CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE BREAKDOWN OF THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

MOHAMAD EL-SAYED SELIM

Faculty of Economics and Political Science
Cairo University

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the main correlates for the failure of the Arab-Israeli peace process since its formal inception after the October 1973 War with special emphasis on the breakdown of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations at the Camp David II Summit held in July 2000. The paper disproves the widely held notion that the Palestinian side was mainly behind such failure by comparing various narratives of the deliberations of the summit. It also looks at the main factors which have been influencing Arab-Israeli relations since September 11, 2001. These are the advent of a neo-conservative administration into power in the USA, the September 11 events in the USA, the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq by the USA, and the change of Palestinian leadership. This paper shows the impact of these developments for the future of peace in the Middle East and attempts finally to outline the main lessons to be learnt from the failure of the Arab-Israeli peace process for the future of the Middle east.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of the "peace process" was first introduced in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict in 1973 by the then American Secretary of State Kissinger, during his first visit to Egypt. By referring Arab-Israeli peace as a process, Kissinger meant that the establishment of such peace would not result from a single act. Rather it will be the result of a series of successive and incremental steps taken over a long period of time, which will culminate in the establishment of peace in the Middle East. The American Secretary of state wanted also to deflate Arab expectations that Peace would be achieved in the near future. It would rather be realized after a long series of actions through which the Arabs would have to demonstrate that they have "really" accepted the existence of Israel. After 30 years of the introduction of the concept of the peace process, the process is still underway with no prospect that it will end in the near future.

The peace process went through three main stages. The first began after the October 1973 War and continued until the collapse of the Egyptian-Israeli self-rule for the Palestinians negotiations in 1982(1). The second began after the second Gulf War resulting from the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990-1991. It included the convening of the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991, the convening of the bilateral and multi-lateral tracks for Arab-Israeli peace negotiations, the signing of the Jordanian-Israeli Peace Treaty in 1994, and most importantly the Israeli-Palestinian Oslo Accords in 1993 and the subsequent agreements implementing them, and the convening of the Camp David trilateral conference between the Americans, the Israelis, and the Palestinians in July 2000 to reach a final settlement between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. The collapse of these talks resulted in the renewal of violence between the Palestinians and the Israelis. The Palestinian disappointment with the failure of the process that began in Oslo in 1993 was reflected in the outbreak of their second Intifada (Uprising). The Intifada was met with ruthless Israeli crackdown, which resulted in the destruction of the Palestinian infrastructure and Authority. The third stage of the Middle East Peace Process began in 2003 after the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in March-April of that year, and release of the "Road Map" sponsored by the Quartet (USA, EU, Russia and the UN).

This paper will review in brief the development of the peace process with special attention to the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in Camp David in July 2000 to reach a conclusion. It will finally look at the consequences of the collapse of the negotiations on the Middle East and present a future look at the USA offering of another episode of negotiations under the "Road Map."

The July 2000 Palestinian-Israeli talks under American auspices are a matter of wide disagreement. Whereas some analysts argue that Israel had offered the Palestinian Authority in these talks the most "generous" concessions that could be presented by any Israeli government, and that the talks had collapsed as a result of the Palestinian intransigence, others contend that what Israel offered the Authority in 2000 fell far below the minimum Palestinian expectations, and that the Israeli offer amounted to a de facto annexation of the Palestinian territories. According to former US President Clinton and former Prime Minister Barak, who negotiated with Arafat in Camp David, " The true story of Camp David was that for the first time in the history of the conflict the American President put on the table a proposal, based on the Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, very close to the Palestinian demands and Arafat refused even to accept it as a basis of negotiations, walked out of the room, and deliberately turned to terrorism." (Morris, 13 June 2002). Waxman (2001:79) also contended that "the concessions Mr. Barak offered at Camp David were the most far-reaching concessions ever made by an Israeli Prime Minister to the Palestinians. They involved a division of sovereignty in Jerusalem, an Israeli withdrawal from 90-95% of the West Bank, full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, an exchange of territory in order to allow Israel to annex the large settlement blocs along the Green Line containing 80% of the settlers, and a limited return of Palestinian refugees to Israel."(2). Rinehart contends that " The real condition that Barak put, which was impossible for Arafat to accept, was the condition

that he gives up what the Israelis call Temple Mount and for the Muslims Al-Aqsa mosque. This is something that was never in any negotiations before, and there were all kinds of vague formulas about the status of al-Aqsa, and it is the first time that was brought up, and was the one thing which Arafat could not accept. So that is why the negotiations blew up. Next Israel asked Arafat to make a declaration of giving up the Right of Return. The Israeli demand was that they give up even the right itself. So that turned to be one thing else Arafat could not accept." (Rinehartt, Internet). Laor also argued that "Anyone familiar with Barak's proposals knows that he offered the Palestinians 90% of the West Bank, that is 90% of what would be left of it after Israel kept its expansion around Jerusalem, its military roads, and bases, and its settlements." (Laor, 2001). Zukes also contended that "The primary fault for the failure of the peace process and the subsequent violence lies squarely with the occupying power, Israel, and its patron, the United States," (Zukes, 2002).

THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS DURING THE GLOBAL BIPOLAR ERA

The peace process began after the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War through the mediating role of the USA. The process that began in 1973 ended in 1982 as the Egyptian-Israeli negotiations on the status of the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel collapsed. This phase resulted in a set of military agreements between some Arab states and Israel. In 1974, Egypt and Israel signed the first Disengagement Agreement, which obliged Israel to withdraw from areas around the banks of the Suez Canal almost 10 kilometers inside Sinai. Syria also signed a similar agreement with Israel in 1974 according to which Israel vacated the Qonietra in the Golan Heights. In 1975, Egypt and Israel signed another disengagement agreement according to which the two parties pledged non-belligerency and Israel withdrew to the Sinai Passes, and its ships passed through the Suez Canal.

The Middle East peace process stagnated after 1975 as a result of the advent to power in Israel of a right-wing government headed by Begin, and the opposition of the Soviet Union to an American-sponsored peace deal in the Middle East. Egypt's President Anwar Sadat opposed any Soviet involvement in the peace process. When the Americans and the Soviets agreed in October 1977 to convene a multi-lateral peace conference in the Middle East, Sadat foiled that project by launching his peace initiative, which led to his visit to Israel in November 1977.

Arabs have debated the wisdom of the modalities of the Sadat initiative. Some analysts hailed it as a brave move, which broke the psychological barrier between the Arabs and the Israelis. Others argued that the Sadat's visit was a symbol of the Arab inability to use all the bargaining chips available. The visit itself should have been the culmination of the peace negotiations thereby demonstrating Egyptian commitment to the signed deal. It is argued that the visit weakened Egyptian position towards Israel in the

subsequent negotiations and forced Sadat to accept a settlement, which was short of what he had initially wanted to achieve.

Although Sadat did not consult with his Arab allies during the October War about his peace initiative, he sent them invitations to attend and participate in the Arab-Israeli negotiations which were held in Egypt in December 1977 (The Mena House Talks). The Syrians, Jordanians, and Palestinians turned down the Egyptian invitation. This was mainly a result of their estimation that the talks would mean the recognition of Israel without corresponding Israeli concessions, and because the Soviet Union, the then main backer of the Syrians and the Palestinians, rejected the Sadat peace initiative. Had the Palestinians, represented at this time by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) attended these negotiations, they would have won if Israel accepted or rejected their participation. The Palestinians must have known that Israel was in firm opposition to their participation in the negotiations. Their acceptance of the Sadat invitation would have meant that either Israel would be forced under the momentum of the Sadat initiative to accept their participation as a legitimate entity, or that Israel would persist in its denial of the Palestinian representation and withdraw from the negotiations, which would have meant the collapse of the Sadat peace initiative. In both cases, the Palestinians would have achieved some gains. However, because of the Soviet "advice" to the other Arab countries to boycott the Mena House Talks and the subsequent ones, only the Egyptians negotiated with the Israelis. Other Arab countries, mainly Syria, Iraq, Libya, and the PLO formed the "Rejectionist Front," a name which referred to the rejection of negotiations with Israel.

Despite the absence of the other Arab actors, the negotiations were quite rough and almost reached the point of collapse. Whereas the Egyptians wanted a comprehensive Arab-Israeli deal, the Israelis insisted on an Egyptian-Israeli one. The Egyptians also wanted total and immediate Israeli withdrawal from Sinai. But Israel advocated the retention of some portions of Sinai and phased withdrawal until after the full normalization of relations. This was when the then American President Carter called for the convening of the Camp David conference to broker the peace process between Egypt and Israel. The conference was held in September 1978, and resulted in the last minute in two documents (I) a Framework for Peace in the Middle East; (ii) and the major principles of an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. These documents meant that Egypt had accepted to sign a separate deal with Israel. The Framework was not linked in any way with the projected bilateral treaty. In March 1979, Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty. According to the treaty, Israel withdrew by April 1982 from Sinai, except the Taba enclave, and Egypt and Israel exchanged diplomatic relations.

The American heavy involvement in the Camp David negotiations was mainly a result of the perception of the threat of the possible strong return of the Soviet influence to the Middle East if the negotiations collapsed. This view was widely shared by all the participants. In fact, at this time the Americans were under heavy pressure from the Soviets in other regions to compensate for their lost influence in the core of the Middle East. Also, the Israelis calculated that by signing the peace treaty with Egypt, they

would pull that country out of the Middle East power equation, thereby rendering other Arab countries virtually incapable of threatening Israel. As a result of signing this treaty, the Arabs chased Egypt out of most Arab and Islamic regional and trans-regional institutions such as the League of Arab states, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference. In the meantime, Egyptian-Israeli negotiations began to discuss the Framework of Peace, especially the reference to a self-rule for the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The PLO and other Arab countries opposed Egypt's claim to negotiate with Israeli on behalf of the Palestinians. Israel also was quite reluctant to provide a meaningful deal to the Egyptians, which they could use to mend their fences with the Arabs. As a result, by 1982, the Self-rule negotiations were suspended. The Egyptian-Israel dispute over the Taba enclave was solved through international arbitration. According to the verdict of the international arbitration court formed by Egypt and Israel, Egypt restored the Taba Enclave. However, the end of the Egyptian-Israeli self-rule negotiations ended the first episode in the Middle East peace process until the end of the "second Gulf crisis" of 1990-91 resulting from the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

The main lesson to be drawn from this review is that the failure of the peace process during the bipolar era can be attributed to role of the Soviet Union in persuading its Arab allies to refrain from joining the process Egypt started in 1977. Granted that this process was deficient, it offered some real opportunities for collective Arab bargaining with Israel using the momentum of the Sadat visit to Israel. That does not mean that Israel was willing to offer the Arabs major concessions. In fact, the Likud right-wing coalition was bent on providing no concessions as Shamir, the former Prime Minister of Israel who represented his country in the Madrid conference, later admitted. However, had the Arabs joined these negotiations, the strategic situation would have been different, especially since the renewal of the Cold War at this time would have motivated the USA to solve the conflict in order to reduce the Soviet influence in the Middle East.

THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS AFTER THE SECOND GULF WAR

On 2 August 1990, Iraq invaded and occupied Iraq. Then the Iraqi President Saddam Hussein offered to withdraw from Kuwait if Israel withdrew from the Arab territories it occupied in 1967. The US and its allies rejected establishing such linkage, but in order to pacify Arab public opinion, which took the Iraqi offer seriously, the American President, George Bush, Sr., defined a new role for the US in the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. On 6 March 1991, after the defeat of Iraq, he defined US postwar goals as to include finding solutions to the Arab-Israeli conflict according to Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of "territory for peace," and sent Secretary James Baker to the region to arrange for a conference to deal with this objective. Baker provided Israel, Lebanon, and the Palestinians non-binding letters of assurance which persuaded them to take part in the projected conference. For example, whereas he assured Israel that he accepted its view that Security Council resolution 242 was subject to

interpretation, promised that the US would not support the establishment of a separate Palestinian state, and that the US would give "considerable weight" to the Israeli view that the Golan Heights were important to its security, he assured Syria that the US believed that resolution 242 applies to all fronts and told the Palestinians that the US wanted their legitimate political rights and opposed Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem (Migdaloviz, 2002). The American proposal was also facilitated by the increasing weakness of the Soviet Union and the defeat of Iraq in the Kuwait liberation war, which meant the weakening of the Rejectionist Front.

The projected conference was held on October 30, 1991. Eleven delegations attended as full participants. These were the US, the Soviet Union, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan/the Palestinians, and the European Community. The UN, the Gulf Cooperation Council, and the Arab Maghreb Union attended as observers. As can be seen, the Palestinians were denied a separate representation. The Madrid conference was a ceremonial exercise. It soon branched off into two main tracks: bilateral and multi-lateral. The bilateral talks included three separate tracks between Israel and Jordan, Syria, and the Palestinians. The objective of this track was to discuss and reach a political territorial settlement. The multi-lateral track comprised five main Working groups: refugees, water, environment, regional economic cooperation, and regional security and arms control. Each working group was headed by a big power and other regional and global interested actors participated. The rationale of breaking the negotiations into two tracks was that whereas the parties themselves would reach a political settlement, other powers would devise modalities to secure such settlement by solving issues related to refugees, water, arms control, etc.

The two tracks stagnated, as Israel wanted to delay the political negotiations until the multi-lateral ones had reached concrete conclusions. The Arabs wanted to accelerate the political negotiations assuming that they would not enter into multi-lateral commitments until a political settlement was reached. In fact Syria and Lebanon declined to take part in the multi-lateral track until the bilateral one reached a frutiful conclsuion.

The Oslo Process: The Bantustan Model Offered

Meanwhile, Israel and the PLO opened a secrete channel under the auspices of Norway. This resulted in a surprise Israel-PLO mutual recognition statements on 9 September 1993 according to which the PLO recognized Israel's right to exist, accepted the UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, and the peaceful resolution of the conflict. The PLO renounced violence and terrorism and undertook to prevent them, stated that articles of the Palestinian Patriotic Charter that contradict these commitments were invalid, and undertook to submit Charter changes to the Palestinian National Council. Israel recognized the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and agreed to negotiate with it. On 13 September 1993, the two parties signed the Declaration of Principles (DOP) on interim self-government for the West Bank and Gaza. The DOP called for Palestinian self rule in Gaza and Jericho, transfer of authority over education,

culture, health, social welfare, direct taxation, and tourism in the West Bank and Gaza to the Palestinians, election in 9 months of a Palestinian Council with jurisdiction over the West Bank and Gaza, Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem will vote, Israel troops to redeploy from Palestinian centers before the elections, a Palestinian police will assume responsibility for public order, joint Israeli-Palestinian committees for issues such as economic cooperation and dispute resolution, and defining rule for the re-admission of persons displaced in 1967. During the interim period, Israel would be responsible for external security, settlements, and foreign relations. Permanent status negotiations would begin in the third year of interim rule and may include Jerusalem. The DOP was accompanied by a timetable. The timetable allowed two months for reaching an agreement on Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho, four months for the completion of the withdrawal and the transfer of limited powers to the Palestinian authority, nine months for the holding of elections of the Palestinian Council, and five-year transitional period leading to a permanent settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 and 338. Negotiations should begin no later than the third year of the transitional period to define the final status. All the controversial issues such as the status of Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees, settlements, and water resources were left to the final status agreement (Shlaim, 1995).

Israel opened that secret channel with the PLO and signed the DOP because it was confronting a major civil uprising (Intifada) in the occupied territories, which began in 1987. For almost six years, the Israeli army failed to crush the uprising and its international reputation and morale began to suffer seriously. Rabin, the then Israeli Prime Minister and his Foreign Minister Peres thought that by establishing a Palestinian authority in the occupied territories, the task of ending the uprising would be transferred to that authority. The Intifada would be turned into an intra-Palestinian conflict. Meanwhile, Israel was bent on keeping the occupied territories, as it gave no commitment in the DOP to end the occupation or stop building colonies in the occupied territories.

The DOP was highly imbalanced. Whereas the PLO recognized Israel as a state, the latter recognized only the PLO as representing the Palestinians. Israel did not reciprocate by recognizing the principle of establishing a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders. This implied that Israel considered the West Bank and the Gaza strip as "disputed territories" which would be a matter of negotiations. The Palestinians had a different "understanding." They understood that they had given a historic concession by recognizing Israel with the 1967 borders (which means 78%) of the total area of mandate Palestine and that Israel would, in turn, recognize their state on the remaining percentage. However, this was not stated in the DOP. Further, the DOP did not restrict Israel's ability to build colonies (settlements) in the occupied territories even though the negotiations were under way. The colonies meant that Israel was creating "facts" which would limit partition and divide the projected Palestinian State. In fact, after the signing of the DOP, the Israel government of Rabin-Peres, which signed the DOP and the subsequent agreements, accelerated the pace of building colonies in the occupied territories. Between 1993 and 1996 (that is between the signing the of the DOP and the

defeat of that government), the Rabin-Peres governments put 40.000 new settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The DOP was also based on the assumption that the realization of Middle Eastern peace required parallel Israeli-Palestinian economic relations. Historical experience, including that of the Europeans, showed that economic cooperation does not result in any significant progress unless it was preceded by political commitments (Ahmad, 1998).

According to Boyle, Advisor of the Palestinian Delegation to the Middle East Peace Process (1991-1993), what the Palestinians were offered in the Oslo process was a Bantustan Model similar to the Bantustans of the South African Apartheid regime. But why did Arafat accept this process, if he knew from the beginning that the model offered fell short of his minimum expectations. Boyle argued that, "He (Arafat) thought he would take what was offered to the Palestinian people by Israel and the US even though if he knew it was a Bantustan, and try to prove his good faith, and the good faith of the Palestinian people, that they were willing to live in peace with Israel, that they would go through a trial test period of five years of this Bantustan model and that at the end of the five years there would be a legitimate Palestine state." (Boyle, 2002).

It is on that assumption that the Palestinians proceeded with the peace process (Boyle, 2002). On 4 May 1994, the Israelis and the Palestinians signed an Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho area. It provided for the withdrawal of Israel from Gaza/ Jericho within three weeks, and authority to be transferred from the Israeli military government and civil administration to the Palestinian Authority (PA). The Authority's territorial jurisdiction included land, subsoil, and territorial waters. Israel retained jurisdiction over the security of the settlements, and external security. The accord began the 5-year period of interim self-rule. On 28 September 1995 Israel and the PA signed the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which was also known as the Taba Accords or Oslo II. The Taba Accords divided the Palestinian occupied territories into three zones, (i) Zone A will be under the security and civil control of the PA. It represented 3% of the territories, and included all the large Palestinian cities such as Nablus, Jenin, and Ramallah (ii) Zone B will be under the civil control of the PA and the security control of Israel. This represented 24% of the territories; and (iii) Zone C, which represented 73% of the territories, will be under the civil and security control of Israel. This area included the unpopulated area of Palestine, and the settlements and the barracks of the Israeli army. The Taba Accords tacitly distinguished between the land and the people of Palestine. Whereas, the majority of the Palestinian people lived under the PA control, the majority of the Palestinian land was still retained by Israel. Further, the Taba Accords did not refer to the colonies, which allowed the Peres Government to increase the momentum of the colonization of the occupied territories. When Netanyahu defeated the Peres Government in 1996, he delivered an address at the US congress in which he revealed that his predecessor had put 40.000 new settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The number of colonizers in the territories increased from 105.000 in 1993 to 145,000 in 1995, an unprecedented increase. Further, the Agreement was not implemented in the city of Al-Khalil (Hebron) in which 400 colonizers lived.

Within this framework, some Arab countries wanted to reinforce the ongoing peace process by taking part in the multi-lateral talks, and participating in the Middle East and North Africa conferences sponsored by the USA to forge a Middle Eastern cooperation framework. The idea was to lend support to the peace process. Three conferences were held in Morocco (1994), Amman (1995), and Cairo (1996). Further, Israel and Jordan signed a peace agreement in 1994 and exchanged diplomatic relations.

Despite the concessions the Palestinians and Arabs made, Zionist fundamentalists objected to the process. Yigal Amir assassinated Prime Minister Rabin in November 1995. He was replaced by Shimon Peres, who decided to freeze the implementation of all agreements with the Palestinian Authority. Further, the Peres Labor Government was defeated in the Israeli parliamentary elections, and was replaced by the Likud-led coalition headed by Netanyahu in May 1996. Netanyahu vowed not to recognize a Palestine state west of the Jordan River and to keep Al-Quds under permanent Israeli sovereignty. On 2 August the Netanyahu cabinet abolished most restraints on the settlements. It initialed with the PA a Protocol Concerning the Redeployment in Al-Khalil (Hebron) on 15 January 1997. According to the Protocol, Israeli settlers in Al-Khalil were allowed to stay under Israeli protection. According to the agreement, almost 20% of Al-Khalil was allotted to almost 400 settlers protected by almost 2000 Israeli soldiers. Israel also agreed to negotiate with the PA on safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank, Gaza Airport and port. Permanent status negotiations were to resume in two months after the implementation of the Protocol. In the meantime, Netanyahu began opening an archeological tunnel at the base of al-Haram Al-Sharif threatening its foundations, and in February 1997, he approved construction of building settlements at Jabal Abu Ghneim in southeast Al-Quds. This led to the resumption of the resistance operations, which were labeled by Netanyahu as "terrorist operations." It is in this context that the Arab countries decided to boycott the Middle East and North Africa regional cooperation conferences including the one held in Qatar, in protest over the Israel renege in the peace process. The argument was that if Israel were not honoring its commitments in the peace process, the regional cooperation process would be frozen. The political and economic tracks were linked, the Arabs argued.

On 23 October 1998 the PA and Israel signed the Waye River Memorandum facilitated by President Clinton. According the Memorandum, Zone A was increased to 18.2% and Zones A and B combined were increased to 40%, and they pledged to combat "terrorism," and the re-affirmation of the nullification of the PLO Charter. It was also agreed on a safe passage between Gaza Strip and the West Bank and on a Gaza seaport (Migdalovitz). The Wye River Memorandum was no more a re-assertion of previous agreements on the withdrawal (re-deployment according to the Israeli jargon). Even though, most of the items of the Memorandum were not implemented, especially those related to the territorial withdrawal. As soon as Netanyahu had reluctantly signed the Memorandum he reneged on his commitments claiming that the PA was not doing enough to combat "terrorism." Meanwhile, on 14 December 1999 the Palestinian National Council (PNC) voted to annul the Charter articles, which delegitimized Israel. But the Israeli cabinet decided on 20 December 1999 to freeze Wye implementation

until the PA abandoned its call for a state with al-Quds as its capital, and resumed security cooperation with Israel.

In the 17 May 1999 elections, Barak led a Labor Party controlled coalition into power. One must recall that Barak was against the DOP and the Oslo process from since his days as a Chief-of-Staff of the Israeli army. Now he had the responsibility of implementing the DOP. In order to accelerate the process, Egypt offered its good offices, and the Sharm al-Shyakh Memorandum (or Waye II) was signed on 4 September 1999. It was agreed to reach a framework agreement on permanent status in five months, and to conclude a comprehensive agreement on permanent status within one year or by 13 September 2000. The Memorandum, in essence, extended the interim period from 1998 till 2000. The Sharm al-Shyakh Memorandum also obliged Israel to transfer territories from Zone B to Zone A, and other territories from Zone C to Zone B with percentages ranging from 1 to 3 in a specified time period. The Memorandum resulted in the release of some 700 Palestinian prisoners, and the opening of the Gaza Airport under Israeli control. The safe passage was not built, and the Gaza seaport was postponed. Later, Barak declared that there are no sacred dates or times for the "re-deployment" and finally he reneged on his commitment and postponed further withdrawal till the final status negotiations, although it was agreed that by the end of the five-year interim period, the occupied territories would be under Palestinian civil control. The end result of the seven-year negotiation was the control by the PA of some 35% of Gaza Strip and 13% of the West Bank. The rest remained under Israeli occupation.

As far as the other fronts were concerned, Barak decided to withdraw from southern Lebanon after almost 18 years of occupation. One must recall that Israel was called upon under Security Council resolution 425 to withdraw from Southern Lebanon. However, it failed to abide by the resolution, and was never asked by the USA to do that. Israel was confronting heavy pressure from Hizballah in Southern Lebanon and was forced to station more forces in that region as its Lebanese allies were faltering. Barak took an audacious step to withdraw from Southern Lebanon, but left one enclave, Shaba's Farms, under Israeli control, which led Hizballah to declare that the withdrawal was not complete. One must note here that Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon was not a part of any peace process. The Israelis left under pressure from Hizballah.

Throughout this period, it was common for Israel to build new colonies and confiscate more Palestinian territories to do that. The most important example was the confiscation of the Palestinian land in Jabal Abu-Ghneim to expand the area of the Israeli-controlled Al-Quds. Israel also began a process of excavation under Al-Haram Al-Sharif claiming that it was looking for the Temple. This resulted in Palestinian protests. Israel replied by killing some 60 Palestinian civilians in cold blood in one day. Closure of the occupied territories was a normal practice, and Palestinian exports were frequently delayed until they were damaged or denied access to their markets, which had resulted in tremendous economic losses. From December 1993 till July 2000, the number of settlers increased from 115,700 to 177,000, 740 Palestinian homes were demolished, and there were 326

days of closure in the West Bank and 311 days of closure in the Gaza Strip (Al-*Masdar Al-Istrategi* (Al-Quds), 2 (17), July 2001). Barak also refused to release Palestinian prisoners, "who have blood on their hands," i.e. were involved in resistance operations against the occupiers. The Palestinians claimed that Barak himself had Palestinian blood on his own hands, by which they were referring to the operation led by Barak in 1973 to assassinate some of the civilian members of the Executive Committee of the PLO in Beirut. Naturally all of this did not create a spirit of confidence among the Palestinian leadership. The fact that all the agreements that were signed were not implemented made them quite alert to the nature of the Israeli commitments under the projected agreement of the final status negotiations. Zunes summed up the status of the peace process on the eve of the convening of the Camp David summit in July 2000 as follows, "Barak refused to withdraw from certain Palestinian lands as part of the third phase of withdrawals previously agreed upon by his rightist predecessor Beyamin Netanyahu. Nor did Israel open the four safe passages between Palestinian areas as it had promised. Barak even encouraged the construction of illegal Jewish colonies faster than did his predecessor. Indeed, during Barak's 18 months in office, the number of settlers grew by an astounding 12%. The Clinton administration did not challenge these policies, nor did it criticize the expropriation of land or the incarceration of Palestinian prisoners. "The most important aspect of this process is that Israel had not honored any single date previously specified for the implementation of the agreements. For example, the withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho, which was supposed to happen on 13 December 1993, was completed on 4 May 1994, the Palestinian elections in the territories under the control of the Palestinians which was supposed to be conducted on 13 July 1994, were held on 21 January 1996, the withdrawals which were supposed to be achieved in July 1996 did not occur, and the final status negotiations, which were supposed to begin during the third year of the interim period, that is in 1996, began in 2000"(Ahmad, 1998). Rinehart added, "what happened immediately after Oslo, was that instead Israel tuned to execute the autonomy plan, the Palestinians did not get control over any aspect of their life. On the contrary, more and more land was confiscated; the settlements have doubled in number. The Palestinians were isolated in enclaves which are surrounded by settlements and bypass roads, and both Gaza and the West Bank were divided into areas where the Palestinians are closed and have no contact with each other or the outside worlds. What has been executed is this new form of the Apartheid in South Africa. So that was the pattern that emerged in Oslo." (Rinehart, 2002).

The Peace Process in the Camp David Summit: The Bantustan Model Rejected

It was in this context that former American President Clinton called for the convening of the trilateral conference to be held in Camp David in July 2000 to reach a framework for the final status agreement. The conference, which came to be known as Camp David II, convened from 11 till 24 July 2000 and was attended by Arafat, Barak, and Clinton. The objective was to forge a framework accord on final status issues. That objective was not achieved. No one knows for sure what were the exact discussions in the summit,

as there were not written offers and counter-offers. The Israeli proposals were never put in writing although they required from the Palestinian side major concessions. However, the recollections of those who participated in the summit provide us with insights on what happened in Camp David in July 2000(3).

According to these narratives, the Israeli Government did not submit any written offers to the PA. All the offers were orally presented, some times by President Clinton, who submitted Israeli offers as if they were Americans. Barak refused to withdraw from all the occupied Palestinian territory. Israel offered to return 96% of the occupied territories. This was the percentage that was widely quoted by Clinton and Barak. But there was a catch. The percentage applies to the Palestinian territories which would be left after Israel annexed greater East Jerusalem and rural areas to the east and north, much of the Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea coast, and part of the "Judean Desert" which Barak argued must remain under Israeli control. "Taking these additional areas into account, Israel was offering only about 80% of the West Bank," (Zunes, 2002). Barak also insisted on retaining 69 Jewish settlements in the West Bank, where 85% of the settlers lived (the total number of settlers at this time was 200,000). Barak offered to evacuate only 15% of the settlers. The settlements that would remain carved up Palestinian territory in such a way that a contiguous Palestinian state in the West Bank would be impossible to create. Under the Barak proposal in Camp David, the West Bank would be split up by a series of settlement blocs, bypass roads, and Israeli roadblocks, which would divide the Palestinian State into four noncontiguous cantons. In the areas where there might be a land bridge, Palestinians would be forced to detour 50 miles just to travel between towns only five miles apart. According to this Plan, there would be no Palestinian territory to settle the Palestinian refugees or to develop.

Further, Barak demanded Israel supervision of border crossing between the new Palestinian state and neighboring states. Israel would control Palestinian airspace, seacoast, and aquifers. He also rejected the right of return of Palestinian refugees expelled from the Palestine in 1948, even a symbolic gesture. Naturally, Israel would indefinitely control Jerusalem and the Palestinian State would be given some non-sovereign jurisdiction over Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Such jurisdiction would only include the land, but would not comprise what was beneath the land. Finally, Barak wanted Arafat to sign a declaration in which he pledged that the Arab-Israeli conflict was over and that there would be no more Palestinian claims in the future. Given the past experience of the Palestinians with Israel, which showed that non-of the previously signed frameworks and agreements was ever fully implemented. Arafat wanted to link the declaration with the signing of a detailed and legally binding agreement. One must remember that the Camp David II negotiations were dealing with a framework, not an agreement. However, Clinton and Barak rejected and wanted an immediate positive reply from Arafat, which was not forthcoming. According to Zukes, "the Palestinians insisted that any permanent status agreement be truly a final agreement rather than one subject to further negotiations. In the previous agreements, further negotiations were often an opportunity for the US

to bully the Palestinians into accepting Israeli demands while refusing to challenge Israeli noncompliance." Further, Arafat argued that he would never sign an agreement that gave Israel full control of Al-Quds including the sovereign right over Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Nevertheless, Arafat presented significant concessions in Camp David. He agreed to change the June 1967 borders by accepting the principle of land swaps, and the concept of settlement blocs, ceded to Jewish neighborhoods built in East Jerusalem, and was ready to reach a compromise on the question of the refugees (Avnery, 2002). But, at the end Clinton squarely put the blame on the Palestinians and declared that the offers presented in Camp David have been withdrawn. Barak also portrayed Arafat as the man who wasted a golden opportunity.

What were the main reasons for the collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations held in Camp David in July 2000? Clinton and Barak blamed Arafat for the collapse of the Camp. Agha and Malley attributed the failure to the predication of the negotiations on false assumptions; that is, peace could be achieved through direct negotiations without international involvement and through confidence-building measures. In their judgement, under conditions of power imbalance direct negotiations would result in a settlement that was quite heavy on the weaker part. They went on to argue that "mistrust is the consequence of the conflict, not its cause," which means that the resolution of the conflict should precede the confidence-building measures upon which the Oslo process was predicated.

In our judgement there were four main reasons for the failure of the Camp David process, (I) The Israelis and the Palestinians entered the Camp David summit with two different views of the process. The Palestinians understood that they had already given all the concessions they could give in the DOP. What was left was to proceed to receive their dues according to the UN resolutions. That was why Arafat did not submit proposals to the Camp David summit. The Israelis thought that what the Palestinians had given in the DOP had been already attained, and that it was about time for the Palestinians to submit new concessions. The Palestinians also understood that the peace process was a means to implement the UN resolutions and it should not reflect the balance of power. Israel thought differently. The agreement should reflect Israel's overwhelming power in the region, and should not relate to any of the UN resolutions on the conflict. These two different conceptions of the process were doomed to collide in Camp David. The major error lay in the non-reciprocal commitments given in the beginning the Oslo process, (iii) Israel and the USA insisted on going to the final status negotiations without fully implementing the previous agreements. The non-implemented items in the previous agreements were presented in Camp David as if they were new concessions. This created an atmosphere of lack of trust on the other side among the Palestinian negotiators, who in turn, insisted on operational plans rather than on frameworks, especially as the other side wanted a public declaration on the end of the conflict, which the Palestinians declined to endorse without full guarantees. The Palestinians went to Camp David under heavy American pressure. They wanted to honor the previous commitments before going to

the final status negotiations as stated in the DOP. (iv) The negotiations proceeded without a legal frame of reference. Although the DOP referred to a settlement on the basis on Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, these resolutions were scrapped during the negotiations. The negotiations proceeded on the basis of the power balance between the Palestinians and the Israelis, which was definitely in favor of Israel. Israel expected a settlement that reflected the power imbalance, rather than the mutually agreed upon legal international framework. It also proceeded on the assumption, which was widely shared by Clinton, that the main criteria for judging the proposals were the security of Israel, rather than the security of all. Or else how can one understand the control of Palestinian airspace and seacoast by Israel even after the final settlement; and (iii) The American bias towards Israel during the negotiations was also one of the main reasons of failure. According to Zunes, (Zukes, 2002) "throughout the peace process, the Clinton administration seemed to coordinate the pace and agenda of the talks closely with Israel, ignoring Palestinian concerns... a top Israeli negotiator admitted that Israel and the US worked closely with each other on their respective proposals; for all intents and purposes, these were largely joint proposals.... Clinton naively thought that he could pressure Arafat to accept Israeli terms."(Also, Ali, 2001).

According to some Israeli analysts, Camp David negotiations failed because Barak never wanted them to succeed. Gabi Schiffer wrote in *Ha'aretz* on 24 July 2002, that "Barak did not fail. He succeeded in achieving his real intentions regarding the peace process. Barak simply never wanted to reach an agreement. He is the one who had practically contributed to the escalation of the conflict with the Palestinians as the breakdown of the Camp David negotiations contributed to the outbreak of the second Intifada," (Quoted in Kaialy, 2001). We have referred earlier to the fact that Barak was one of the staunchest critics of the Oslo process long before coming to power in 1999. Avnery subscribed to this view in a different way. He argued that Barak harbored deep contempt of the Arabs and never trusted them in the first place to make a deal with them. He quoted Barak as saying in an interview on 13 June 2002 the following, "They (the Palestinians) as the products of a culture in which to tell a lie creates no dissonance. They do not suffer from the problem of telling lies that exists in Judeo-Christian culture...truth is seen as an irrelevant category." Avnery commented, "the statement is monstrous. The Great Peace maker demonizes the culture of a billion human beings...when used by a politician trying to explain why he failed to make peace with these products of culture, it makes further study seem superfluous." Ron Pondak, one of Oslo's Israeli architects, made a narrative of the Camp David negotiations, ended up putting the responsibility on Barak's shoulders. "In the traditions of the Persian Market's bargaining, Barak engaged in foot-dragging during negotiations...Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas) recommended that the general principles guiding the Permanent Status agreement be established at the outset of the negotiations. Barak rejected this proposal fearing he would expose his positions too early in the game. Barak should have understood that without a presentation of these principles, an agreement could not be reached." Slater (2001) also concluded that it was Barak who destroyed the Camp David negotiations. He argued that "In view of the settlement expansion, Barak's past

(or continued) ideology, his distaste for Arabs in general and Arafat in particular, his endless, sometimes daily, radical flip-flopping, and the preemptory manner in which he dealt with the Palestinians at camp David, even some of his own cabinet ministers wondered whether he had been seriously seeking a settlement and was really prepared to pay the necessary price for it.

Consequences of the Failure of The Middle East Peace Process

As soon as the Camp David conference ended, Barak proceeded to punish the Palestinians and entice them into violent insurgency. On 28 September 2000, he gave opposition leader Sharon the green light to visit Al-Haram Al-Sharif with 1000 security forces protecting him. This was done despite personal pleas from Arafat to refrain from this step which would provoke the Palestinians. Barak rejected Arafat's plea and proceeded with the Sharon's visit which he knew would trigger violence. That is exactly what happened and obviously what he wanted. That day the Second Palestinian Intifada was triggered, which came to be known as Al-Aqsa Intifada. The Israeli forces responded by opening fire on the Palestinian protestors killing four of them in Al-Haram Al-Sharif area. The Intifada was not pre-planned, as Barak and Sharon claimed. In fact, Arafat went to Barak's residence asking him not to allow this provocative and unnecessary act. However, Barak insisted and later claimed that the Palestinians should not have protested in the first place. The Intifada was the first main consequence of years of living under occupation which ended with failure in July 2000. It was also the consequence of the unabated Israeli colonization of the occupied territories. Palestinians seeing their lands being taken on a daily basis while Israeli's claimed peace. The rate of colonization during the first six months of 2000 was almost 96% higher than the rate of colonization during the first six months of 1999. Meanwhile, Israel began partitioning the West Bank and Gaza into unconnected divisions. The West Bank was divided into 31 separate zones, and the Gaza Strip into 16 separate zones. One must also recall that the Security Council resolution issued on 7 October 2000 had "deplored the provocation carried at Al-Haram Al-Sahrif on 28 September 2000 and the subsequent violence". The resolution also condemned Israel for committing crimes against humanity, meaning the Palestinians. All the members of the Security Council, except the US, which had abstained, unanimously approved this resolution.

On 10 December, Barak called new parliamentary elections. He used the elections to coerce the Palestinian Authority to give more concessions than were required in Camp David arguing that these were needed to defeat the right wing leader Sharon, even though his forces were in full swing killing Palestinian civilians and destroying their infrastructure. Nevertheless, Arafat accepted under Arab, European, and American pressure to re-negotiate with Barak. The new Israeli-Palestinian negotiations started in Washington on 18 December and ended on 23 of the same month. During these negotiations, Clinton presented a new Israeli proposal, as if it were an American one. He suggested that Israel cede sovereignty over Haram Al-Sharif and Arab neighbors in

Jerusalem and 96% of the West Bank (and all of Gaza Strip, and annex settlement blocs in exchange of giving the Palestinians Israeli land near Gaza. Jerusalem would be the capital of two countries. The Palestinians would give up the right of return to Israel and accept a "Jewish" connection to the Temple Mount and sovereignty over the Western Wall and the holy site beneath it. Israeli forces would remain in the Jordan Valley for 3 to 6 years to control borders, and then be replaced by an international force. The agreement would declare "an end to conflict."(Migdalovitz, 2002). It is important to notice that Clinton did not count the greater occupied Jerusalem or the security zones in the Jordan Valley and elsewhere when calculating the 96% of the West Bank he claimed his proposal offered to Palestinians. Barak said that he would accept the plan as a basis of negotiations if Arafat did so. Arafat, in turn, sought clarifications on the contiguity of Palestinian State territory, the division of East Jerusalem, and the right of refugees to return.

The talks were resumed in Taba, Egypt in January 2001. In Taba, there was a real progress in the negotiations, as Barak wanted an agreement to help him in the elections. It was agreed that that Israel would withdraw from 95% of the West Bank and compensate the annexation of the settlement blocs by other lands, the opening of safe passages between Gaza and the West Bank under Palestinian control. It was agreed that on the issue of Jerusalem, everything that is Arab will be under Palestinian control and everything that is Jewish will be under Israeli control with Israel sovereignty over the Western Wall, in addition to the return of 10,000 Palestinian refugees annually for 10 years and compensating the rest. The two negotiators, Israeli Foreign Minister Ben-Ami, and Abu Al'a, declared that the peace looked so near. However, once again the Israelis refused to put all of this on paper. They wanted to give the impression that there was a progress in order to help Barak in the elections (Gad, 2002). On 3 January 2001, Arafat met Clinton in Washington and informed him that he had accepted Israeli proposals presented in Taba with some reservations to be ironed out later, and asked him to inform Barak of that position. Barak did not reply to Arafat's move (Agha and Malley, 13 June 2002). Barak never replied to Arafat and waited until Clinton left office. Sontage (2001) quoted top Palestinian negotiator, Nabil Shaath as saying, "If Camp David was too little, Taba was too late." Meanwhile, Clinton approved the largest sale of military helicopters to Israel, equipment that had been used in some of the worst Israeli atrocities during the preceding weeks. A Pentagon official announced that the US weapon sales do not carry a stipulation forbidding their use against civilians and that the US would not second-guess an Israeli commander who orders such attacks. Congress also approved a foreign aid bill of US$2.82 billion to Israel. According to Zunes, "Not a single amendment was even offered that would have linked the aid with an end to human rights violations." (Zunes, 2002).

On 6 February 2001, Sharon was elected Prime Minister of Israel. He vowed to retain united Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, the Jordan Valley and other security areas. Sharon's associates declared that the results of the negotiations since Camp David were null and void. The newly-elected American President, George Bush, Jr., also said that the Clinton proposals "were no longer the United States proposals." Sharon said that he

could accept a disarmed Palestinian state on 42% of the West Bank. The Palestinians insisted that the talks restart from where they left off at Taba.

The Intifada continued in full swing. Israel blamed the PA for failing to prevent the Palestinian violence and re-occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip and destroyed the entire political and economic infrastructure of the PA. Between 28 September 2000 and 31 March 2004, 2930 Palestinians were killed , 38562 were wounded, 7389 were taken prisoners, 2022 homes were fully demolished and 36776 homes were partially destroyed. During the same period 778 Israelis were killed(4). According to Larsen, the UN Special Envoy to the Middle East, the Palestinian economy lost US$5.4 billion during the same period (4). This is in addition to thousands of Palestinian homes destroyed and thousands of Palestinians arrested in Israeli detention camp (Hussein, 2002).

Perhaps, the main problem of the Intifada is the use of armed violence against Israeli civilians. One could argue that Israel has been using violence against the Palestinians since 1948. However, the use of guns and bombs, especially against civilians, had hurt the Palestinians and provided Israel with ample pretexts to crush the Palestinians, those who use violence and those who do not. The first Intifada (1987-1993) was mainly peaceful. Palestinians threw stones on the Israeli soldiers for almost six years. This had demoralized the Israeli soldiers, and embarrassed the Israeli governments. One must give credit to the Intifada for convincing all actors that the Palestinians will not settle for the Israeli territorial hegemony, and that it was the Intifada that led President Bush to change his hands-off approach towards the Arab-Israeli conflict and towards an involvement in the peace process.

Rinehart maintained that Israel not only triggered the Intifada, but was also making sure that Palestinian violence would continue in order to use it to destroy the Palestinian society. She noticed that whenever the Palestinian violence stopped, Israel provoked it by assassinating a Palestinian activist in order to re-trigger the Intifada. In November 2001, the Palestinian violence inside Israel stopped for almost two months. Israel responded by assassinating Mahmoud Abu Hanoud, which led to Palestinian reprisals. Rinehart contended that this act was designed to create the atmosphere of bloodshed before Sharon's visit to the US as Sharon knew that there would be a price for the assassination of Abu Hanoud. Israeli moves to destroy the Palestinian Authority cannot be viewed as spontaneous 'acts of retaliation'. It is a calculated plan long in the making. The execution requires first weakening the resistance of the Palestinians, which Israel has been doing systematically since October 2000 through killing, bombarding of infrastructure, imprisoning the people in their hometowns, and bringing them close to starvation, All this, while waiting for the international conditions to 'ripen' for the more advanced steps of the plan," (Rinehart, 2002).

Apart from economic compensation for the Palestinians, the Arabs were helpless in dealing with the Israeli atrocities and provocation. In fact, most of them understood that Sharon was trying to provoke some Arab countries to intervene so, as he would use this opportunity to trigger a regional war under conditions of power imbalance.

Consequently, Arab response was mainly of a political nature and it entailed offering Israel more concessions. On 27 March 2002, Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah proposed that the Arab League summit offer "normal relations and security for Israel in exchange for full withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories, recognition of an independent Palestinian state with Al-Quds as its capital, and the return of refugees. The summit's Beirut Declaration endorsed the plan. The summit communiqué also supported the Intifada against occupation and called for stopping the establishment of ties with Israel. "The Arab Peace Initiative", as it came to be known, seemed to have been encouraged by the Security Council resolution 1397 issued on 12 March 2002 which called for the establishment of a Palestinian state. However, on the day that followed the announcement of the Arab Initiative, Israel launched a massive assault on Jenine, which resulted in the widely known Jenine Massacre, and which, naturally embarrassed the Arabs. In our judgement, the Arab Peace Initiative was ill timed. Concessions should be offered on a reciprocal basis on the negotiation table rather than unilaterally through the media. Israel considered the Initiative as a political gain that had been attained without a price and asked for more concessions. It came to the conclusion that the Initiative reflected Arab weakness and as a result it should wait until it could extract more concessions.

Before the convening of the Arab summit in Beirut in March 2002, Vice President Cheney came to the region offering the Arabs a deal. The deal was to put restraints on Sharon's attacks on the Palestinians in lieu of Arab endorsement of an American projected invasion of Iraq. The Cheney proposal was rejected. In fact, the Arab summit witnessed an Iraqi-Saudi rapprochement, which naturally infuriated the Americans. The Jenine Massacre, which immediately followed the Arab summit, was partly a response to the Arab rejection of the Cheney offer.

The US resorted to another strategy to persuade the Arabs to endorse its projected invasion of Iraq. It began to take steps to formulate a proposal for a Palestinian-Israeli deal. In May 2002, the USA formulated a new framework called the Quartet, which included the USA, the EU, Russia, and the UN. The Quartet was entrusted with the task of formulating a "Road Map," to the resolution of the conflict. The Americans made the formulation and presentation of the Map conditional upon the election of a new Palestinian leadership. As the Palestinians rejected the American intervention in the choice of their leader, a compromise was reached to create the position of a Palestinian Prime Minister with significant powers to enable him to negotiate with Israel. This was done with the election of Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) as the first Palestinian Prime Minister. The Americans assumed that Abu Mazen would be the only negotiator with them, thereby Arafat would be scrapped.

The Road Map was released on 17 March 2003 as President Bush was boarding the Presidential plane to the Azores islands to fix the date with his European allies for the the invasion of Iraq. The timing of the release of the Road Map, although it was ready long before, indicated that the US was using this document to win Arab public opinion to its side as it was about to invade an Arab country. In fact when the Road Map was

announced in March , the first phase of the Map was supposed to be completed by the end of May. This left less than three months for the implementation of the first phase, although it was supposed to be implemented over nine months (beginning from October 2002). The Road Map was formally presented to the Palestinian Authority and Israel on 30 April 2003, after the occupation of Iraq, although the first phase was supposed to be completed by the end of May 2003.

The Road Map divided the resolution of the conflict into three phases, the progress from one phase to the other depending upon the assessment of the Quartet. The first phase would mainly focus on disarming the Palestinian resistance groups, conducting Palestinian reforms, recognition of Israel, stopping the Intifada, Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation. Israel would only secure the freedom of movement of the leaders of the Palestinian Authority and de-construct the colonies built since the election of the present Israeli Government. Israel would be under no obligation to disarm the colonizers or reduce the level of Israeli armament in the occupied territories. What this meant is that whereas the Palestinians would be disarmed, the Israelis would retain their arms. During the second phase, the emphasis would be on more Palestinian political reforms, and security cooperation. As such cooperation proceeded, Israel would withdraw from the areas it occupied after September 28, 2000 and would freeze all colonization (settlement) activities including the natural growth of the colonies. Further, an international conference would be held, provided the actors agreed, to establish an interim Palestinian state. A new international conference would be held during the third phase on the permanent status of the Palestinian state, and Arab states would establish normal relations with Israel. Perusal of the Road map shows that it is based on the same faulty incremental and confidence-building approach adopted during the Oslo process. The Map put solid commitments on the Arabs, such as a Palestinian recognition of Israel during the first phase (which has been repeatedly done) without a similar Israeli recognition of a Palestinian state, and establishing normal relations with Israel during the third phase, without putting reciprocal commitment on Israel, except to negotiate. Further, whereas the Road Map commits the PA to dismantle resistance organizations, and fully disarm, it does not oblige Israel to disarm the settlers or to withdraw its armed forces from the occupied territories, which means that the Palestinians will be the only side who will be disarmed. It is our argument that the Road Map will meet the same fate of the Oslo process, as it does not appreciate the difficulties of the Palestinians who have to negotiate each inch of their territories with Israel and see that progress depended largely on the goodwill of the occupier. It is also based on the assumption that the root of the conflict lied in the Palestinians, who lack the democracy of Israel, rather than in occupation. The assumption is that if the Palestinians were democratic it would be easy for them to cede the land to Israel.

The Road Map was an American attempt to absorb some of the Arab anger directed against the US as a result of its invasion and occupation of Iraq in March-April 2003. One must recall that the Road Map was supposed to be released and implemented in October 2002. It was only released before the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq, one

year after the Arab rejected the March 2002 Cheney offer and formally presented in the wake of the occupation of Iraq. The main objective was to re-direct Arab public opinion away from the Iraqi question and to absorb some of Arab fury over the destruction of the Iraqi state. In fact, as the USA was formally presenting the Road Map, it was announcing that the Map was no longer viable. In April 2003, the American Ambassador to Israel announced that the Road map was no longer suitable (Al-*Shark Al-Awsat*, 16 April 2003), and in the same month Richard Perle, member of the Council on Defence Policies in the Pentagon, said that the Arabs should not be compensated for the war on Iraq by accelerating the implementation of the Road Map (*Al-Shark Al-Awsat*, 18 April 2003).

The Future of the Middle East Peace Process

The Middle East Peace Process has been recently influenced by four major developments. These are (i) the advent to power in the USA of the Bush, Jr. in January 2001 and his re-election to a second term, (ii) the September 11, 2001 attacks in the USA, (iii) the American invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003; and (iv) the death of Yaser Arafat, the chairman of the PA, and his replacement by Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen).

The first development was the advent of a Republican and ultra-conservative administration to power in the USA. This administration approaches the process from an ideological conviction based on the preferences of the Christian-Zionist conglomerate in the USA. This was reflected in the support George Bush gave to Sharon, his Israeli counterpart, who shares his approach to the conflict. Sharon was elected to power one month after Bush. The new American Administration adopted a policy of neglect to the peace process on the grounds that the Palestinains had let the former American administration down in Camp David. This was at a time in which Sharon was already in full swing trying to quash the second Intifada by military force.

The second main development was the September 11, 2001 attacks in the US. After the attacks, the USA launched a global war on "terrorist" groups and the states which it claimed support them through a strategy of military pre-emption. Combating "terrorism" became the first priority in the American foreign policy agenda. Israel jumped into the American-led campaign by endorsing it and arguing that the Palestinian Intifada was a form of terrorism and that by quashing the Palestinian Intifada, it was also contributing to the cause of combating terrorism. The American President was already pre-disposed to endorse this argument and Israel was given the green signal to proceed in full swing.

It is also in this context, that the third main development emerged. Immediately after September 11, 2001 the USA invaded and occupied Afghanistan claiming that the Afghan government hosted and supported Al-Qaida organization, the main suspect behind the September 11 attacks. It then began to develop plans to invade Iraq on grounds that it possessed weapons of mass destruction and had links with terrorist

groups. The Bush administration linked the Palestinian and Iraqi questions. It began to change its policy of neglect of the Arab-Israeli conflict that it vowed to pursue immediately after the advent of Bush to power in 2001, to a more active policy provided that the Arabs endorsed its plans to invade Iraq. Before the convening of the Arab summit in Beirut in March 2002, Vice President Cheney came to the region offering the Arabs a deal. The deal was to put restraints on Sharon's attacks on the Palestinians in lieu of Arab endorsement of an American projected invasion of Iraq. The Cheney proposal was rejected. In fact, the Arab summit witnessed an Iraqi-Saudi rapprochement, which naturally infuriated the Americans. The Jenine Massacre, which immediately followed the Arab summit, was partly a response to the Arab rejection of the Cheney offer. As we have seen earlier, the US resorted to the Road Map strategy to persuade the Arabs to endorse its projected invasion of Iraq. The Road Map was outlined earlier.
The occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq had major ramifications for the peace process in the Middle East. It resulted in a further tipping of the balance of power in the region in favor of Israel. Iraq was removed from the Middle East power equation and Iran, an ally of the Palestinians, was surrounded from virtually all fronts by Western forces. Syria also found itself for the first time in its history a neighbor of a new adversary, the United States troops in Iraq. The US used these developments to further weaken the Syrians by forcing them to vacate Lebanese territory, thereby strengthening Israel power in the region.

These trends were reflected in the US publicly endorsing for the first time Israel's territorial ambitions to annex Palestinian territories. On 14 April 2004 President Bush, Jr. publicly pledged to endorse the Israeli vision of the nature of the future settlement. In a joint press conference with Sharon, the American President said that the USA "will not prejudice the outcome of final status negotiations. That matter is for all the parties. "However he proceeded to added that " the realities on the ground and in the region have changed greatly over the past several decades, and any final settlement must take into account those realities and to be agreeable to all the parties....It seems clear that an agreed, just, fair and realistic framework for a solution to the Palestinian refugee issue, as a part of any final status agreement, will need to be found through the establishment of a Palestinian state and the settling of Palestinian refugees there, rather than Israel.....In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing Israeli population centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949....It is realistic to expect that any final status agreement will only be achieved on the basis of mutually agreed changes that reflect these realities." The President also stated that "the USA is strongly committed to Israel's security and well being as a Jewish state."(www.state.gov/p/nea/rls/31420.htm). The Bush Statement fully endorsed the Israeli view of the future settlement. It was a reflection to the fact that the peace process has been held hostage to the intricacies of American electoral politics. The statement was unnecessary for the future of the peace process, but was needed to boost Bush's electoral stand. The crux of the Bush statement was to retain the "settlement blocs" , to deny the right of return for Palestinian refugees to their original homeland, and to keep the right of return of the

Jews to Israel so as to keep its identity as a "Jewish state." Although it referred to a Palestinian state, it made this establishment of that state contingent upon Israel's approval concerning the timing and the boundaries of the state. Nevertheless, it did not make the concessions given to Israel in Palestinian territories contingent upon the approval of the Palestinians. However, the Bush statement was not a major change in the American policy towards the Arab Israeli conflict, as was widely believed by some Arab analysts who conflict compared likend the Bush statement to the 1917 Balfour Declaration(Yousri, 2004). In fact, this statement just publicized the Clinton proposals presented in the Camp David-2 Summit. An examination of these proposals, as they were previously outlined, would reveal that they were not drastically different from the "Bush Promise" to Sharon in April 2004. After the re-election of Bush he announced that the projected Palestinian state would be established in 2009, by the end of his second term, thereby announcing the official scrapping of the "Road Map." According to this Map, the state was supposed to be established in 2005.

The final development in the Middle East was the change of leadership of the PA with the death of Yasser Arafat in November 2004 and the election of Mahmoud Abbas as a new chairman in January 2005. In conformity with the prevailing view in the West that Arafat was responsible for the failure of Camp David II, Arafat's death was met with a sense of relief and optimism that the peace process could be re-started as the new leadership would be more willing to give the concessions that Arafat did not provide. It coud be argued that Abbas would be able to be more conciliatory than Arafat. But one has to realize that Abbas functions within democratic institutions which have to endorse any deal that Abbas might reach with the Israelis. Palestinian legislative institutions would have to ratify any Abbas-Sharaon deal. Abbas would likely advocate a return to the Abbas-Ben Ami agreement reached in December 2000 which Arafat has also endorsed as we pointed out later. The question is that the new Israeli and American leaderships think that the post September 11 changes do not warrant giving the PA concessions similar to those reached by Abbas and Ben Ami.

A Sharon-Peres coalition is not likely to change these conclusions. Such a coalition will strengthen Sharon's "Iron Fist" rather than persuade him to shift towards the Abbas-Ben Ami deal. The withdrawal from Gaza plan is viewed by Sharon as a long term step which ought to be followed by a long testing period. In the meantime, the process of colonization and land annexation will continue unabated. Further, the projected American-Israeli offensive against Iran is not likely to leave much room for peaceful negotiations in the Middle East. The region has actually returned to a Hobbesian-style state of nature in which the regional and global hegemons see no reason for compromise.

CONCLUSION

Today, peace in the Middle East seems to be a mirage. In our judgement, the main obstacle to peace is the American unconditional support to Israel. The USA considers

Israel a state above the law and the only judge of Middle Eastern security. Israeli security is considered the only criterion for judging any peace proposal. We have noticed the huge military and economic aid provided to Israel immediately after the collapse of the Camp David negotiations. On June 28, 2001, Israel and the Palestinians agreed to a 7-day period without violence to be followed by a 6-week cooling off period. Secretary of State Powel said that it was up to Sharon to determine if violence abated (Migdalovitz, 2002). During the apex of the Sharon atrocities against the Palestinians, Bush publicly called him "a man of peace." On 2 May 2003, Rice, the US National Security Advisor, said in an interview with an Israeli newspaper that the "US cosiders Israel's security as the key to world security," (*Al-Bayan*, 3 May 2003). On 14 April 2005, the USA moved to prejudge the projected Israeli-Palestinian negotiations by endorsing Israel's entitlement to retain most of the Zionist colonies in the occupied territories. In the meantime, it has exercised the maximum pressure on Syria to withdraw from Lebanon even though, the Lebanese government wanted the Syrians to stay. The comparison between the American approach to the Israel-Palestinian track and the Syrian-Lebanese track is quite revealing.

The main conclusion to be drawn from the Middle Eastern peace process is that the process should not replace the peace. This is the legacy that has been plaguing peace in the Middle East. Further, in making the peace, power balance is crucial, even if some of the actors pretended it was not. The reciprocity of the commitments and the clear identification of the ultimate result of the process are more important than the process itself. Emphasis on incrementalism and confidence building is not a substitute to a comprehensive view of the resolution of the conflict. Historical experience shows that confidence building measures were never a viable strategy for conflict resolution. These measures are status-oriented ones which reinforce a settlement rather than create one.

ENDNOTES

(1) This does not mean that there were no international and American proposals to achieve Middle East peace before 1973. One can refer to the UN Security Council Resolution 242 and the diplomacy led by the UN special envoy Jaring and the cease-fire proposal of US Secretary of State Rogers. These moves never entailed direct negotiations between the Arabs and the Israelis as happened after the October 1973 War.

(2) The offer referred to by Waxman was not presented in Camp David, but in the subsequent Taba negotiations in January 2001. Arafat accepted this offer and went to Washington to ask Clinton to convey his acceptance to Barak. The latter never replied. Further, Waxman asserts that Barak wanted a "final status agreement." The Camp David offer was supposed to be a "framework for further negotiations in the future."

(3) Among those who wrote about the discussions of Camp David are (i) Robert Malley, special assistant to President Clinton for Arab-Israeli Affairs and director of Near East

and South Asian Affairs in the National Security Council and a participant in the Camp David Summit. Malley wrote with Hussein Agha an account of what happened in Camp David published in *Foreign Affairs* in 2002, (ii) Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), high-ranking Palestinian negotiator in Camp David and the present Palestinian Prime Minister. He submitted a report to the Palestinian Central Council in August 2000 in which he reviewed the positions of both sides during the negotiations. The report was published in *Al-Hayat* on 11 September 2001, (iii) Former Egyptian Ambassador Salah Bassyouni, a top activist in the Egyptian Peace Movement, (iv) Amnon Kapeliouk also wrote a major article in which he reviewed three books published by Israeli top officials including former Israeli Foreign Minister Ben-Ami, and Yossi Beilin, an Israeli negotiator in Camp David, and Gilad Sher, (v) Professor Slater also published a major academic article in *Political Science Quarterly* in which he analyzed the reasons for the failure of the Camp David negotiations. All these reviews and others provide us with a general view of what happened in the summit.

(4) These are the statistics of the PA State Information Service, Al-Hayat, 14 August 2003, and in Al-Siyassa (Kuwait), 30 March 2004.

REFERENCES

-Abu Taleb, Hassan, "The regional setting of the settlement," in Ahmad Al-Rasheedy, ed., *The Palestinian Question and the Prospects of the Peaceful Settlement*, (Cairo: Center for Political Research and Studies, Cairo University, Egypt, 1998), pp. 43-68 (in Arabic).

-Agha Hussein, and Robert Malley, "Camp David and after: An exchange, A reply to Ehud Barak," *The New York Review of Books*, 13 June 2002.

-Agha, Hussein, and Robert Malley, "The last negotiation," *Foreign Affairs,* May-June 2002.

-Ahamd, Youssef Ahmad,"Oslo as a framework for settlement: The theory and the practice," in Ahmad Al-Rasheedy, ed., *op.cit*, pp. 15-25.

Al-Azar, Mohammad Khaled, "Issues of the political settlement: A review of the Palestinian policy," in Ahmad Al-Rasheedy, ed., *Op.cit*, pp. 175-224.

-Aly, Abdel-Monem, "Hot Bargaining: The Middle East 2001," *Perceptions* (Ankara), 6(2), June-August 2001, pp. 57-70.

-Avnery, Uri, "Barak: A villa in the jungle," July 2002. http://gush-shalo.org/archives/barak.htm

-Bassyouni, Salah," What are the facts of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations until now?" *Al-Hayat*, 25 April 2002.

-Ben-Ami, Shlomo, "End of a journey," *Ha'aretz*, 14 September 2001.

-Bishara, Marawan, *Palestine/Israel: Peace or a Racist Regime*, (Cairo: Center for Human Rights Studies, 2001) In Arabic.

-Boyle, Francis," The Al-Aqsa Intifada and international law," 30 November 2000. www.lawsociety.org/Intifada 2000/articles/intlaw.htm

-Dowty, Allan and Michelle Gawerc, "The Intifada: Revealing the chasm," http://meria.idc.il/journal/2001/issue3/jv5n3a4.html

-Evans, Garth and Robert Malley, "Road Map vs. reality," *The News* (Pakistan) 7 May 2003.

-Gad, Emad," The road to the Intifada," in Emad Gad, ed., *Al-Aqsa Intifada*, (Cairo: Center for Political and Strategic Studies of Al-Ahram, 2002), pp. 11-42.

Howeady, Fahmi, "President Clinton's proposals," *Al-Ahram*, (Cairo), 2 January 2002.

-Hussein, Nazir, "Israel's state terrorism and regional peace, Post 9/11 scenario," *Strategic Studies* (Islamabad), 22 (3) autumn 2002, pp. 175-224.

-Kaialy, Maged, " A new Israel view of the Camp David negotiations," *Al-Hayat* (London), 16 August 2001.

-Kapeliok, Amnon, "A partner for the future: Conducting catastrophe," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, February 2002. http://m.ondediob.com/2002/02/03campdavid

-Klein, Menahem, "The origins of the Intifada II and rescuing peace for Israelis and Palestinians," www.fmep.org/analysis/klein origins of intifada.II.html

-Laor, Yitzak, "The tears of Zion," *New Left Review*, 10, July-August 2001.

-Mark, Clyde, *Palestinians and the Middle East Peace: Issues for the United States*, (Washington D.C. Congressional Research Service, The Library of Congress, March 2003).

-Migalovitz, Carol, *The Middle East Peace Talks*, (Washington: Congressional Research Service, the Library of Congress, October 2002).

-Morris, Benny, "Camp David and after: An exchange," *The New York Review of Books*, June 13, 2002.

-Morris, Benny, "Camp David and after: Continued," *The New York Review of Books,* 27 June 2002.

Nafie, Ibrahim, "After the fall of the false masks: New formulas of peace are needed," *Al-Ahram*, 3 November 2000.

-Rinehart, Tanya, "Evil unleashed," 19 December 2001 www.mediamonitors.net/tanya 11.html

-Okasha, Said," The Palestinian War of Independence: An inside evaluative view," in Emad Gad, ed., *Op.cit*, pp. 43-79.

-Rinehart, Tanya, and Bryan Atinsky, "Transcript: Tanya Rinehart on the Al-Aqsa Intifada, Background and context," 2002 www.indymedia.org.is/imc/israel/ webcast/display.php3?article id=4

-Saikal, Amin, "Introduction: The Middle East peace process and the PLO problems," in Amin Saikal and G. Jukes, Eds. *The Middle East: Prospects for Settlement and Stability,* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1995), pp. 1-10.

Sayigh, Yezid, "Arafat and the anatomy of a revolt," *Survival,* 43 (3), autumn 2001, pp. 47-60.

-Shahak, Israel, and Norton Mezvinsky, *Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel,* (London: Pluto Press, 1999).

-Shlaim, Avi, "Israeli politics and the Gaza-Gericho settlement," in Amin Saikal. and G. Jukes, Eds. *Op.cit*, pp. 10-26.

-Slater, Jerome, "What went wrong? The collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process," *Political Science Quarterly*, 116(2), summer 2001.

-Sontag, Debora,"Quest for Mideast peace: How and why it failed," *The New York Times Review*, 26 July 2001.

-Waxman, Dov," A tragic hero: The decline and fall of Ehud Barak," *Perceptions* (Ankara), 6 (2), June –August 2001, pp. 71-88.

Yousri, Ibrahim, "What does the American endorsement of Israel's expansionist demands mean?," *Al-Ahram*, 24 April 2004.