

# Difficulties in the Solution to the Palestine-Israel Conflict and Some Contemplation Concerning Them

Fuchang Yang<sup>1</sup>

***Abstract: History and the current situation show that the Palestine-Israel conflict faces both internal and external difficulties. The author outlines its historical development and makes some suggestions on the solution to the problem. All parties concerned should be aware of the overall situation and its immediacy. The US should play an active part in regard of the peace negotiations. Israel and Palestine should try to decide on a feasible solution and carry it out in reality. The internal solidarity of Palestine is of great significance to reaching a peace treaty.***

***Key Words: Palestine-Israel Conflict; Peace Process; US Middle East Policy***

## I. The Unsolved Palestine-Israel Conflict

The Palestine-Israel conflict has been going on and off for more than 60 years ever since the outbreak of the first Middle East War in 1948, yet it still remains to be solved. Three decades has passed after the signing of The Camp David Agreement between Egypt and Israel in 1978. It is clearly written in the agreement that "Egypt and Israel promise that no threat or force shall be applied for the solution of conflicts and any conflict shall be resolved peacefully in accordance with Item 33 of the UN Charter." Later Egypt retreated from the battlefield and the core of the Middle East issue shifted from the Arab-Israel Conflict to the Palestine-Israel Conflict. However, the latter remains unsolved over the past three decades.

The International Conference on the Middle East was held in Annapolis, Maryland, US on November 27, 2007. It was another significant attempt of the international community to solve the Palestine-Israel conflict after the Madrid Middle East Peace Conference held in October 1991. With more than 40 countries present, this conference showed that the international community is concerned about this issue and wishes peace may be regained in this disturbing area so the people there may thereafter live a peaceful life. If so, there would be less conflicts and one less potential crisis around the world. Out of this good-will, all delegates

---

<sup>1</sup> Fuchang Yang, Honorary Director of China Association of Middle East Studies, former Vice Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC, former Ambassador to Kuwait and Egypt and former President of the China Foreign Affairs University.



gave their advice one after another and called for Palestine and Israel to make some progress toward peace.

At the opening ceremony, President Bush read the "Israel-Palestine Joint Understandings on Negotiations" signed by the United States of America, Palestine and Israel. The major points are as follows: Israel and Palestine agree to immediately launch good faith bilateral negotiations in order to conclude a peace treaty and fulfill the ultimate goal that Israel and Palestine peacefully coexist as "two states." Every effort would be made to conclude an agreement before the end of 2008. For this purpose, a steering committee, led jointly by the head of the delegation of each party, would meet continuously, as agreed. Leaders of Israel and Palestine would continue to meet on a bi-weekly basis. The parties also committed themselves to immediately implement their respective obligations under the Performance-Based Roadmap and agree to form an American, Palestinian and Israeli mechanism, led by the United States, to follow up on the implementation of the "Roadmap." The United States would monitor and judge the fulfillment of the commitments of both sides of the Roadmap. The Chinese delegation put forward "five points" in order to promote the solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict: all parties would respect history and take both sides into consideration while holding on to peaceful talks; all parties would discard violence and interference and stick fast to a peaceful solution; all-round efforts would be made toward balanced development and an atmosphere of peaceful talks; more attention would be attached to development and cooperation so as to lay a sounder basis of peaceful talks; all parties concerned would condense common understanding and dedicate more efforts so as to guarantee peaceful talks. The fundamental purpose of the above "five points" was to advance peaceful talks, for they both tally with the present situation in the Middle East and the international call for peace in this area.

However, we remain rather cautious about whether this conference's goals turned out as well as expected, considering the numerous difficulties and problems accumulated over the past decades. None of the solutions or agreements in terms of the Middle East issue, solutions issued by the UN, the Security Council of the UN, and bilateral or multilateral agreements, has been completely implemented. More often than not, the efforts of all parties were wasted with a blast or a slaughter. On November 28, 2007 an article in *Riyadh* said, "As there are too many pivotal problems unresolved between Israel and Palestine, any attempt to call for the normalization of the Israel-Palestine relation while evading those problems is doomed. This conference is nothing but an expedient measure to drag on the tough negotiations."<sup>2</sup> Others argued that if the conference could not solve the problems it might cause a backfire and give an edge to them instead. On November 28, 2007 Jordanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Salah Al deen Al Basheer spoke through

---

<sup>2</sup> "State Media in the Middle East Cautious about the Annapolis Conference," available at [http://www.chinamil.com.cn/site1/xwpxw/2007-11/29/content\\_1039647.htm](http://www.chinamil.com.cn/site1/xwpxw/2007-11/29/content_1039647.htm).

**Tomorrow**, a Jordanian newspaper, "If this new effort for bringing peace to Israel and Palestine fails again, disappointment will further intensify the conflicts in the Middle East area and extremism may take hold." To sum up, the international community held expectations as well as anxieties toward the Annapolis conference; they looked forward to a solution but they found it simply out of reach.

## **II. Internal and External Difficulties around the Israel-Palestine Conflict**

Looking back into history and presently, Israel and Palestine have found that they are facing both serious internal and external difficulties in search of a solution to their conflict. These difficulties are as follows:

### **A. Palestine**

Today's Palestine is divided into two parts with the Palestinian National Authority led by Mahmoud Abbas controlling the West Bank and Hamas the Gaza Strip. During the Palestinian Parliamentary Election in early 2006 Hamas won the majority of votes and formed its own cabinet. Now Fatah, which used to be the mainstream party of Palestine, fell into the role of an out-party. This result reflected the political preference of the Palestinian people. As the ruling party, Hamas had to make suitable policies to rule the country and help the people out of their misery. In June 2006 Hamas drove Fatah out of Gaza, which enlarged the gap between the two parties. In fact, this weakened the strength of Palestine as a whole, giving no help to fight external enemies or winning the support of the masses. Numerous efforts have been made to mediate their hostility. For instance, on February 23, 2008, President Saleh of the Republic of Yemen put forward his "Yemen Proposal", which suggested ending Hamas's unilateral control of the Gaza Strip, holding a national election in advance, resuming talks, reestablishing a Palestinian national coalition government, and rebuilding security forces.<sup>3</sup> On March 22, 2008, the Palestinian National Liberation Movement and the delegation of Hamas met in Sanna, the capital of Yemen but failed to agree on the "Yemen Proposal". The major reason for the discrepancy was the request for Hamas to abandon its unilateral control of the Gaza Strip. No doubt the Palestinian National Liberation Movement welcomed this idea but Hamas's answer was negative. If acceptance of this idea means its occupation of the whole Gaza Strip is wrong, then it would lose much of its support and influence. Meanwhile, Hamas would, without Gaza, lose a significant stronghold to rely on in

---

<sup>3</sup> "News Analysis: Why Is Peace Hard to Make among Palestinians," available at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2008-03/27/content\\_7870755.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2008-03/27/content_7870755.htm).



its fighting inside or outside Palestine.

As a matter of fact, it is quite beyond Hamas' power to control the Gaza City on its own. With no financial resources of its own, Hamas mainly relies on Israel for fuel and food. Arab countries also call for Hamas to change its unilateral control of Gaza. Therefore, only by cooperating with the Palestinian National Authority, which is recognized around the world, will Hamas be able to get out of this serious difficulty. Fatah can never found a complete country without Gaza, now a huge obstacle in its negotiations with Israel. So neither can survive without the other. United, they both benefit; divided, both suffer. On April 21, 2008, Mr. Maschal, a Hamas leader in Syria, made two important statements: Hamas agrees that, in accordance with the boundary line drawn before the 3<sup>rd</sup> Middle East War, a Palestinian state shall be founded with Jerusalem as the capital; Hamas refuses to talk directly with Israel and accepts any agreement signed by the Palestinian National Authority and Israel as long as the agreement passes a Palestinian referendum.<sup>4</sup> The statements are of great significance because Hamas's recognition of the Line of June 4 means that it recognizes the fact of Israel's existence and the legality of the negotiations between the Palestinian National Authority and Israel. Of course there are still many difficulties ahead before the final solution as Hamas will not easily give up its persistent policies or its radical stand. One of the latest attacks happened on March 6, 2008 when a gunman sneaked into a Jewish religious school in Jerusalem and killed 8 students who were studying in the library that night. On March 7 Reuters reported that Hamas claimed responsibility for the attack.

#### B. Israel

Radical groups have set up another barrage against Israel with its main battlefield in the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset. The Israeli Parliament is made up of 120 members, representing different parties which hold different stands toward the Israel-Palestine conflict. For example, the Likud Party advocates a tough line on Palestine, a stand shared with the National Union and the National Religious Party. Former Prime Minister Ariol Sharon broke away from Likud and formed the Kadima Party. The latter held a relatively mild stand and agreeing to negotiate with Palestine and pushed the Gaza Withdrawal Plan. These different stands compete and fight each other in the Parliament, representing various voices and requests of Israelis. In the parliamentary election held in March 2006 the Kadima Party led by Ehud Olmert won the most votes and became the leading party in the Parliament. Yet with only 29 seats in total, it had to form a coalition government together with the Labor Party (19 seats), the Shas Party (12 seats), Gil - Gimla'ey

---

<sup>4</sup> "Hamas Willing to Accept Peace Talks under Conditions," available at [http://www.infzm.com/news/xwgz/200804/t20080422\\_43441.shtml](http://www.infzm.com/news/xwgz/200804/t20080422_43441.shtml).

Yisrael(7 seats) and Yisrael Beytenu (11 seats). Later Yisrael Beytenu quit the coalition government because it had different political viewpoints. Thus the present government only makes up 67 seats in the parliament, a narrow majority.<sup>5</sup> As these parties stood for different interest groups, the coalition government would split apart in any case. Olmert had to be cautious during negotiations with Palestine for fear of infringing the interest of any party concerned

On March 1, 2008 the Israeli Defense Force raided the Gaza Strip from both the air and the ground, killing more than 60. "What has happened is far worse than slaughter. It's such a pity!"<sup>6</sup> said Abbas, the President of the Palestinian National Authority. In protest he ordered to suspend all peace talks or contacts on all levels with Israel. On March 9 the Israeli government declared that Israel would build over 300 apartments at the Givat Zeev bloc in the West Bank of the Jordan River and 750 housing units at Pizgat Ze'ev in East Jerusalem.<sup>7</sup> However, that was against the spirit of related agreements and not in favor of the peace process. In short, all these parties also have a considerable influence on the government. .On September 18, 2008 Olmert resigned as Prime Minister to fight charges of corruption against him. The new leader of the Kadama Party was former Foreign Minister Tzpi Livni, an advocate of the two state solutions, but rejecting the return of the Palestinian refugees to Israel. She favors tightening sanctions against Iran, while taking a more dovish approach to the regional solutions.

### C. The United States

The role that the United States plays in the Middle East is well-known and it is even greater in respect of the Israel-Palestine conflict. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the US launched with all its might the Afghanistan War and the Iraq War. For the US, the opening of the Annapolis Conference meant that the Israel-Palestine conflict was already on its schedule, a policy change of the US in the Middle East. Yet the change was passive and it was made simply due to the dangerous situation between Israel and Palestine. The major reasons are as follows: first, since its war against Iraq began on March 20, 2003, the US has been frequently under condemnation from the international community because of the illegitimacy of the war as a violation of the United Nations Charter and the chaos of post-war Iraq under US control. The US found itself stuck in the war, the worst time since the Cold War. There was much accusation domestically and the voices of protest could be heard everywhere. The war even became a topic for the next presidential election in 2004. Statistics showed that the death toll of American soldiers was 353

---

<sup>5</sup> Brief Introduction of the Country, see <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/wjb/zzjg/xybfs/gjlb/1449/1449x0/default.htm>

<sup>6</sup> <http://lifestyle.thebeijingnews.com/0493/2008/03-02/21@103456.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> Wuyong Feng, " Israel Wants to Build New Settlements," *Beijing Youth Daily*, March 11, 2008.



even when President Bush announced that the war in Iraq was basically over on May 1, 2003<sup>8</sup>, but the US military death toll had reached 4000 by March 23, 2008. Although it is far smaller than that of the Vietnam War, the "pain of Iraq" has become an inevitable topic in American society, let alone the enormous US and UK military spending. Data of the American Ministry of Defense show that the Iraq War has cost the US \$406 billion (another official sum shows that the direct military spending of the US in Iraq amounts to \$500 billion<sup>9</sup>). Judging from the numbers and the present situation, it is obvious that the US has been setback both in the battlefield and its strategy.

The reason why the US triggered this war was never simply oil as many assumed in the beginning. It had two main purposes: one view in this situation was for the US to establish its hegemony around the world, i.e., those that obey the US may survive while anyone that defies the US will perish; the other view was so that the US could find a foothold in the Middle East and especially among the Arab countries in order to coordinate its activities with Israel. So far it seems that these two purposes are still the US goals; the US has had to turn round to try to solve the Israel-Palestine conflict again a little bit more. Second, the US has started two wars under the banner of anti-terrorism, taking it for granted that terrorism can be curbed simply by force. However, things turned out to be the opposite and terrorist activities increased across the world. Many bomb attacks happened in Iraq which were planned in protest against American occupation. In addition, the American occupation has led to many religious disputes, and in many cases, one explosion would claim ten or more lives. What's worse, some European countries and even Saudi Arabia and Jordan have become also under threat of terrorist attacks. Seeing that military force by itself didn't work well, the US initiated its "Greater Middle East" Initiative in early 2004, believing that once democracy would be set up in a country, the root of terrorism would be wiped out. The project received strong criticism and boycott from Arab countries which emphasized that reform should start from within but not to be imposed externally. Meanwhile, many leaders from Arab countries have made it clear that the very root reason of every problem the Middle East has faced is the Israel-Palestine conflict and it would be virtually useless to create a democratic reform but to turn a blind eye to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Many European governments also have held the same point of view. They have thought that "the Israel-Palestine conflict is the root cause for the rise of Islamic extremism and terrorism in the Middle East.

The Palestine problem must be solved fairly as early as possible before any possible victory of an "anti-terrorist" war.<sup>10</sup> The US had to give priority to the Israel-Palestine conflict now that neither persuasion nor coercion has worked.

---

<sup>8</sup> Xiao Yang, "Background Knowledge," *Beijing Youth Daily*, March 24, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Guoqing Zhang, "Costs of the Iraq War," *Beijing Evening News*, March 20, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Li Liu, "Chaos and Reassembly," *International Affairs Review*, Vol. 1, 2008.

Third, dislike against the US has grown year in and year out among the Arabians. The yearly opinion polls carried out by the University of Maryland and Zogby International after the Iraq War has shown that the Arabians had a growing dislike against the US. The 2008 Zogby poll has shown that 83% of the Arabians dislike the US.<sup>11</sup> Apparently the Arabians are hurt by the American raid of Iraq, the "Greater Middle East" Initiative and the fact that the US has been partial to Israel. One reason behind the US's growing concern about the Israel-Palestine conflict is that it might retrieve some respect over there.

#### D. Iran

Although the US fought in the Iraq War, the war has benefited Iran the most, making it a leader in this area after the war. The US overthrew the reign of Saddam Hussein and thus got rid of an old enemy for Iran. Then the Shiah came into power in Iraq, one more country reigned by the Shiah besides Iran. In other words, Iran has had a rather noticeable influence on Iraq. During the late half of March, 2008, large-scale clashes happened in Basrah between the Mahdi Army of the Iraqi Shiah, an anti-US Force, and the Iraqi Army, an American army and al-Badhr, another hostile Shiite force. Later, Iran played the role of the mediator. The Associated Press reported that Iran arranged talks between senior leaders of all parties in the holy city of Qom, saying that "the unity of all Shiite parties bears on the important interests of Iran."<sup>12</sup> Apart from its significant role in respect of Iraq, Iran has also been in close ties with Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas for religious or political reasons. The overall development of the situation in the Middle East through 2007 revealed a shadow of Iran in many large conflicts or disputes. Early in 2008, President Ahmadinejad was quite active at the Gulf Cooperation Council Summit and later in his visit to Iraq. Arab countries, the Gulf countries in particular, have been suspicious about the regime of conservative forces in Iran. Despite their caution, they are willing to keep in contact with Iran.

The following are some possible reasons that Iran dares to say "no" to the US, which is in accordance with their mentality; Iran supports the just cause in Palestine and holds an unswerving hostile attitude toward Israel and Palestine may keep good relations with Iran through these contacts. The above mentioned poll by the University of Maryland and Zogby International also shows that the majority of Arabians deny that Iran is a major threat and 67% agree that Teheran has the right to carry out its nuclear plan. Iran has been rather tough in the matter of Israel. More than once President Ahmadinejad has vowed to "wipe Israel off the map." Early in April, 2008, the Israeli National Infrastructure Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer warned that any Iranian attack against Israel "would trigger a tough

<sup>11</sup> Peizhao Huang, Kejiang Guan, "83% Arabs Dislike the US," *Global Times*, April 17, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Associated Press Teheran [April 6-telegram], *The Reference News*, April 7, 2008.



reaction that would lead to the destruction of the Iranian nation."<sup>13</sup> Iran did not postpone its response. "We are ready to eliminate Israel from the world scene," Deputy Commander-in-Chief Mohammad Reza Ashtiani said. Of course the tension between Iran and Israel has certain influence on the peace talks between Israel and Palestine.

### III. On the Solution to the Israel-Palestine Conflict

For many years the Israel-Palestine Conflict has been in an odd circle, i.e., from conflicts to negotiations, then to failure then to new conflicts. As far as the mentality of both sides is concerned, every negotiation could spark some hope, which, when broken, would turn into desperation that would stimulate radical reactions and once again new talks with new hope. As long as the odd circle exists, violence and violence in return targeted killing and massacres will never stop. Nobody but the people of both countries will be the victims and they wish their misery to end as soon as possible. Therefore, all parties concerned must grasp the overall situation and realize the immediacy of the problem.

a). As Israel and Palestine are extraordinarily unequal in respect of their strength and a "strong Israel and weak Palestine" are gradually becoming a known fact, it is impossible for the two sides to carry out negotiations on an equal footing. At home Israel has a sound national system, well-trained army, all-pervasive intelligence agencies and a developed economy while overseas there is a multitude of supportive Jews. The Jewish lobby has an astonishing influence in the US. Palestine is no competitor of Israel in these respects. Its political regime refers to nothing but the Palestinian National Authority and its economy is basically under the thumb of Israel. Once Israel cuts the fuel supplies, the Palestinians would live a hard life. All the harbors and docks are under the control of Israel. All Palestinian exports must pass through Israeli control, the latter transfers 40 to 50 million dollars of monthly tax revenue payment to Palestine. Many Palestinians travel to Israel every day to work there so as to support their families. However, many Palestinians are prevented from crossing in and out of Israel for work. Speaking of the external environment, Palestine has the sympathy of Arab countries, which offer Palestine their support in politics, finance and morality. Yet their support is a far cry from the support that Israel obtains from the Jewish lobby in the US and the American government under the leadership of President Bush. The former is simply some specific support to Palestine while the latter has an impact on the US policy-making on this issue.

Furthermore, there are many problems between the Arab countries, which detract their support for Palestine, and the disparities in viewpoints also weaken

---

<sup>13</sup> Kang Yu, "Israel and Iran Threat to Destroy Each Other," *Global Times*, April 17, 2008.



their support. Negotiation means receiving as well as giving; one must have some qualifications even to compromise. However, Palestine seems to be short of such qualifications to contain Israel or to make a bargain. Solutions or agreements have proven to be of little effect. Therefore, negotiations are a rough process for Palestine while Israel, with everything under its control, is supposed to bear more responsibilities on the negotiations and make more efforts. China made this point quite clear to the visiting Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in the 1990s. After all Israel was still occupying Arab land at that time. During the 2007 Annapolis conference, Prime Minister Olmert said that Israel must make painful compromises so that negotiations would be completed within 2008 and Palestine and the Arab people would make peace. President Abbas hoped that both sides would base their solution on ending occupation and founding an independent Palestinian state. He also hoped the efforts and that wishes of both sides would come true soon for the world is developing fast and every country is developing their economy. It should be an immediate task to ensure that both the Israeli and the Palestinian people live a peaceful and prosperous life.

b). We wish that the policy adjustment of the US really helps the solution to this conflict. It is still a "wish" because of several reasons: the US policy of leading the world will not change; the dominant role of the US in Middle East affairs probably will not change under new presidential terms beginning in 2009; the US stand of being partial to Israel probably will not change and the US's tough attitude toward Hamas probably will not change. With so many things probably unchangeable, any solution to the conflict could be barely possible. As the only super power in the world, the US ranks No. 1 in terms of military force, economy, science and technology but this country always considers itself the world's leader. All countries, big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor, should be equal. Nobody welcomes imposed criticism. The US, which has always been advocating democracy, should put democracy into practice in international relations instead of making decisions for others. Anyone who wants to dominate the Middle East affairs is supposed to be fair and just. No sooner when Hamas came into power through democratic procedure in 2006 than the US boycott began, causing a lot of complaints among Arab countries. They argued that the US might disagree with policies of Hamas but should not deny the choice of the Palestinian people or adopt dual standards. If the US wants to rely more on the strength and influence of other countries it must get rid of its superior attitude, stop calling itself the world's leader, consult other parties on an equal footing and give up its stand that is so partial to Israel in order that the Israel-Palestine conflict may be solved. All in all, the solution should be the overall situation to grasp for all involved parties.

c). Among all the solutions to the Israel-Palestine Conflict, there are "The Roadmap for Peace in the Middle East" and "The Arab Peace Initiative" among



others. Any solution, if put into practice, should surely advance the Middle East peace process. "The Roadmap for Peace in the Middle East" was submitted to Israel and Palestine on April 30, 2003. This three-stage roadmap provides rules about a cease-fire, ending violent clashes, Palestine's striking Israel with terrorism and creating political reform, Israel's withdrawal from the Palestinian land it occupied after September 28, 2000, demolishing the settlements built after March of 2001, creating a viable borderline, resolving the position of Jerusalem, and providing the return of refugees; each has a clear-cut schedule. During the third stage (2004-2005) both sides were to reach a final agreement, mark off the boundaries and establish a Palestinian state. Three years has passed but there has been no Palestinian state or any other required development. "The Arab Peace Initiative" appeared earlier than the "Roadmap". It was passed by the 14<sup>th</sup> Arab Summit held in Lebanon in 2002 and was reiterated at the 19<sup>th</sup> summit held in Riyadh in 2007. However, this "initiative" has been refused by the US and Israel all along. The initiative asks Israel to do three things: withdraw its troops to the Line of June 4, 1967; implement U.N. Resolution 194 to guarantee the right of return of the Palestinian refugees and to recognize an independent and sovereign Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. The Arab leaders promised "full normalization of Arab ties with Israel on the basis of a comprehensive peace."<sup>14</sup> The following two points in the "Initiative" are of great importance as the Arab leaders only ask for East Jerusalem as the capital instead of claiming the whole city of Jerusalem and talks about the possibility of the normalization of Arab ties with Israel. Both are beyond the "Roadmap". Aloe Ben-Meir, a professor at the Center for Global Affairs, New York University, published a book on "The Arab Peace Initiative in 2008," in which he has suggested that the Israeli government adopt this initiative because it "fully meets Israel's pursuit of peace; it maintains the individuality of the Jewish nation, guarantees the integrity of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, accepts the Palestinians and the normalization of Arab ties with Israel."<sup>15</sup> So long as Israel and Palestine are sincere about peace, they should be able to find positive elements in various agreements, initiatives or resolutions and push the peace process forward.

d). Its internal unity is of vital significance for Palestine to reach an agreement of peace with Israel. When all parties realize that the overall situation or the cornerstone of regaining legal national rights is to recover lost lands and establish a Palestinian state they would put aside the factions' self-interest for the sake of the overall situation and get united for the interest of the Palestinian people. Without internal integrity, it would be impossible for Palestine to reach any agreement with Israel or any agreement without following internal problems.

---

<sup>14</sup> "Promotion of the Arab Peace Initiative," *Home of Arabs*, May, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Alon Ben-Meir, "Reconciling The Arab Initiative," available at <http://www.alonben-meir.com>.