy. No less importantly, there was nothing Yasser Arafat could have said or done to incite Palestinians more than Israel and its actions.

Arafat’s own loyalists from the more secular minded ‘Fatah-affiliated Tanzim’, formed into smaller cells of the ‘al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades’ and entered into a deadly competition. Arafat apparently knew that he was already dead in Israeli eyes as far as ever being a partner in ‘peace again’ was concerned, and that nothing he could do would resurrect his credibility. The almost bigger than life symbol of Palestinian struggle had met his match in Sharon. Lack of faith in any Palestinian partnership drove Sharon’s decision to disengage from Gaza unilaterally, without any coordination’s with the Palestinians.
6.2.2. The Peace Process Impasse

When Sharon came to power, he took a hard-line attitude toward Palestine, causing Israeli-Palestinian conflict to be more intensified. His visit to the Temple Mount sparked the outbreak of the al-Aqsa intifada. In January 2003, despite continuing violent confrontations with the Palestinians and a lingering economic crisis, Sharon was re-elected by a huge majority, owing largely to two perceptions held by the Israeli public; that Arafat was not a credible partner for a political settlement, and that Sharon was unusually successful in managing what was seen as Israel's most important relationship with the United States. Despite, the man who for many years had been perceived as a fighter, advocate of radical change and power-oriented thinking was able to transform himself into the patriarch of Israeli politics. He maintained a close and effective relationship with Bush administration.

The situation undoubtedly hardened positions on both sides, with extremists in both Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories claiming all of historic Palestine. Nevertheless, there was no evidence that the PA or the majority of Palestinians abandoned the two-state solution. The two-state solution however is most seriously threatened by the on-going construction of Israeli colonies and by-pass roads aimed at incorporating the Occupied Palestinian Territories into Israel. Without a halt to such construction, a two-state solution may simply be impossible to implement.

The international consensus for peace in West Asia has involved the withdrawal of Israeli forces to internationally recognised (pre-June 1967) boundaries in return for security guarantees from Israel's neighbours, the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, a shared Jerusalem as the co-capital of both states, and a just resolution for the Palestinian refugees. The United States however, rejected the international consensus for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel on the basis of the the UN Security Council resolution, reflecting the international consensus which had the support of the entire international community including most Arab states and the Palestinians. It was put up for a vote as far back as 1976, but was opposed by Israel and was vetoed by the United States.

This strident opposition to Palestinian statehood finally shifted when President Clinton toward the end of his presidency and President Bush in a more direct way in 2001, declared that the United States would support a Palestinian state in parts of West Bank and Gaza Strip. However, both administrations made it clear that the US
would not support anything beyond the very limited sovereignty and severely circumscribed boundaries that the Israeli occupiers were willing to offer.

The American factor in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could be outlined as:

1) The Jewish people today are predominantly an American people in the sense that there are many more Jews than any other nationality in the US than in Israel itself.

2) American Jewish establishment taps the extra-ordinary energy and unfailing generosity of its members for the causes of Zionism and Israel.

3) Popular American notions that Israel is a pioneering society much like America, and a tiny democratic struggling country is the only friend the US has in West Asia, threatened by the fanaticism of terrorism.

4) The Jewish lobby contributes substantially to the existence of a special relationship between America and Israel.

The impact of all this over the decades is most noticeable in Congress which has become very responsive to pro-Israel activism. The US continued to find strategic relevance of Israel after the disintegration of Soviet Union and end of the Cold War. Various US administrations have been compelled to intervene in the region in the name of protection of the values of freedom, independence, and democracy and to stop terrorism threatening the security of the global order. Israel’s military and intelligence capabilities and strategic location contributed to the US objective of containing Soviet expansion into the region. But friendly US-Israeli ties did not advance other US interests in West Asia.

As US relations with Arab nations improved, the United States attempted to balance its stated commitment to Israel with other regional commitments and interests. Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, according to a survey conducted among Jewish people in November 2001, 85 percent of Jews in America supported Palestinian statehood and believed that resolving Israeli-Palestinian conflict would help America to win support around the world in its anti-terrorist War. Three quarters of the Jews surveyed believed that America should play a positive role in the West Asian peace process even if it disagreed with Israelis.²

In recent years, the situation of the Arabs in Israel has improved in every way with respect to standard of living, level of education, and civil rights but they confront discrimination in Israel and considerable gap between them and Jewish Israelis remains. Discrimination continues in the allocation of public resources and social wealth; the State of Israel continues to be Jewish in its foundations and its agenda; and the Arabs do not enjoy collective rights as a national minority. Relations between Jews and Palestinians in Israel have not been the same since the al-Aqsa intifada. The fracture would not be mended without a security guarantee to the Israelis and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Obviously, there could be no comprehensive solution to the Palestinian Israeli conflict without resolving one of its key components: the plight of the Palestinian refugees.

6.2.3. The End of an Era

Yasser Arafat’s death in November 2004, following a rapid deterioration in his health marked the end of an era. For the Palestinians, he was an icon who succeeded in gaining international recognition their national aspirations. For Israelis, he was a terrorist who was not prepared to end the conflict and truly accept coexistence with the Jewish States. Arafat was the symbol of the cause, both a father figure and the only genuine authority among Palestinians. His death created both psychological and practical uncertainties. As most Palestinians feared, the void would give rise to a violent power struggle; Hamas came into power over throwing the Palestinian government formed by Arafat-led Fatah party in 2006.

Dennis Ross suggested that Post-Arafat Palestinian succession election required an active US effort to be a successful one, “The United States must get back into the diplomatic game.” Bush had said he wanted to invest political capital during his second term to make a Palestinian state a reality. To fulfil this United States should have first recast itself as a bridge between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Arafat’s death offered a potential turning point for both Palestinians and Israelis. But it would have been possible only if the two sides- with the US help reach an understanding. No agreement would be possible without making concession on the existential issues of Jerusalem, borders, and refugees by both sides. The post-Arafat Palestinian leadership failed to show that their government was capable of ending corruption, establishing the rule of law, obtaining freedom of movement.
The international consensus for peace in West Asia has involved the withdrawal of Israeli forces to internationally recognised (pre-June 1967) boundaries in return for security guarantees from Israel’s neighbours. The establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, a shared Jerusalem as the co-capital of both states, and a just resolution for the Palestinian refugees. But the two-state solution however is most seriously threatened by the construction of Israeli settlements and by-pass roads aimed at incorporating the Occupied Palestinian Territories into Israel. Without a halt to such construction, peace became much harder to achieve. President Clinton toward the end of his presidency and President Bush in a more direct way in 2001 declared that the United States would support a Palestinian state in parts of West Bank and Gaza Strip. However, both administrations made clear that the US would not support anything beyond the very limited sovereignty and severely circumscribed boundaries that the Israeli occupiers were willing to offer.

The American factor in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are evident that the popular American notions that Israel is a democratic struggling country and the only US ally in West Asia threatened by the fanaticism of terrorism. The Jewish lobby continues contribute substantially to the existence of a special relationship between America and Israel. The US continued to find strategic relevance of Israel even after the disintegration of Soviet Union and end of the Cold War. The proactive role in the peace process seemed vital for the US strategic interests in the region. Moreover, both the parties expect US to involve and spend enormous resources in the peacemaking. Despite numerous drawbacks, the US active involvement is likely to continue until a permanent peaceful solution is achieved.