THE PEACE PROCESS IN THE MIDDLE EAST: ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS

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Introduction

In the Autumn of 1987 there was a widespread perception that conflicts in the Near East—both the Israeli-Palestinian and Lebanese conflicts — were becoming less and less relevant, in a certain sense almost marginal to global international politics. The situation changed dramatically with the outbreak of *intifada* in December 1987.[1] The uprising changed the self-awareness of the Palestinians and increased their self-confidence, and forced the Israeli society and political system, the inter-national public opinion and decision makers to put the question of the Occupied Territories at the top of the political agenda. After the outbreak of the *intifada*, and as the weakening Soviet Union retreated from Middle Eastern politics, a sequence of dramatic events affected the region.

From the outbreak of the *intifada* to the Second Gulf War, the peace process, the assassination of Itzhak Rabin, a sequence of dramatic—sometimes tragic—events changed the face of politics and life in this part of the world. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the influence of different elements on the peace process in the Middle East, especially focusing on the Palestinian-Israeli issue. It is clear that several different elements contributed to the unblocking of the stalemate in the Middle East. First, the international system and the changes in its structure that occurred since the end of the 1980s; second, a more restricted "circle" of the "Middle East security complex,"[2] i.e., all the Arab states, Israel and Iran; third, the actors directly involved in the Israeli-Arab peace negotiations which began in Madrid on November 1, 1991; finally, we have the core of the issue, i.e., the Palestinian-Israeli dyad.

The International System and the Middle East

The place of the Middle East in bipolar international politics was quite clear: it represented a pivot between the European front and the Asian area, a region with huge resources whose control was perceived as vital by the United States and other Western powers. This strategic position was obviously dramatically altered by the change in the international system which took place between 1989 and 1991 (i.e., from the collapse of Soviet rule in Eastern Europe to the dissolution of the Soviet Union itself), making it difficult to gain a clear picture of its current position in the inter-national system. Moreover, it is difficult to distinguish between the effects of the "end of the Cold War," those of the crisis and war in the Gulf, and those of the

eventual splitting up of the Soviet Union, closely interrelated events that took place in rapid succession.

A further difficulty is provided by the not easily definable structure of the international system. The hypothesis of unipolarity, which was fashionable during and immediately after the Second Gulf War, has proven to be of limited meaning with the decline of the the United States as an economic power even while remaining the biggest military power. The feared or desired "New World Order" has not emerged, partly because of the unwillingness of the US to use its ground forces in crisis situations, and its unwillingness or inability to undertake the risks which are unavoidable if one wants to lead the governance of the international system.

Rather, transnational interdependence, different forms of power, and complexity in the international system make definitions of power and interest, and consequent forecasts, far less reliable than in the past. One can expect that we will face a combination of the increasing importance of international institutions together with an interaction of balances of different types of power, often split into sub-systems. In this world of differentiated and sometimes fragmented powers, the conflictual heterogeneity of values, i.e., the so-called "clash of civilizations," will make the evaluation and forecast of crises and conflicts even more difficult.

Regionalization of the international system (Buzan, 1994) is a useful hypotehsis here. Fragmentation with respect to the globalization of security structures which characterized the Cold War,[3] is postulated, and the appearance of a "central coalition" of states, formed by the Atlantic Community and Japan, among which there are no threat perceptions. Regional subsystems such as the Middle East are only partially connected to this central region: unlike during the Cold War, the security perceptions of the main actors of the international system do not affect unambiguously the patterns of security and conflict in peripheral subsystems.

The presence of a single "non-ruling" global power has two consequences. First, a *regional* configuration providing stability and security is necessary both for US economic "vital interests" and for traditional US allies (Israel first of all, but also the so-called Arab moderate states). Second, the necessity of steadfast alliances and loyalties is less relevant than in the era of global bipolar rivalry. While the special relationship between the US and Israel continues to be a determinant element in Middle East policy, this factor is nonetheless often overestimated by most Arab analysts.

The decline of the Soviet Union as a global power and its eventual disappearance had a direct impact on the Middle Eastern arena. This process was made clear by the marginal role the Soviet foreign minister Kozyrev played in the Madrid Conference. Actually, Gorbachev had initiated a withdrawal from the Middle East as early as 1987. However, the Soviet leadership tried to maintain a certain degree of influence in the area during the last phases of the Iran-Iraq war. Moreover, during the years 1987-1991, and especially during the Gulf crisis and war, differences and strains could be observed in the Kremlin on the issue of Middle East policy.

The marginalization of the Soviet Union in spite of efforts to influence events, and its de facto withdrawal from the Middle East had—paradoxically—similar consequences for Israel and Syria. On one hand, Syria could no longer enjoy the Soviet umbrella, which had certainly been an important component of the overall deterrent capabilities enjoyed by Damascus: Israeli fear of Soviet countermeasures (Eban, 1994). Moreover, Syria lost not only its "protector," but also

its main supplier of advanced weaponry. On the other hand, Soviet withdrawal and the crushing defeat of Iraq in the 1991 war made a steady "strategic alliance" with Israel more entangling than profitable for the United States. Thus, in some situations (e.g., the whole affair of the loan guarantees), the US could put pressure on Israel without jeopardizing its own interests in the area.

From the regional system perspective, each of the last decades was characterized by well defined ideological trends (and polarizations), corresponding to power confrontations between Middle Eastern states. The 1960s were marked by the so-called "Arab Cold War" between pan-Arabism lead by Nasser on one side, and Arab "moderate" states on the other. The Six-Day War was the first blow to pan-Arabism, and the end of the 1960s and the 1970s saw the rise of radical nationalism (especially Palestinian). At the same time Islamic radicalism was gaining ground, although it became visible to the Western media (and to most Western scholars) only later, after the Iranian revolution and President Sadat's assassination. During the 1980s the polarization in the Arab world was determined by the Iran-Iraq War, (1980-1988) and by the fear of the extension of Shia'i radicalism.[4] The 1990s, after the second Gulf War (January - March 1991), have been marked by a further, and perhaps final, weakening both of pan-Arab ideologies and of state-sponsored nationalism. This failure was made apparent by the inability of the Arab League to find an inter-Arab solution to the crisis, and by the massive and decisive foreign (above all US) military intervention in inter-Arab affairs. Moreover, in the mid-1990s, Islamic radical movements are a transnational factor of instability and a threat to all regimes or elites in the Arab Middle East (with the exception of Sudan and perhaps Libya), but, as yet, they have not consolidated into an ideology motivating the foreign policy of a state or of a group of states.[5] At present, no particular ideology is driving the foreign conduct of Arab states, and decision makers are more inclined towards policies which can be labelled as pragmatic realism or as surrender.

The theory of regionalization has to take into consideration two partially conflicting factors;.[6] on one hand, the fact that local actors are often convinced that the United States is the only significant power in the international arena, and particularly in the Middle East, gives some local reality to the "unipolar momentum"; on the other, the interaction of two kinds of complexities (global and regional) should produce a complexity of a higher degree.

The fragmentation that characterizes the international system affects the Middle East as a region as well. While the partial destruction of the Iraqi military machine in the Second Gulf War brought calm to the Gulf, minor conflicts are not disappearing—from the short civil war in Yemen to the Erithrea-Yemen friction regarding the Hanish Islands, to the Egypt-Sudan crisis. Nevertheless, they do not appear to have the escalatory potential that other conflicts such as Lebanon, the Iran-Iraq war, and the Israeli-Arab conflict, seemed to have in the previous decades. No single issue or even main questions define Middle Eastern politics. The Maghrebi states (and particularly Algeria, which used to play a significant inter-Arab role) are now looking inward because of their domestic problems. This means that the precarious process of integration which should have been institutionalized by means of the Union of the Arab Maghreb is totally stagnating.

In the East, the total isolation of Iraq and the partial isolation of Syria have sidelined two of the most important actors among Arab states. Three points regarding Syria need to be made:

First, during and after the Gulf Crisis and War, the US yielded to Syria virtual protectorate of Lebanon, increasing the international legitimacy of al-Asad's regime and changing the balance in the region. Second, President al-Asad playing the tough in the negotiations with Israel puts him, at least temporarily, outside the game of Middle Eastern diplomacy. Third, many commentators deem that al-Asad's reluctance to sign a peace treaty with Israel stems mainly from internal reasons; the internal harshness of the Syrian regime requires the rationale of the external threat posed by Israel. Another element of uncertainty in the region is the unclear position of Saudi Arabia, beset by domestic problems and decreasing oil revenues. Egypt's opportunities in this environment are certainly increasing. Note, for example, the diplomatic confrontation with Israel concerning the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the mediation in the peace process, and different mediations in Arab world conflicts.

The Israeli-Palestinian peace process is the result of a general weakness and fragmentation of the Arab countries. However, it should not be forgotten that the Arab states had long requested an international conference as a diplomatic means for a comprehensive solution to the conflict. Even though the process itself was half way between a conference and bilateral talks (preferred by Israel), the possibility to have bilateral talks in a more comprehensive framework could not be dismissed. The peace process required the participation all the parties involved. Earlier certain Arab states had tried a separate peace, with differing degrees of success. Two Arab heads of state had tried to deal alone with the Zionist movement and/or the state of Israel, the Emir of Transjordan (later king of Jordan) 'Abdallah, and Egyptian President Anwar as-Sadat, but they paid for it with their lives.[7]

The effects of the change in the international and regional systems on the policies and relevance of the PLO were, at the beginning, devastating. Yasir Arafat needed political support, and this was declining also because of the Soviet-Israeli détente.[8] The pro-Iraqi attitude of the leadership (and of most of the Palestinian public opinion) during the Gulf War seemed to deal the Organization the final blow. However, the effect of the *intifada* on the Palestinian and on the international public opinions were not nullified. On the contrary, they were one reason why the US leadership intended to establish a peace in the area that was acceptable to all the parties. The *intifada* had proved to the Palestinians themselves that it was possible to organize their own society independently and autonomously with respect to the occupation. It has also proved to Israeli public opinion that it was not possible to rule a people against its will, and to the international public opinion and decision makers that the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could not be neglected.

By means of the peace process and of participation in multilateral conferences and summits, Israel is becoming an actor in the Middle Eastern subsystem. Israel's increasing role notwithstanding, Arab acceptance of the Jewish state is based on power and deterrence more than perceived legitimacy: the "Old Middle East" has already disappeared, but the "New Middle East" is not yet discernible.

The Palestinian Arena

Generally speaking, we have factors of continuity and change in the evolution of the Palestinian attitude towards Israel (Gresh, 1988). Continuity is to be found in the increasing focus on Palestinian issues by the PLO, in particular by the Fateh. Radical nationalist groups, with a more or less pronounced "marxist" flavor, have—or at least originally had—a distinct inclination towards pan-Arabism. The mainstream PLO leadership's focus on perceived Palestinian interests has helped it to accept the existence of Israel as a matter of fact. Nevertheless, the recognition of Israel was a stepwise and long process, from the 1970s proposal of a bi-national non-confessional state in Palestine,[9] to the Washington ceremony in September 1993. The stalemate in the Madrid process and the victory of the left-wing coalition in the 1992 Israeli election gave the PLO, at that time in a crisis of legitimacy and in a situation characterized by lack of perspective, a window of opportunity.

Radical critics of the peace process have always stressed the existence of unequal conditions between Israelis and Palestinians negotiators, caused not only by the unfavorable ratio of forces, but also by the pro-Israeli stance of the US. The secular opposition (as opposed to radical Islam) does not openly criticize the process as such: they cannot deny that negotiating is the only possible option. They can only criticize either the method of decision making, or acquiescence in negotiations.

A further problem within the nationalist camp is represented by the revision of the Palestinian National Covenant. In the letter that Arafat wrote before the singing of the Declaration of Principles, he undertook to amend those parts of the Palestinian National Covenant calling for the destruction of the state of Israel, or any reference denying the legitimate right of existence of the Jewish state. The Oslo 2 Agreements confirmed (XXXI, 9) this pledge, and stated a two-months term from the inauguration of the Palestinian National Council. There is no real objection to the change of the Covenant, or to the adoption of a new covenant, because it is universally acknowledged that the text of the Covenant, adopted on May 28, 1964, is by and large outdated. Everybody knows that the declarations adopted by the Palestinian National Council (PNC) in Algiers, on November 15, 1988, which recognized the terms of the UN Resolution 242, implied the recognition of Israel and practically superseded the National Covenant. Thus, the criticism points, as usual, to the lack of democracy and to the fact that the change is not a result of free intra-Palestinian discussion, but the outcome of Israeli and American pressures.

The real alternative to Fateh in Palestine is represented by radical Islamic movements, in particular the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas[10]). The Charter of Hamas says:

> The Islamic Resistance Movement believes that the Land of Palestine is an Islamic *Waqf* upon all Muslim generations till the day of Resurrection. It is not right to give up it or any part of it . . . Any action taken in contradiction to the Islamic *shari'a* concerning Palestine is unacceptable action . . . There is no solution to

> the Palestinian problem except by Jihad. The initiatives, options, and international conferences are a waste of time and a kind of child's play.[11]

This approach derives from the general approach to the dar-al-Islam of radical Islamic groups,[12] and is strengthened by the presence of Jerusalem in Palestine.

Yet, few people really believe that the liberation (seen from an Arab or Islamic perspective) of the whole Palestine, from the river to the sea, is a politically sensible objective. On the one hand Hamas has repeatedly launched terrorist offensives, on the other has put conditions to Israel for a settlement of the conflict.

Terrorist offensives have taken place in waves, marked by periods of truce in between. An exceptionally bloody campaign took place after the Palestinian elections. Some offensives were declared as a retaliation, for example, against the massacre in Hebron or the killing of Yahiya 'Ayyash. As far as "peace initiatives" are concerned, Hamas has offered Israel a cease fire as early as March 23, 1988.[13] Other proposals were put forward in April 1994 (Anon., 1994) and March 1996, after different waves of suicide bombings. The conditions put forth by Hamas can be synthesized as follows:

> (i) Israel should withdraw from all Occupied Territories, including East Jerusalem;
> (ii) The Territories should be placed under neutral control;
> (iii) The Palestinians can choose their representatives without Israeli interference or objections;
> (iv) The representatives have the right to lay down all the issues, without any previously decided limitation.

Note that there is no mention of the PLO or the issue of *shari'a*. Also, neither the agenda nor the conditions are different from those put forward by both the PLO and the national leadership in the West Bank and Gaza. The meaning of this is not clear. Yet, the first aim of Hamas is the disruption of the peace process, at least in the form it has taken in its first phases. Two hypotheses can be put forward. The first is that terrorism and "peace initiatives" are two components of a unique strategy, which aims to force Israel to negotiate with Hamas. If Hamas used terrorism as a means to force Israel to accept the movement as a negotiating partner, it would be a dubious strategy: it is highly improbable that any Israeli government is willing to sit at the negotiating table with the representatives of the organization directly responsible for so many massacres. Moreover, according to a poll in March 1996, only 5.3% of East Jerusalemites supported Hamas' and Jihad's operations, 65% opposed them outright, and 14.7% opposed them, although they understood the motivation. The result is that almost 80% of Palestinians in Jerusalem do not agree with Hamas' strategy.

According to a second—and more realistic—hypothesis, there is a fight within the movement between the "militarist" wing (organized in the 'Azz ad-Din al-Qasim and the Yahiya 'Ayyash brigades), and the political wing, which aims to build a political alternative to Fateh. This hypothesis seems to be supported by the establishment of the Islamic National Salvation Party on March 21, 1996, in Gaza, and by an initiative signed by representatives of Islamist,

Fateh, and nationalist opposition figures, calling for national dialogue, stopping of military activities, and pluralism (Kanaana, 1996). The lack of support for suicide operations and the presumable division within the radical Islamic camp make it clear that the peace process has gained a strong momentum, and that it has introduced irreversible[14] effects both in the Palestinian public opinion and in Palestinian political groups.

The Israeli Arena

If we analyze the ideological roots of the rightist parties and of the parties of the center-left government coalition that initiated the second phase of the peace process (1994-1996), we can see that the differences between the two opposite groups are not only tactical, but derive from their cultural roots, and from the different approaches that socialist Zionism, on the one hand, and revisionist Zionism and later rightist parties, on the other one, have had with respect to interior and foreign policies.[15] "Socialist Zionism" has been directed at the construction of a Jewish democracy and a new Jewish society in the Land of Israel, whereas "revisionist Zionism" and its successors, the rightist parties, have always had as their principal aim the establishment of a state with Jewish majority on both the East and West Banks of the river Jordan, through any means deemed necessary to achieve this purpose. A further position is represented by the religious parties and fundamentalist groups, whose program has nevertheless much in common —at least tactically—with Likud's plans.[16]

There is an evident connection between the issue of an Israeli identity and the political perspectives of the Jewish state in the Middle East. Socialist Zionism, and, even before that, cultural Zionism, always put a strong emphasis on moral values underlying the history of the Jewish people and Zionism itself. Ahad Ha-Am wrote in the year 1897: "We are driven to the conclusion that the real and only basis of Zionism is to be found in another problem, the spiritual one. . . . The secret of our people's persistence is . . . that at a very early period the Prophets taught it to respect only the power of the spirit and not to worship material power."[17] Starting from these premises, political objectives cannot be pursued at any cost, without caring about the morality of the means. Ahad Ha-Am was certainly much more aware of the Arab problem than other early Zionist thinkers, and was conscious of the fact that conflict would arise when the number of Jewish settlers would go beyond a certain tolerable limit.

Freedom and democracy cannot be considered as "optional" in political and social life in modern Israel.[18] This point has become increasingly important in the debate concerning the future of relations with the Palestinians. During the *intifada*, there was an increasing consciousness in the left of the Israeli political spectrum that the Zionist ideal of a democratic Jewish nation state was severely affected by the preceding 20-year occupation. On the one hand, the Palestinians would be the majority between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea by the year 2010, and already in 1987 it was not possible in that region to think of a purely Jewish state. On the other, rightist solutions ranging from the "Bantustan system" to actual expulsion (recommended by extremists of the Gush Emunim), would pose deadly danger to the democratic

character of Israel—not to speak of the extreme solution of extermination, advocated by Rabbi Israel Hess.[19] The Israeli left increasingly understands that the continuing occupation of territories inhabited by a people who refused the occupation itself is a seed of corruption for Israeli democracy (e.g., Rolef, 1991). From this perspective, the exchange of land for peace appears to be necessary to avoid the evolution of the Israeli society towards a non-Jewish and/or non-democratic society.

It is interesting to observe that even from a Jewish religious perspective it is possible to find a relation between one's own and others' freedom, between enslaving and being enslaved.[20] It can be found in the relation between Joseph's action in Egypt and the successive enslavement of the Jews. The relation is found by Shlomo Rifkin, chief rabbi of Efrat (a settlement south of Jerusalem) in the fact that "perhaps the Jews were enslaved because the Almighty saw the necessity to enforce one of the underlying and most basic principles of Judaism: no one may enslave another" (Rifkin, 1991). The meaning of *Pesah* leads many Jewish thinkers to give great importance to the freedom of those peoples who are still enslaved (e.g., Sonnino, 1995). Even though these reflections have no direct reference to Israeli-Palestinian relations, they have at least a bearing on the approach to the problem.

The naive illusion of the Labor party that there was an objective convergence of interests between the Jewish socialist movement and the Arab workers was dealt a serious blow as early as 1921, when Arab-Jewish riots erupted after leaflets were distributed by communist Jews to Palestinian workers. In any case, the Palestinian national movement was widely misjudged by Zionist leaders, who thought that Arab masses had no interest in national politics, and intended only to advance their standard of living.

Most of Zionist leadership, except for a tiny intellectual minority, did not understand the character of the Palestinian national movement. The idea of a binational state supported by Brit Shalom and Martin Buber never gained wide support, since it was in contradiction with the widely shared Zionist aim of a Jewish state, whatever the conception of Arab-Jewish relations might be.

The difficulties in the relations with the Palestinians induced the Labor leadership to embrace the Jordanian option. In particular, after the end of the first Israeli-Arab war, up to the death of king 'Abdallah, there were intensive contacts in order to stipulate a peace treaty between Israel and Jordan (Shlaim, 1990). After the 1967 war, the Labor leadership took into consideration a separate peace with Jordan, based on the principle of giving some land for peace. This principle was always considered in connection with Jordan, and never with the establishment of a Palestinian state. Moreover, any direct talk or contact with the PLO was excluded.

The first important shift took place after the 1992 election, a partial departure from the typical "pure" Jordan option which had characterized Labor's policies for decades. (The Labor Party had already shifted from total rejection of the notion of Palestinian national rights.) Zionist mainstream personalities, such as former foreign minister Abba Eban, advocated a two-state solution (Eban, 1995; Heller and Nusseibeh, 1991). The option for a Palestinian state was still taboo for Labor, but the Declaration of Principles and the Oslo accords released a new possibility for action. Yossi Sarid, Israel's Environment Minister, said at the end of March 1995 that after the elections of the Palestinian President and of the Palestinian Council, "a Palestinian state is

emerging, at least a state in the making" (*The Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 25 March 1995, p. 1), and saw this as a positive development. Even though Itzhak Rabin disavowed his minister's observations, ambiguously worded acknowledgments were made of the necessity of a Palestinian "entity" (*The Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 1 April 1995, p. 2 and 22 April 1995, p. 9), and Peres spoke favorably about the idea of a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation (*The Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 26 August 1995, p. 8). Finally, after the decision of the PNC to amend the National Covenant, the Labor Party officially discarded its rejection of a Palestinian state. There has been an inherent trend in the peace process which has carried the actors involved far beyond their original positions and intentions.

However, former Israeli Prime Minister Itzhak Shamir made clear his own and his government's stance in the speech he held at the peace conference in Madrid.[21] He did not accept that the talks could focus on territory, stating that "the issue is not territory but our existence." Full acknowledgement was requested for the state of Israel, offering to the Palestinians only the possibility to discuss an interim agreement based on the Camp David framework. It was of paramount importance for him to stick to the aims of the revisionist movement: a Jewish state with a Jewish majority on the largest part of the Land of Israel.

These positions were emphatically confirmed after the Gaza-Jericho agreement by the leader of the Likud who succeeded Shamir, Benyamin Netanyahu, and by other even more radical members of the party. In the debate at the Knesset, Netanyahu charged Peres with abandonment of Zionism. Sharon went further, when he declared to the Army Radio that a government run by Likud would not honor the agreement with the PLO. Netanyahu signed a declaration, together with other leaders of right-wing parties and the former prime minister Itzhak Shamir, which strongly rejected any policy based on the "land for peace" principle.

Nevertheless, the inherent dynamic of the peace process after Oslo 2 obliged even Netanyahu and Sharon to cope with new realities. Netanyahu declared he would refuse to meet Arafat, but he would have government representatives talk with the Palestinian Authority (PA), if it would comply with minimal conditions (control of terrorism, change of the PLO Charter, etc.) (*The Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 27 January 1996 and 17 February 1996). Sharon, in turn, acknowledged the impossibility to go back. He proposed to request that the PA abide by every part of the accord, and not extend the zone controlled by the Palestinians (*The Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 6 January 1996).

The attitude towards democracy of some parts of the Likud is clearly shown by Ariel Sharon's declarations and articles. Sharon (1993) writes: "Our forefathers and parents did not come here to establish democracy; . . . they came here to create a Jewish state.... When it comes to the fate of Jews in the Land of Israel, real democracy is only that which promotes political morality and historic justice in realizing the biblical promise of the Jewish people." In other words, those Israeli citizens characterized by Arab language and Palestinian identity, should not be given the right to decide on issues regarding security, etc. This implies the existence of first and second class citizens.

It is clear that the choice to embrace the road towards some kind of peace agreement with the Palestinians and neighboring Arab states was not dictated by some abstractly defined national interest, but the outcome of elections held in 1992, which were won by the center-left coalition.

Will public opinion continue to support this policy? According to some analysts, the troublesome social situation in Israel, caused also by the difficulty to absorb the waves of *'olim* coming from the Soviet Union, and after 1991 from CIS-countries, was the main cause of the success of Labor. The relevance of social factors is important because they have also significantly affected parts of the traditional Likud electorate, such as the *mizrahim* or lower social classes (Chazan, 1991, pp. 18-20). Other analysts think that the success of Labor and of its allies was intrinsically related to the different policies vis-a-vis Arab countries and the Palestinian issue. This attitude can be traced back to the desire—intrinsically related to the origins of Zionism—to be a normal people living in normal situation, *goy kekal hagoyim*. A pre-condition for this is peace with the Palestinians and the Arab states.

Jerusalem

The conflict over Jerusalem is a hotly debated and long-standing issue which involves not only Israeli-Palestinian relations, but also the relations of the state of Israel and of Judaism with all the Arab states, Islam, and Christianity. In the issue of Jerusalem we can find the deepest and fullest articulation of practical issues, such as borders, housing, construction, religious, historical and ideological aspects, perceptions, emotions and prejudices. Moreover, the two official (and widely shared, within the respective communities) positions are mutually incompatible and seem to exclude any possible compromise: the Palestinians want East Jerusalem to be the capital of their state, whereas the Israeli official position is that unified Jerusalem is the eternal capital of the Jewish state. For this reason it was decided to postpone the discussion of this issue to the last phase of the peace process.

The walled city of Jerusalem contains the holy places of three religions: *al-Haram ash-Sharif*, i.e., the area including the two mosques (the *qubbat as-sakhra'*, i.e., the Dome of the Rock, and the mosque al-Aqsa); the Western Wall of the Second Temple; and the Holy Sepulchre. The *Via Dolorosa* (according to a probably unreliable tradition the path of Jesus Christ's *via crucis*) runs from the Gate of the Lions to the Holy Sepulchre through the Muslim and the Christian Quarters. Outside the walls of the Old City, the Mount of Olives is sacred both to the Jewish and the Christian tradition (different parts of the hill are significant for each). A particular problem is that the First (Solomon's) and the Second Temple (built after the Babylonian exile) were erected in the area which later became holy for Islam.

Jerusalem is considered by some Muslims to be the second holy place; the place where the *mi'raj* (i.e., the night ascension to the Heavens) took place can be considered in the sufi tradition even more important than Medina, where the Prophet lived and was buried. Different opinions can also be found in Judaism with respect to this area. The traditional orthodox view is that no Jew should enter the Temple Mount area because he or she could step on the spot of the *Sancta Sanctorum*, and it is disputed what are the conditions of purity for a Jew to be allowed in the area. Moreover, whereas some fundamentalist groups openly proclaim their intention to destroy the mosques and to build the Third Temple, the orthodox tradition either poses severe

condition for the reconstruction of the Temple, or even—as did Moshe ben Maimon—states that the Third Temple shall not be built by human hands, but will come down from Heaven in messianic times (Wigoder, 1989: 693-96).

A major obstacle for any solution of the Jerusalem problem is the claim by all the parties —and particularly by Jews and Muslims—that the city belongs mainly, if not totally, to their particular faith. For example, on the Jewish side it is argued that the name of Jerusalem appears 821 times in the Tanach, and never in the Qur'an. Moreover, the role of Jerusalem in the Jewish tradition is unique compared to its role in other cultures and religions (Rifkin, 1995). The first argument overlooks the reference to the night journey of the Prophet in the XVII sura, and the many references to Jerusalem in the *Hadith*, but the second argument is undeniable: the city is one with the existence of a Jewish state, and the theological relevance of the temple and its destructions and reconstructions have no comparable analogies in other religions. Nevertheless, Jerusalem is only incidentally quoted in the Torah,[22] and even The *Encyclopedia of Judaism* acknowledges that the importance of the city in Judaism was due to a political decision of King David (Wigoder, 1989: 381-83).

The Muslim "sectarian" argument is that the Jewish presence in Jerusalem has not been long, and that an Arab and mostly Muslim Jerusalem has endured for the last thirteen centuries, except during the Crusades, 1099-1188 (e.g., Bukhari, 1995). This approach totally neglects the continuous presence of Jews in the quarter of the Old City. Nationalist Muslim arguments stress the Palestinian/Canaanite origin of Jerusalem/Urusalim/al-Quds, before the Jewish conquest under King David.

Following the disturbances at the Western Wall during the 1920s, an international commission composed of Sweden, Switzerland, and Norway dealt with the problem of the sovereignty of the whole area of the Temple Mount by adjudicating the whole of it (including the Wall) in 1930 to the Muslims, a decision often quoted by Palestinians. Actually, the sources of law in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza are quite confusing, since they are an accumulation of acts from the Ottoman Empire, the British Mandate, the Jordanian period (1949-67). Moreover, the Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem (and of the Golan Heights) has not been internationally acknowledged. Thus, this international arbitrate of 1930 could be considered as a significant precedent.

It is important to remember that in Israel there is a substantial national consensus (both in the public opinion and in the political system) regarding a "unified Jerusalem" as the eternal capital of Israel—a position continuously confirmed by representatives of the government and of the opposition, though with different degrees of consideration for the rights of the Palestinians. Moreover, the policies pursued by both the Labor and Likud parties have aimed at encircling the Arab city by means of new Jewish quarters, and making the functioning of Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem, especially the Orient House, difficult.

The Palestinians, in part independently of any religious consideration, do not accept the total Israeli control of the city, although there is widespread pessimism and disillusionment. The perceptions of Jerusalemite Palestinians are well illustrated by a poll held in August 1995.[23] According to this poll 62.8% of the respondents preferred war to continued Israeli control of East Jerusalem, and only 16% were of the opposite opinion. Moreover, 41.5% wanted East Jerusalem

to be the capital of the Palestinian state, 23.3% preferred an internationalized city, 15.3% Jerusalem as an open city and a capital of two states. Whereas this poll is hardly surprising, it is interesting that, in an other poll, Palestinian East Jerusalemites declared themselves, even though only with a plurality, against the possibility of separating East from West Jerusalem: 45.2% were against separation, 20.9% in favor of it. Note that East Jerusalemites could not easily survive if their links to Israel were cut or even made difficult.

As far as the Israeli-Muslim issue is concerned, a statement issued by the late Itzhak Rabin seems to hint at a proposed Jordanian co-responsibility in the control of *al-Haram ash-Sharif* in Jerusalem. This proposal can only solve the problem of access and control to the holy places, but does not address the national question; it does not imply any Israeli willingness to withdraw from any part of East Jerusalem, or even to share sovereignty and effective control. The role of the hashemite kingdom in *al-Haram ash-Sharif* could represent a delicate issue in future Jordanian-Palestinian relations and in the talks on the final status of the city between Israel and the PNA.

Specific Christian concerns voiced by the heads of Christian churches to the Israeli government asserted that "Jerusalem is too precious to be dependent solely on municipal or national political authorities, whatever they may be" (Shapiro, 1994). This statement was (correctly) perceived as a challenge to Israeli sovereignty, and mayor Ehud Olmert, although reiterating his assurances with respect to the role of the city in the three religions, excluded any international guarantees, which are traditionally considered necessary by churches, especially the Catholic church.

Even though Israeli governments and the Jerusalem municipal authorities have tried to create *fait accomplis* in the city, developments cast some doubts on the feasibility of what Palestinians call the process of judaization of the city, and Israelis call the defense of its Jewish character. In 1995 a group of city planners reported an increase of the Arab population in municipal Jerusalem from 1967 to 1995 (from 25.8% up to 28.4%), and forecast an Arab majority in greater Jerusalem for the year 2010 (Hutman, 1995). In greater Jerusalem the Jewish population would grow, according to this report, from 500,000 to 740,000, whereas the Palestinians would gain the majority increasing from 470,000 to 820,000. This growth would make it numerically possible that Jerusalem would be administered, in the future, by a haredi-Palestinian alliance. Thus the paradox that the capital of the Zionist state might be governed by a non-Zionist alliance.

The different factors discussed above make it clear that a political solution for Jerusalem is necessary not only because the political needs of the Arab Jerusalemites cannot be overlooked, but because of the complexity of the problems of the city for Israeli authorities. A variety of different proposals on the future of Jerusalem have been put forward. These proposals, which maintain the "united city," but solve in various ways the problem of sovereignty, can be classified into three groups:

(i) International sovereignty;
(ii) United Jerusalem under two distinct sovereignty (West: Israeli—East: Palestinian) (e.g., Tufakji, 1995);

(iii) United Jerusalem under shared (Israeli-Palestinian) sovereignty (e.g., Whitbeck, 1996; Leon, 1996).

The first proposal derives from the 1947 partition plan, and it is unacceptable for Israel. In the second proposal, the city would not be divided, and its unity would be guaranteed by an umbrella municipality, whereas neighborhoods would hold separate elections and have separate administrations (according to the London or Paris model). The Western part would be under Israeli sovereignty, the Eastern part outside the walled city under Palestinian sovereignty. The sovereignty of the old city would be divided (Arab on the Muslim and the Christian Quarters, Israeli on the Jewish one). A further possible solution is provided by a combination of these proposals, for example, the sharing of sovereignty on the part containing holy places, and a partition of less sensitive neighborhoods. The solution of shared sovereignty, even though it implies a significant change in Israeli attitudes, may be the only one which could be acceptable for both parties.

Final Reflections

We have highlighted the reasons why the road towards peace, or at least a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, seems to be reversible only at a high cost. In conflict resolution and peace-building, however, perceptions of the "other side" are often no less important than "facts," especially in a situation where contacts and interaction are unavoidable. The question is, whether the peace process can bring a stable peace. Peace can be properly called "stable" (which is not always a synonym of "just") only if the actors involved have no interest in choosing any other feasible (or perceived as such) strategy. Nevertheless, violent conflict is actually *impossible* if it becomes *unthinkable*, i.e., when violence is outside the realm, as among the countries belonging to the European Union. The reason lies not only in decision making procedures or in ideal affinities, but also in the interdependencies between societies, i.e., in the processes of integration between interacting democratic societies. This means that the existence of independent civil societies plays a decisive role in conflict resolution. In our context, an important role is thus played by the relations between Israeli and Palestinian civil societies.

A seemingly possible way out of this conflict could be zero interaction. A strategy of deconnection between Israelis and Palestinians does not, however, look feasible. First, the presence of a growing Palestinian minority in the state of Israel, would be a permanent stake for the future Palestinian or Jordan/Palestinian state. Further, no normal economic life in the area is thinkable if it is obstructed by reciprocal boycotts. A strategy of deconnection by not employing Palestinian workers has been pursued by the center-left government of Israel, but this is primarily a political strategy which is not economically or socially viable.

If deconnection is not feasible, then some form of integration is necessary. The obvious goal is a situation where war is as unthinkable as it is between Germany and France.[24] This

cannot be achieved in the Middle East by any form of threat systems, though an emerging Soviet threat helped the German-French *entente* after World War II.

The question is how, after a final peace settlement, can the underlying conflicts be dealt with, both inside Israel (between Arab/Palestinian and Jewish Israeli citizens) and between Israelis and Palestinians, and generally Arabs. While there is a flux of Israeli tourists in Egypt, and Israelis with a second passport can visit Jordan, very few Egyptians visited Israel or even East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Moreover, Israeli interest in Egypt or Jordan seems to be purely touristic. If some form of inter-societal *détente* is to be achieved, this lack of mutual interest has to be overcome. The reasons seem to be different on the two sides, and are not the same for everyone in each "camp."

The Palestinians do not perceive their relationship with Israelis as a relationship between equals.[25] Since the Israeli is at the same time the occupying soldier and— more rarely—the peace activist, (s)he will be usually perceived as the occupant. The creation of a Palestinian state and a period of separation could be basic steps in order to overcome this Palestinian perception. As far as Israelis are concerned, it appears that there is not—so far—a wide interest in knowing the Palestinian reality directly. That reality would confront each individual with the major problems concerning Israel's and Israelis' identity, and their relations with their neighbors.

Nevertheless, two more optimistic points can be made in conclusion. First, the hierarchic relations in Israeli society itself between groups originating from different areas seem to be weakening. The intra-societal integration could make relations with other groups easier. Second, and more important, the relations developed during the *intifada* between Israeli peace groups and parts of the Palestinian elite could develop into a permanent process of reciprocal understanding spreading beyond these small but important groups.

Notes

1. For a review of the events since the outbreak of the *intifada* up to the Madrid peace conference, see *The Stone and the Olive Branch. Four Years of the Intifada from Jabalia to Madrid*, Jerusalem Media and Communication Cemter (JMCC), Jerusalem 1991.

2. The concept of "security complex" was introduced by Barry Buzan (1991, p. 190): "A security complex is defined as a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another."

3. It is interesting that the "security structure" would be going in the direction of fragmentation—according to this hypothesis—whereas the production, financial, and knowledge structure are undergoing an increasing process of globalization.

4. In this connection it is important to observe the differences in ideology between Sunni and Shia'i radicalism, but also their different international political role: Saudi Arabia, who opposed Iranian-sponsored Shia'i radicalism, was very active in supporting everywhere (up to the Second Gulf War!) Sunni radicalism.

5. Sudan is too weak and/or peripheral to be the bulk of an "islamic block." Lybia is much weaker and prudent than it used to be; moreover, Qadhafi cannot be considered as a standard Islamicist. Iran cannot be considered as a part of the Arab system, whereas it is part of the Middle Eastern security complex and it has an influence on Arab politics.

6. On the Middle East as a region after 1989 see, for example, Salamé, 1992; Karawan, 1994.

7. On King 'Abdallah's foreign policy, see Avi Shlaim (1990).

8. This is the reason why Michail S. Gorbachev is not loved in Palestine, and why almost everybody was happy in the Occupied Territories when the putsch in Moscow in August 1991 seemed to be successful.

9. This first step, even though it was played down by Israeli and pro-Israeli politicians, acknowledged for the first time the right to live in Palestine to all the Jews who had made *'aliya.*

10. Hamas is the (Arab) acronym of *Harakat Muqawama Islamiyya* (Islamic Resistance Movement).

11. Charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement of Palestine, arts. 11 and 14, in Ahmad, 1994, pp. 137-38 and 140-41.

12. In an interview with the French journal *Politique Étrangere*, Zaynab al Ghazali, an Egyptian authoratitative representative of the Islamic women's movement, declared that, as far as former Islamic territories are concerned, their policies could be syntesized in the slogan "al-Quds wa'l-Andalus" (Al-Quds is the Arabic name of Jerusalem, and al-Andalus is the Arabic name of the Islamic Spain). See "Égypte: la longe lutte des integristes musulmans," *Politique Étrangere*, No. 13 (Automne 1981), pp. 249-58.

13. See "Interview with Hamas", *Palestine Report*, 4 December 1994 (translated from al-Quds, 28 November 1994), pp. 8-11; also Abdul Hadi, 1996.

14. It should not be forgotten that the word "irreversible" does not properly mean "that cannot be reversed or revoked": in classical thermodynamics a trasformation is irreversible if the backward transformation is impossible in an isolated system.

15. On the differences on foreign policy and on the Palestinian issue between the Likud and the Labor Party, see Shlaim, 1994.

16. This is perhaps a relationship analogous, but with a deeper degree of affinity, to the alliance between Hamas and a part of the Palestinian secular opposition.

17. "The Jewish State and the Jewish Problem", in Herzberg, 1986. On the life and the thought of Ahad Ha-Am, see Zipperstein, 1993.

18. In this connection, Ahad Ha-Am's skepticism with respect to representative democracy must be remembered.

19. On the positions of Jewish fundamentalism with respect to the Palestinian problem, see Sprinzak, 1993, pp. 125-28. It is to be remarked that Rabbi Hess' proposal has not been supported by anyone; nevertheless the Arabs-Amalekites comparison has found a certain diffusion in the most extreme part of the Gush Emunim.

20. See Rifkin, 1991. This article was published in the series "Shabbat Shalom." These articles comment every week on a passage from the Bible.

21. The full text of Itzhak Shamir's speech in Madrid can be found in *The Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 9 September 1991, pp. A and D.

22. It is quoted in connection with Melkisedek, king of Salem, which is identified with Jerusalem (Genesis, 14, 18-20). Melkisedek is also quoted in Psalms, 110, 4.

23. It should be taken into consideration that the Oslo 2 agreements had not yet been concluded, and this fact probably influenced Palestinian attitudes in a radical direction.

24. On civil society and conflict resolution, see Rodolfo Ragionieri, "Reflections on Conflict Management", *Quaderni Forum* VIII (1994), No. 1, pp. 77-94.

25. This important point was made clear by Dr. Muhammad 'Afif (JMCC) in an interview (September 1994).

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