CHAPTER - VI

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A fundamental dilemma fuels the impasse between Israelis and Palestinians. To feel adequately reassured, each side wants from the other acceptance of its national identify and explicit recognition of its legitimate rights. But neither side is prepared to offer such acceptance to the other under the present circumstances because of the special type of zero-sum conflict in which they are caught up, a conflict in which acknowledging the other's legitimacy is perceived as compromising one's own legitimacy and in which granting rights to the other is perceived as abdicating one's own right. Not surprisingly, each party suggests that the other must take the first step. Palestinians argue that, "since the Israelis are in a position of advantage vis-a-vis the Palestinians, they must take the initiative in recognizing the Palestinians. They regard it as self-evident that one cannot expect the occupied to recognize the occupier". Israelis, starting with the same premise, draw precisely the opposite conclusion. "Since the Israelis are in a position of advantage vis-à-vis the Palestinians, the Palestinians must make the first move in recognising Israel". Both sides are aware of the enormous obstacles within their own communities that impede recognition of the other, but they tend to underestimate the equally great obstacles faced by the other.

From the day of its rebirth as a state in 1948 Israel had to struggle for acceptance. The Arab world refused to recognize the state or even, for a long time, to call it by its name. Anwar Sadat's visit in 1977 meant so much to Israelis because it represented acceptance. Then in 1993, the Oslo Agreement brought recognition of Israel's legitimacy by the Palestine Liberation Organization.
Palestinian negotiations at Oslo assumed that Israel would gradually abandon the settlements, and withdraw to something like its pre 1967 borders. But Oslo left those steps to further negotiation, and they did not happen. The settlement process continued unchecked after Oslo.\textsuperscript{1} It was Oslo's ambiguity and lack of substance that helped to cause the present disenchantment. It is true that the process is not well, and it may continue to suffer periodic setbacks, punctuated by more intense violence, or else languish in a state of suspended animation, but it is doomed to survive for the very reason, that there is no alternative.

It was conceived as an open-ended, multi-stage process - an experiment in each stage would determine behaviour in the next stage. It may well have been preferable to begin with a common view of permanent status and then work backward - as with Egyptian-Israeli peace process. But the political judgement was that what had to be done could not then be done, and the underlying assumption - or hope was that Oslo would usher in a process of confidence building that would eventually make possible what was politically impossible then. But instead of confidence building, there has been confidence destruction. Nevertheless, when all the other alternatives have been exhausted and the price has been paid, the parties will have no choice but to turn to original logic of Oslo.\textsuperscript{2}

After some protracted paralysis in the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, the signing of Wye Memorandum in Washington on 23\textsuperscript{rd} October 1998 injected hope among Palestinians and brought expectations of future progress. But such hopes and expectations, however, were short lived. The months preceding the agreement witnessed serious deterioration in Palestinian public support for the peace process and affirmed doubts about the pit falls of national reconstruction.
Support for armed attacks against Israelis, which had dropped in early 1996 to about twenty percent, began to rise gradually, reaching over fifty percent in October 1998. In the same month, about two-thirds did not believe the Palestinians and Israelis would be able to reach agreement on final status negotiations.

However, the collapse of the Camp David summit and the Palestinians' faith in a negotiated solution rapidly disintegrated and was replaced by a conviction that they should not lay down their arms until Israel agreed to end its occupation and withdrawn from the land occupied since 1967.

Israel, for its part, doubts Palestinians will ever agree to disarm and give up terrorism for a peace agreement to end the historical conflict. Hence, the fundamental obstacles to peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could be viewed from, the emergence of the state of Israel in 1948, that resulted in the seizure of the Arab's territories in the 1948 and 1967 wars, the forcible displacement of its inhabitants, the status of East Jerusalem, Refugees, etc. Some other obstacles are: water problem, democracy, suicide bombing, etc. The major obstacles to the peace process have been analysed in detail in the following sections.

1. **The Issue of Jerusalem**

   Jerusalem is one of the great symbolic issues in the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Muslims everywhere are opposed to Jerusalem being declared the Israeli capital. Religious sentiment is heightened by the Israeli action, and it gives the dispute a peculiarly religious character. In part the Muslims claim that their shrines are desecrated by Israeli action. Moreover, they argue that the Israeli
intention is to convert the city into a wholly Jewish entity. The Israelis are said to have attacked Islam itself.

On the Israeli side there is a totally different presentation. Jerusalem they insist is the city of the Jews the focal point for Judaism and the only capital of Israel. It is also noted that during the Jordanian occupation of East Jerusalem, Jews were not permitted to workshop at their holy sites. The Wailing Wall was off limits to Jews, and not maintained by the Jordanian authority. Under Israeli sovereignty, Muslims and Christians are free to workshop at their shrines. The Israelis assert that they are in a better position to provide equal access. However, Jerusalem was supposed to be declared an international city, under permanent trusteeship by the United Nations, according to the 1947 U.N. Resolution that called for the partition of the British Palestine mandate into Jewish and Arab States.

Hence, Jerusalem presents special problems in this regard, quite apart from religious concerns and the ideological attachments and claims of both sides. Free access for Jews, Muslims and Christians to their holy sites in Jerusalem is a requirement for the whole international community. The Israelis reject partitioning the city, but denying Palestinian demand for a capital there will block the peace process.

When crown Prince Abdullah came out with his peace plan for the West Asia, he however, over - emphasized on the need for Israel to withdraw from all the seized territories including Jerusalem and his statement of vision was rejected out right by the Israeli government. The Palestinians inside and outside East Jerusalem cannot be cut off from each other. How the issue of Jerusalem is resolved will be critical in shaping the reactions of Arab and Muslim Governments.
2. The Issue of West Bank and Gaza Strip

The current map of the West Bank is an aberration. With respect to the Israeli-Palestinian track, a majority of the Israeli public is apparently reconciled to the prospect of a Palestinian state in the Gaza Strip and a sizeable proportion of the West Bank. The Palestinians either fully control some slices of territory or administrative authority while Israel keeps security control. The Palestinians currently control fully or partially, some 40 percent of the West Bank. This is, however, subject to Israeli's choice.³

Every Israeli leadership, especially - Sharon has always fought the Palestinian vision of a viable state. He played a leading role in the creation of the settlements and he opposed the Oslo Agreement. Uri Avineri, a pro-peace Israeli who over the years has written three biographical essays about Sharon, two with his co-operation, wrote this January 2002, that chorine's "minimum" aim now was "to imprison the Palestinians in several enclaves, each one surrounded by settlements, by pass roads and the army. In these big prison camps, the Palestinians will be allowed to image their own affairs, supplying cheap labour and a captive market. He does not care if they are called "a Palestinian state". Sharon's minimum aim, Avineri said, was "to exploit a war situation or a world crisis to expel all Palestinians, including those who are Israeli citizens, from the country".

It must be borne in mind, therefore, that Arab villages are over - loaded by settlements, some are split in half by roads. In Hebron and East Jerusalem, Israelis have settled themselves at the centre of Arab living areas. But given the profusion of settlements across the West Bank, drawing borders that produce a continuous territory for the Palestinians, while minimising the number of
settlements to be evacuated, isolated or abandoned to Palestinians rule, presents a security nightmare for Israelis and Palestinians. As it is, the Palestinian negotiating position is to hold out for a state in all of the West Bank and Gaza as a compromise on historical claim.

Interestingly enough, there have been four wars still going on since the birth of Israel in 1948. The first is a Palestinian war to destroy the state of Israel and the second, being a Palestinian war to create an independent state along side Israel, ending the occupation of West Bank and Gaza, etc. however, the war has to be defeated or definitively renounced. Hence, winning the second war, which is a war of independence, depends on losing or renouncing the first war, which is meant to destroy the state of Israel.

In essence, the establishment of Israeli settlements in the West Bank territory is aimed at providing Jerusalem, Israeli capital, with a defense in depth. Returning of the West Bank to Jordanian sovereignty, or the creation of a Palestine state on the West Bank would place Jerusalem in a precarious position. Nor would Arabs be continued with a west state that did not, at the very least, also involve the transfer of East Jerusalem to Arab control.

3. The Issue of Refugees

The Palestinian refugees can be described as the entire body of Palestinians who vacated land and homes now in or controlled by state of Israel. Therefore, political issues heavily burden the Palestine refugee question. That is to say, that the crux of the Israeli problem, in the Arab eyes, is the fate of the refugees from Palestine. Three million of them are scattered in five Arab countries, living hand-to-mouth lives in squalid surroundings, unwanted, homeless and hopeless.
The U.N. has piously recognised that the refugees should be allowed to return to their homeland but failed to implement its high sounding resolutions on the subject. Israel also resolutely refuses to acknowledge the right of return for Palestinians to Israel itself and wants limitation on those who would be allowed to move to a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. Therefore, this is still a contentions issue in the Arab - Israeli conflict.

4. **The Problem of Golan Heights**

The 1967 June war ended with Israel occupying not only all Palestine but also equally, the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt and the Golan Heights in Syria. The possibility of peace between the Arabs and Israel consequently became more tenuous. However while camp David Accord, on 17th September 1975, between Egypt and Israel saw the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the seized Egyptian territory, and an end to hostilities on Egyptian borders, it is rather unfortunate that achieving peace between Israel and Syria is yet a distant dream because Israel wants a security guarantee from Syria while the later is non committal, and wants the return of Golan Heights first. Hence this has held back any peace treaty on this front.

5. **Thirsty for Water Brooks**

In all this, one fundamental question has barely been touched on in the negotiations for a permanent settlement. This is water, and its vital importance in a parched region. The current distribution of available water is grossly unjust. The Palestinians use per person in towns and for farming is only 30 present of the Israelis. The settlers, profligate with irrigation, consume five or six times as much
per person as their Palestinian neighbours. The Israelis waste water for a lot of their farming. When it comes to drinking water, 37 percent of West Bankers are without piped water, and Gaza’s drink water that is hardly fit for fields. A fair solution would be to bring the quantity and quality of drinking water to the Palestinians up to Israelis standards and then negotiate on irrigation water.

Israelis control the use of all the surface water from Jordan and virtually all the ground water from the aquifers that criss-cross the West Bank. The Palestinians have not as yet seriously challenged this, though it is one of the issues that are disturbing the Palestinian leadership.

6. Lack of Democracy

In fact, the Arab world is not politically homogenous. There are diverse forms of government and social and economic structures. Some Arab countries are small, other is large, some are densely populated, and others have spares populations spread over large terrains. Some are poor, others are among the world’s richest lands, some are traditional monarchies, and others are military or partly dictatorships. Some are mildly authoritarian, others harsh tyrannies.⁴

Thus, the diversity of political systems in Arab states has prevented them from following identical principles when in comes to matters of regional importance, such as Arab - Israeli conflict, conflict amongst Arab States, Iraqi crisis etc. These differences of political systems also engender hostility.

The lack of democracy leaves the field open to the extremists, partially licensed by government authorities. Egypt’s regime is authoritarian, but not
harshly so compared, for instance, with those of Syria, or the dyfunctioned Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein. Still, political party activity is discouraged and extreme Islam is persecuted. As a result mosques are the only places in which people can congregate freely. But they are subject to political indoctrination of one sort or another inside them. However, the Saudi Government itself bases its legitimacy on a strict and puritanical version of Islam, and it has encouraged and supported fundamentalist religious doctrine. Until September 11, 2001 it was one of the few governments that recognized the Taliban.

Therefore in the aftermath of September 11, Arab politics have come under unprecedented scrutiny in the West. As the unremittingly authoritarian nature of Arab regimes have come into ever sharper focus, this lack of democracy is decried as a cause of anti-regime and anti-western violence, at the same time that it is depicted as the only reliable short-term shield against the exact same phenomena. Arab autocracies, it is argued, encourage violence domestically by blocking peaceful change, and export violence by using state-controlled media to deflect demands for accountability with propaganda against the United States, Jews, or the west. The same autocracies, however, must be supported because they are all that blocks the rise to power of even more viciously authoritarian and illiberal groups.

Since the Arab World lacks popular ultra nationalist movements, the most likely candidates for the category of illiberal challengers are Islamic groups or parties, whose presumed commitment to Islamic law-Sharia renders them debatable defenders of democracy at best. The Arab world's democracy deficit has finally captured Washington's attention. The September 11, 2001 attacks put
an end to Washington's long-cherished illusion that the shortage of democracy in the Middle East was not pressing as long as stability was maintained. Now, President Bush has described the promotion of "Freedom" in the Arab World - as a key element of national security strategy.

As a result, on 25th June 2002, Bush marshaled out blueprint for peace in the Middle - East by calling on the Palestinian people to elect new leaders and sought an end to violence against Israel as pre-conditions for U.S support for the creation of a Palestinian state.

"Peace requires a new and different Palestinian leadership so that a Palestinian state can be born. I call on the Palestinian people to elect new leaders, leaders not compromised by terror", Mr. Bush said in his long-awaited speech on a West Asia peace plan. During the cold war, Washington had used the conservative forces in the region against regional radicals and the then Soviet Union and turned a blind eye to the internal political decay within the Arab world. Without a modernisation of the political conditions in Saudi Arabia and other parts of the Arab world, the Bush Administration has argued since September 11, that it is impossible to root out the sources of global terrorism. With or without American pressure, many regimes in the region too have come to recognise the urgency of political reform at home.

Therefore, a reformed and democratic government with new leaders is a prerequisite for U.S support for final status negotiations with Israel and for an independent Palestinian state. If this does not happen it is likely that Arab - Israeli conflict would linger on for want of reform and democratization.
7. **The Problem of Terrorism**

Never in Israel's history, has so much harm been inflicted on so many by so few. Since the onset of the second intifada in late September 2000, dozens of exploding humans - Palestinian H-bombs have rocked the Jewish state and transformed the lives of its people. In 1999, suicide bombings were seen as a gruesome aberration in the Israeli - Palestinian conflict, an expression of religious fanaticism that most Palestinians rejected. Increasingly, Palestinians are coming to see suicide attacks as a strategic weapon, a poor man's "smart bomb" that can miraculously balance Israelis technological powers and conventional military dominance. They appear to have decided that, used systematically in the context of a political struggle, suicide bombings give them something no other weapon could, such as, the ability to cause Israel devastating and unprecedented pain, in order to make Israel to succumb but Israeli leadership have a policy that, they would not under any circumstances, "negotiate under fire, and the Palestinians fear that, absent fire, the Israelis will have no incentive to negotiate".  

The President of the United States in July 2002 was about to propose the creation of a "provisional Palestinian State", when; of course, Palestinian suicide bombers went and slaughtered the Israelis. In fact, the Palestinian dream was drawing closer to its realization, the possibility of a truce between Palestinians and Israelis was in the air, territorial compromise with the Jews, and an elementary respect for their lives and their rights, were looking up, when a bus carrying school children was blown up in Jerusalem by Hamas, and no sooner had this happened than the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade exploded the street corner in Jerusalem last year 2002. However, the Palestinian community is divided, and
there are many decent people who deplore the suicide bombings and aspire to get with a business of self-government. The outcome of this was, therefore, swift and severe as the Israeli incursions into 'Area' A in the wake of the atrocities were justified. The Massacre of the Israelis in Netanya a few months later, made Israel to reoccupy certain areas for security reasons.

Hence, late March 2000, it seemed as if there would be no end to the renewed violence of the 'Al-Aqsa Intifada", which began in September 2000 and was exacerbated by the election of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in February 2001. Palestinian anger at Sharon's election reflects both his anti-Palestinian reputation in general, and his repudiated role in the 1982 Massacre of Palestinian refuges in Lebanon. The offensive against Israel was conducted on two fronts, which had the blessings of the Palestinian Authority and its constituents, as well as action by several well-known groups such as, Hamas, Hizbollah Islamic Jihad etc, operating independently.

But, Sharon and Israeli government believed that Arafat was at least indirectly responsible for their behaviour. Some consideration should be given to the militants within the Fatah faction of Arafat's Palestinian Authority - Fatah Tanzim and the Al-Aqsa martyrs Brigades, a recent militant offshoot of Fatah. These militants have contributed to the increasing violence in Israel and the occupied territories. In the first three months of 2002 alone, members of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed responsibility for multiple attacks that killed more than a dozen Israeli soldiers, destroyed an Israeli tank, and included a suicide bombing on March 9,2002, that killed 11 and wounded 50 people. In any case, by late March, even as U.S envoys attempted to broker a cease-fire and set
the scene for renewed peace talks, tit-for-tat terrorist attacks and heavy handed Israeli retaliation were continuing.

However, after the September 11, 2001, the attacks on high profile U.S targets, combined with the escalating violence in Israel and the occupied territories, indicates an increased willingness by terrorists to inflict mass casualties with weapons of mass destruction (WMD). As for the capability to conduct a mass-casualty WMD attack, it is therefore actively possible that group acting on its own might develop and weaponise sufficient WMD agents. With its pools of technical members, Hamas is probably the most capable of acting independently. At this time, Hamas would probably produce a relatively crude weapon capable of inflicting truly massive numbers of casualties.

If history is any guide, Israel's military campaign to eradicate the phenomenon of suicide bombing is unlikely to succeed. Despite the military frenzy that Israel adopts to deal with the terrorist activities in Israel proper and the occupied territories, suicide bombing goes unabated. On March 5th 2003, at least 10 Israelis were killed and 30 wounded when the powerful bomb blast tore through an Israeli bus in Haifa - Israel, retaliated the next day by striking, killing 11 Palestinians. On March 8th 2003, a Hamas leader was killed in Israeli raid, thereby causing an outcry of vengeance by the Islamic fundamentalist groups. In effect, terrorism and violence, is one of the major obstacles to peace in relation to Arab - Israeli imbroglio.
8. Political Instability in Israel

It is important to know that political instability in Israel since decades now or so, has been one of the several reasons why peace between Israel and Arabs, especially the Palestinian, still remains a mirage. This is precisely because the electoral system in Israel is so intricate as it is ambiguous, that hardly any party wins a clear majority after elections. On the other hand, political parties are so many with the main or major parties being the Labour and Likud parties. Arab political parties in Israel’s politics have got much significance in changing the direction of Israel's democracy. Therefore, coalition governments formed either with one of the major parties or with any party of the same ideology, have been the case in Israel.

In Israel now there is 120-member unicameral parliament - Knesset. The Knesset elections are based on proportional representation system. After every four years elections for the Knesset are to be held for electing its members and for the formation of the government. In 1996, the Knesset passed a law regarding reforms in Israel's electoral system, which came into effect then. One of the reasons for electoral reforms was due to severe problems related with the forming and preserving the coalition governments. The election of Ehud Barak as new Prime Minister of Israel in May 1999 raised hope that Israel under Barak would honour its commitments and pushes the Middle East peace process forward. However, he wanted to delay some elements of the Wye Accord until the two sides negotiate the so-called final status agreement covering the permanent borders and powers of the Palestinian land. On 6th September 1999, Palestinian leader Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Barak signed an accord in the presence
of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and King Abdullah II of Jordan. This accord was a revised version of Wye River Accord Signed in 1998. The accord called for further Israeli troops withdrawal from West Bank and release of hundreds of prisoners in return for Palestinian guarantees of security.

The two sides agreed not to commit unilateral action or take measure, which could change the status of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. They also agreed to resume stalled negotiations on the status of Jerusalem, water rights, refugees, Jewish settlements and final borders. It was agreed that the construction of new port of Gaza will begin on 1st October 1999 and the same day a route will be opened to allow the Palestinians to travel across Israel between the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The two sides agreed to work out a framework agreement outlining the permanent status agreement within a year, i.e. by 13th September 2000.

However, it is unfortunate that all these lofty ideas ended in a fiasco due to political instability in Israel. Since Ehud Barak took over leadership in May 1999, series of uprisings by the Palestinians and some obstacles at home forced him to call for an early election on 16th February 2001, in order to sell his policies vis-à-vis the peace process to his people. But as politically predicted, in a country of political instability, he lost to the hard-liner, Ariel Sharon in the Prime Ministerial election on 16th February 2001 itself. But with the formation of a unity government on 6th March 2001, he, therefore, pledged to restore security in the face of a Palestinian revolt. The formation of a unity government was equally so, a demonstration of a mind change and guts against peaceful settlement of the
conflict. In fact, political trends in Israel are as quite topsy-turvy as they are unpredictable. Yet again, in November 2002, Israel faced another political crisis, this time because of the Labour party's withdrawal of support to the 19 month-old National Unity Government. The Likud Party leader and Prime Minister Aerial Sharon, has called for fresh elections in January 2003, instead of forming another coalition with the help of far-right religious parties who were willing to support this government on the condition that he shun Washington's "Road Map" for West Asia peace and reject the future establishment of Palestinian state. Mr. Sharon termed their demand "political blackmail". He thinks maintaining a special relationship with the US is more important than forging an allegiance with the far-right nationalist parties.\(^9\)

In consequence to Israel's political scenario, on January 28, 2003, Israel went for crucial elections that will have a profound effect on the chances of hammering out a peace deal with the Palestinians in the coming months and years and could influence Israeli disposition towards Iraq.

But with the defeat of Iraq in the just concluded unequal war, and Israeli public demanding political stability, the Labour party and even the smaller Shinui, parties did not support the government in the peace process. With this in mind, Israel would not come out of its political quagmire that had plagued it since its birth.

Thus, the above mentioned stumbling blocks are the reasons why the Arab-Israeli conflict since 1947 has not been settled despite all the concerted efforts by several actors, such as UN, USA, EU, Russia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia
etc. The conflict, in fact, has become a vicious circle that any attempt to a
peaceful settlement to the conflict would be disrupted by yet another obstacle
emanating either from the Israel's colonial mentality and its negative approach
to the resolution of the conflict or from the Palestinian terrorist groups
operating from both inside or outside the Palestinian territories, or as a result of
Palestinian leadership's sense of angst and impatience. In essence, peace
process is always preceded by an upsurge of violence.
END NOTES


