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PEACE NEGOTIATIONS
AND THE DYNAMICS OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

Amr G. E. Sabet

Peace as Cant

Once upon a time, as the story goes,

> there was a bear who was hungry and a man who was cold, so they
> decided to negotiate in a neutral cave. After several hours a settlement
> was reached. When they emerged the man had a fur coat and the bear was
> no longer hungry (Karrass, 1970: 3).

The saga of the Middle East 'peace process' and the fanfare that has surrounded it, obscured the fact that little has been subjected to detailed systematic and objective analysis. Nor has it been sufficiently put to the test of negotiation principles in a fashion that would shed light on its underlying nature and substance. This caveat hindered addressing important questions regarding the very structure of the process and its ability to deliver on its purported promises. It further raises questions as to whether one could speak of a real peace in the making, or whether the whole endeavor is merely used as *cant*. By cant is meant "a mode of expression, or a cast of thought, of which the effect--irrespective of the motive--is to create a misleading discrepancy between the natural meaning of words and their practical significance..." (Hugo, 1970: 19).

In order to understand the full implications and underpinnings of regional politics it is crucial to reintroduce some basics of the Arab-Israeli conflict which, have been lost or concealed in the maze of peace proclamations. This should not be construed as an attempt at rehashing the polemics, arguments and counter-arguments of the past five decades or so, but rather as a bid to expose the structural flaws connected with the policies devised to deal with the current regional predicament. A careful diagnosis helps in anticipating the patient's prognosis.

The origin of the Arab-Israeli conflict goes back to the early part of the twentieth century. The Zionist movement, founded by Theodore Herzl in the late 1890s, was able to elicit a promise from the British Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour, committing "His Majesty's Government" to the "establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people..." (Heikal, 1996: 28-29).[1] Brief statements made by two major figures involved in the Zionist Jewish state project, serve as an exemplary of the genesis and stakes of the conflict: the aforementioned Arthur Balfour and David Ben-Gurion the first Prime Minister of the newly created state of Israel. Admitting in a memorandum to cabinet colleagues in 1919, that the Palestinians had been deceived, Balfour attributed the deception to the "Big Four" powers (the US, France, Britain, and Italy), rather than to Britain alone. He stated: "so far as Palestine is concerned, the powers have made no statement of fact that is not admittedly wrong, and no declaration of policy which, at least in the letter, they have not always intended to violate" (Heikal, 1996: 30). As for Ben-Gurion, he stated in 1938:

When we say that the Arabs are the aggressors and we defend ourselves-
that is only half the truth. As regards our security and life we defend
ourselves.... But the fighting is only one aspect of the conflict which is in
its essence a political one. And politically we are the aggressors and they
defend themselves (Finkelstein, 1995: 108).

Reverting to the basics of the Arab-Israeli conflict allows us not to lose sight of the politics of injustice as an inherent source of antagonisms. The moral foundations of the Arab-Israeli conflict do not simply lie in the realm of competing perceptions, but in veracity and justice. Its essence, as Balfour's and Ben-Gurion's words clearly suggest, is born in a historical *injustice* inflicted rather than in a current violence perpetrated against the Palestinians. Not in a conflict between two rights, as Albert Einstein has philosophized, but a situation in which one party is clearly an aggressor and the other a victim.[2] To frame the matter differently would sound reminiscent of Harry Truman's cynical aphorism "if you can't convince them, confuse them."

In order for such politics not to constitute the sown seeds of a future more violent and bitter collision, an important analytical distinction must be made between conflict *resolution* and *settlement*. The former refers to "the transformation of relationships in a particular case by the solution of the problems which, led to the conflictual behavior in the first place." The latter designates "the suppression of … conflict by coercive means, or by bargaining and negotiation in which relative power determines the outcome" (Burton, 1990: 3). Resolution must incorporate the principle of *Justice*, the salience of which has made the Palestinian issue the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Otherwise, it would simply collapse into a reduced settlement arrangement.

Peace Transformation and the Politics of Injustice

The 'peace' process has attempted to circumvent, transform, and conceptually obliterate the true nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict by resorting to conventional Western conflict resolution and power politics mechanisms. These mechanisms fundamentally altered the political agenda of the conflict through subterfuge and issue transformation, imposing and maintaining an asymmetric power relationship in favor of the Arabs' adversary. A development facilitated by systemic and regional changes arising from the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Second Gulf War and the destruction of Iraq, and American-Israeli military and scientific cooperation. Superordinate axes were introduced in order to change the regime of alliances. For the purposes of creating overlapping space, 'moderate' Arab and Jewish forces supporting 'peace' were supposedly to be aligned against 'radicals' or 'extremists' across both societies, opposing it. A closed Arab agenda would have set Islamists and incumbent regimes, at least in principle, as natural allies against a common Israeli enemy. Arab governments instead, have sought to establish *common* cause with Israel in fighting Islamic resistance to such open concessional schemes. This *open* agenda evolved into one of confronting the *effects* of injustice rather than its *causes*, changing the political constellation supporting the original principles and re-connecting interests in a fashion that cuts across *closed* foundational considerations.

Back in January 1989, President Hosni Mubarak (1995) of Egypt proclaimed that he and other Arab leaders were supported in their search for peace, among other actors, by "the peace loving forces in Israel itself." To make his starting point clear, he indicated that after all the sacrifices due to previous wars with Israel, he "was not ready to take more risks" (Mubarak, 1995:

546-547). In one stroke, Mubarak was acknowledging the conflict to be one of costs rather than of entitlements, conveying a willingness to play by the rules of the opponent rather than his own. A less than inspiring overture from someone engaged in a protracted and gruesome process of conflict management. Expressing his rather limited understanding of the Vietnamese case as an example of a war that "was settled only through negotiations," Mubarak failed to relate the outcome to the conditions on the ground and from there on draw the relevant conclusions. The Vietnamese had been willing to take risks and consequently were successful in imposing their will on a much more powerful adversary.

According to Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing, inferior power is not in and of itself the most important determinant of outcome. Resolve plays an extremely important role as well. "The military inferiority of one party may be compensated by its greater interests engaged, thus making the parties equally resolved. A militarily stronger party may be less 'resolved' in the crisis than its opponent if it does not value its interests as highly as the opponent values his" (Snyder & Diesing, 1977: 498). Exacerbating their military inferiority by translating it into a lack of determination, the Arab party's *starting* point to negotiations conversely, was to concede entitlement claims from the very outset. For to recognize Israel, is invariably to recognize the right to dispossess the Palestinians and to occupy Arab land in defense of such dispossession. This gradual yet steady concessionary Arab behavior served implicitly and/or explicitly to self-condemn earlier policies and stances adopted vis-a-vis Israel, and to undermine the justice principle. In essence, the Arabs arrived at a situation in which they became susceptible to recognizing their values to be, if not wrong, then at least faulty. Since at a point they became actually willing to relinquish what they had considered sacred for the past five decades or so, further pressure, so the justified expectation would be, may lead them to concede other rights and Jerusalem as well. The late king Hasan of Morocco and president to the Jerusalem Committee, for instance, had indicated that Jerusalem constituted to the Arabs nothing more than the sacred sites, such as "Al-Aqsa Mosque" (Hasan, 1999: 172). Statements of the kind undermine rights to land restoration and liberation.

Such precedents introduced structural transformations capable of concomitantly changing the psychological distribution of power heavily in favor of Israel. It emasculated the Arab position, first and foremost at this level, from defiance to one of virtual submission. Their practical manifestations include the degradation of religious consciousness, which is necessary if Jerusalem is to be compromised, moral and spiritual decadence in order for people to forsake values such as Jihad and the undermining of national and historical self-confidence so as to justify defeatism. Together with the media and mind-altering changes in Arab educational systems, they came to constitute what President Clinton has termed "education for peace." As a settlement mechanism the 'peace' process, has recast the substance of the conflict by steadily creating the appropriate environmental means-ends framework for such 'concessions' to be made.

Negotiation constitutes the "art of the dialectics of wills that use force (and/or peaceful measures) to resolve their conflict" (Luttwak, 1987: 241). Strategies, tactics and skill, in addition to options and resources available, constitute the pillars of its dynamics. Their overriding principle is for one side to take advantage, to the extent possible, of the adversary's weaknesses, loopholes, and oversights. The outcome configuration largely determines the privileged or non-privileged translations of any proposed agreements, and heavily influences the subsequent order of events. In this sense, negotiation is a double- edged sword. It may resolve conflicts or it may exacerbate them.

Setting detailed blueprints or axioms predictive of the ensuing results of a negotiating process therefore, is by no means an easy task. It is important nevertheless, to underscore the inter-linked premises that "where one ends up depends on where one starts" (Raiffa, 1982: 215); that the final outcome of negotiations usually reflects the relative power configuration of the parties concerned and; that negotiating outcomes not only emanate from objective material conditions, but as importantly, from subjective psychological fortitude. Thus, the weaker side in particular must exhibit a good measure of steadfastness in order to establish a credibility threshold for any demands made or positions upheld. Otherwise, diminished will power would inevitably translate into a one sided open agenda in which--as far as the privileged party is concerned--agreement may not necessarily be preferred to non-agreement. Unequal costs emanating from a failure to agree, together with an asymmetric capability to modify the reference structure, constitute two determining factors of negotiation outcomes. This is especially so in as far as they reflect not simply an imbalance in power resources but also in "control relations." As a reflection of structural asymmetry, they allow for the unilateral alteration of the rules of the game and for redefining the norms which *all* actors are expected to follow in their mutual relations (Hopmann, 1978: 143; Vayrynen, 1991: 4-5). Once this stage has been reached, it *substantively* ceases to be negotiation since, "the weak," to quote Henry Kissinger, "do not negotiate" (Finkelstein, 1995: 237).

Both the Americans and the Israelis believed that a preliminary step-by-step negotiating approach, rather than a comprehensive one, would contribute to undermining the famous Arab consensus, agreed at the Khartoum summit in August 1967, of "no talks, no recognition, no peace" (Field, 1994: 384). The purpose was to divide the Arab World, win *de facto* recognition of a few countries and put the Israelis in a stronger position when they came to negotiate directly with the front-line states and the Palestinians. The idea behind such a strategy which, underscored Kissinger's negotiating style, was to build "positions of strength with an active diplomacy pressing for settlement" (Kissinger, 1994: 467ff). Israel's tactics as Yehoshafat Harkabi (1977: 103) had alluded to as early as 1977, was to bring the Arabs into "... step by step, practical settlements and interim agreements as a gradual incremental process of 'interlocking' the rivals into positive arrangements which may make it more difficult for them to revert to open conflict and war."[3] Or in a more recent statement by a British diplomat, which mirrors the same position, to create "a complex architecture of Arab-Israeli connections... that will not be easily demolished" (Field, 1994: 368). Such tactics were consistent with the overall strategy of detaching Egypt from the Arab-Israeli conflict, isolating Syria, and cantonizing the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. Above all, they have succeeded in breaking the necessary link between statecraft and war. Once all this had been achieved, Israel reversed its position, with the former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu calling for "a package approach" that circumvents earlier agreements made (1997a: 39).

The Peace-Justice Dialectics

Power relations based on considerations of order and might frequently offend the "sense of justice," and cannot but fuel the emotions of resentment, anger, and tension which, ultimately lead to violence. Notions of injustice, as a backlash against perceived disparities between prerogatives and benefits, always remain an inherent and perpetual risk factor (Lerner, 1981: 12-13). 'Peace,' merely as the opposite of violence rather than as a reflection of justice is unlikely to overcome or rectify such concerns. Injustices inflicted by the Western colonial legacy on the Arabs in general and the

Palestinians in particular have characterized the nature of the conflict from its very inception as one of entitlements-benefits. The erupting sense of injustice triggered intense and unique emotional responses which, could not be quantified solely in terms of tangible indices or reduced simply to an aversion of loss and an appetite for gain. *Phenomenologically* "it engage(d) powerful passions that have the effect of increasing the stridency of demands, amplifying intransigence, reducing sensitivity to threats and value trade-offs, increasing the willingness to run risks, and increasing the likelihood of violent behavior" (Welch, 1993: 20). This helps explain the drive behind the martyrdom bombings perpetrated by Islamic militant organizations such as Hamas, Hizbollah and Jihad, and allows putting their militancy in perspective. Their actions largely constitute the observable symptoms of the unobservable motivation and need to respond to group insult with rage (Burton, 1984: 13). Referring to these organizations as terrorist structures opposing peace comprises an altering discursive mechanism which seeks to eliminate the entitlement-benefits discrepancy context in favor of one re-constructed and based on *cost-benefits*. The former then is depicted as irrational and the latter as rational. Historical experiences however, show that when basic entitlements are at stake against overwhelming odds, less rationality is needed, and actually fares better, than more rationality. For instance, the Czechs' behavior with respect to Nazi Germany's demands on their land, in Michael Handel's (1981: 91) words, was "*too rational*" in response to a military threat they believed they could not win out against in the long run. This was in stark contrast to the Finns and the North Vietnamese who were less calculating, more emotional, and more determined to fight against the overwhelming powers of both the Soviet Union and the United States respectively. The Finns, while losing twice, earned respect and admiration and perhaps made themselves less attractive as potential satellites. In the case of the North Vietnamese, they ultimately prevailed and won a war in which they virtually had lost all the battles. One can not help but wonder what the outcome might have been had the Vietnamese, alternatively like the Arabs, started doubting themselves. The constructed 'peace' discourse, based on such self-doubts, makes it immensely easier for the Americans and Israelis to manipulate parties whose strategic calculations can be transformed toward cost-benefit quantification (the Czech option). This as opposed to actors who consciously adhere to their own strategic imperatives, irrespective of costs (the Finnish or Vietnamese option). The former constitutes a strategic victory, the latter a strategic challenge.

The justice motive differs from loss aversion or appetite for gain in two further respects: *prescriptively* and *extensively*. Prescriptively, the very desire to see justice done 'though the earth may perish' is a very strong drive embedded in basic and non-negotiable human needs and values. This sets them in stark contrast to material valuations based on economy or self-interest. Extensively, it does not overreach to what people simply would like to have, but rather to what they consider to be their entitlements. In this respect, it is categorical and demanding of nothing less than full satisfaction. People within the entitlement-benefits value matrix are usually willing to incur a heavy price for potentially less useful things they consider a matter of right. They are also more willing to trade-off or forswear pursuing goods which, they would like to have but to which they do not necessarily feel particularly entitled. "The mode of reasoning involved in the defense of one's entitlements," therefore, "differs fundamentally from the mode of reasoning involved in the pursuit of other goods: it tends to be categorical and deontological rather than utilitarian" (Welch, 1993: 20-21).

Substantively, Israel with the aid of American indifference if not complicity, attempted to reconcile the entitlement-benefits discrepancy. This was done not by meeting Palestinian legitimate demands for statehood, but by transforming the rules in a fashion that would increasingly lead the Palestinian Authority, headed by Yasser Arafat, to act--if not actually believe--as if it has misconceived the scope and content of Palestinian entitlements (Welch, 1993: 20). According to Harkabi (1977: 88), "making the opponent uneasy and apologetic about his objective, is a first small step in the process of its *erosion*, inducing him to start discarding it."

The expectations of the Palestinian negotiator presumably anticipated a Palestinian state at the end of the road. The pattern of negotiations it followed, however, appears in all practicalities to have reduced the Palestinian Authority (PA) to nothing more than an auxiliary Israeli security structure. Israel's further de-linking of security matters from changes taking place on the ground in Jerusalem and the West Bank and therefore from the *political* heart of the 'peace' process, reflected the divesting of the purported Palestinian/Arab negotiating formula. Israel continues to maintain its own constants and payoffs in terms of a unified Jerusalem under its control, entitlement to most of the West Bank (notwithstanding redeployment maneuverings), monopolized access to nuclear weapons, priority of its security concerns over all other considerations, and eventual access to the water resources of the River Nile and the Euphrates (Lesch, 1992: 158).[4]

America's rather explicit recognition of the legitimacy of this agenda was manifested most conspicuously by the Congress's vote (even if non-binding) to transfer the US embassy to Jerusalem by 1999. US envoy Dennis Ross' statements, during his August 1997 visit to the region, in the wake of bombings in Jerusalem by Hamas militants, attempted to further entrench the Palestinian negotiator within this de-linking structure. He called upon Israelis and Palestinians to work as partners against a "common threat" from militants, and emphasized that "security is something that serves Israeli interests and Palestinian interests..." (Goller, 1997: A15). Israeli security was to become the Palestinian Authority's own, irrespective of whether or not Palestinian demands for statehood can or will be met. In return for Arafat's resumption of security cooperation with Israel to rein in Islamic militants, a vague promise was given by Ross of an upcoming broad US peace initiative. Supposedly it was to address Palestinians' complaints against Israel, including reportedly, *some kind* of freeze on Israeli expansion of colonies (conveniently termed settlements), and an acceleration of talks on a final peace settlement (Assad, 1997). However, American Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's response during her subsequent visit to the region in September 1997, to complaints that Israel was strengthening its grip on Jerusalem, expanding Jewish colonies and leveling the homes of Palestinians, was unequivocal. "There is no moral equivalent," she stated "between killing people and building houses.... The Palestinian Authority must take unilateral steps and actions to root out the terrorist infrastructure" (Schweid, 1997). The problem with unilateral gestures as Kissinger (1994: 488) has indicated, is that they "remove a key negotiating asset. In general, diplomats rarely pay for services already rendered..." Moreover, they tempt the adversary "...to drag out the negotiations in order to determine whether other unilateral gestures may be forthcoming." Not only that, but Albright was also making the connection between militant acts and the peaceful process of building houses, rather than to the breaking of agreements and Israeli colonial expansion. In as far as she was interested in accomplishing any significant results, it was to call for holding financial contributions to Islamist groups, and to cajole Arab regimes into attending the upcoming economic conference to be held in Doha, Qatar, in November of that year. Ross'

earlier promises--and for that matter any upcoming ones--to Arafat are unlikely to be any different from the British WWI superfluous offerings to give Arabs their independence in exchange for support in the war effort against Ottoman Turkey. In essence, nothing has been learned, nothing has been forgotten.

Arafat's relationship with Islamist groups is significantly complex to allow for the above demands to be conceded, at least in their US-Israeli ideal. Much as he would like to clamp down on their infrastructure, he remains strongly constrained as to how far he could go. In many ways, his fate has become intertwined with their own to the extent that by destroying them he could virtually be committing political suicide. Eradicating Hamas and Jihad could greatly diminish the need for his presence as a party altogether. When newspaper photos had depicted Arafat embracing Hamas figures, they were basically showing him holding to his last trump card. This is where the inherent contradictions of a common security framework can be most strongly felt. The major caveat is that while the Israelis would like to see Islamic opposition eradicated, the most that Arafat could do, if for no other reason than to ensure his own survival, is to contain and weaken but not eliminate them. The logical outcome is that both the PA and Israel can only pursue a *parallel* rather than a common security policy. This poses Arafat's dilemma. It serves to project him both as a collaborator, to many Palestinians, and as an ineffective and uncooperative 'negotiator,' as the US and the Israelis allege. Such an ambivalent outcome could only lead to the eventual erosion of the PA's legitimacy, forcing it to control its own people by increasingly coercive measures. As Glenn E. Robinson (1997: 54) has stated, "...PLO failure to deliver Palestinian rights will compel the PA to tighten the noose around its own society. Open politics in the midst of national failure is not a recipe for regime survival." It should come as no surprise therefore that Arafat would accept internal security guardianship by the CIA on his people through the Wye River agreements.

Israeli security officers further have warned that enfeebling Arafat could open the door for Hamas to achieve political dominance in Gaza and parts of the West Bank (Drozdiak, 1997b: A14). Capitalizing on such a trade-off, Arafat continues to project himself as the one most capable of controlling and possibly coopting those groups. In as much as the Israelis may loathe him, he stands as the best of two evils. Arafat has become an Israeli interest and safety valve. His rumblings that he will not be dictated to by Israel do not hide his real concern. The *Washington Post*, referring to statements made by Palestinian officials, has indicated that he remains constrained by the fear of generating sympathy for Islamic militants by acquiescing to Israeli demands (Drozdiak, 1997a: A01). His holding of "national unity" talks, during the latter half of August 1997, and then again with other dissenting Palestinian groups in September 1999, simply aimed at bringing militants into the political process as a way to dilute their influence and persuade them to abandon their actions and opposition. This reflected a typical pattern of political cooptation reminiscent of Egyptian President Sadat's policies toward Islamist opposition and which ultimately proved fatal for him. Furthermore, Arafat continues to concentrate power in his hands. While attempting to weaken all other forces and/or rudimentary social institutions (most of which have an Islamic identity), as is being demanded by the Israeli side, he continues to personally control money offered by international donors. With virtually no accountability, Arafat in all but name has become the PA (Robinson, 1997: 45). This significantly consolidates the position of the Israeli negotiator who by constructing control structures to 'handle' the PA 'chief' could indirectly 'administer' the 'tribe' as well. A virtual situation is thus created in which the grand strategy of one side is in effect being

tackled in the framework of personal, tribal and 'fiefdom' politics, by the Arab side. Though short of a state, the PA is not an aberration but rather a typical regional structure, where it only takes control of the leader to dominate the hierarchical socio-political configuration.

Peace Concessions and the Strategy of Defeat

Empirical studies regarding winners and losers in negotiations have indicated that parties with higher aspiration levels and wanting more, actually did get more. In a conflictive non-cooperative bargaining process, opponents with high aspirations, irrespective of their skill or power, ended up as winners in every case where they opposed low aspirants. They indicated furthermore, that negotiators who made the first compromise ended up being losers in the final outcome (Karrass, 1970: 17-18 & 19). From the outset and as a reflection of collapse of will, the Egyptian side had declared itself desperate to opt out of confrontation. Since the Israeli side did not exhibit such desperation, it becomes clear that negotiation terms can only be strategically tilted in its favor, with the outcome most likely to reflect that condition. In light of such findings, it follows that the strategic concessions initiated by the late President Anwar Sadat through the Camp David regime, and in whose footsteps a number of other Arab leaders are following, can only lead to disastrous consequences for the Arab World.

Such a pattern of concessions can never be fair or just to the Arabs due to several reasons. Firstly, concessions are fair only as long as the negotiators have no need to revise their original expectations about what the ultimate agreement will be or about their strategic goals of entitlement (Bartos, 1978: 22). Yet, while Mubarak's chief political adviser Usama al-Baz conceded that the conflict between the Arabs and Israel was over boundaries and no longer over the latter's existence, former Israeli chief of staff Raphael Eitan declared the Arab-Israeli conflict to be "civilizational" (*Kayhan al-Arabi*, 1998: 11). This reflects a remarkable strategic turn of events in favor of the Israeli negotiator, confirming the conclusion that a negotiating opponent will concede in opposite proportion to the adversary's concession rate (Cross 1978: 29).

Secondly, negotiation requires that parties be constrained by the same rules which, neither side have the right nor capability to alter unilaterally. If negotiation is a matter of finding the proper formula as a referent principle, and then implementing detail (Zartman 1978: 76-77), and if one party has the capability of changing it at will while the other is constrained by it, then no element or mechanism of joint decision-making does in reality exist. Both parties cease to share equal stalemating power, and the asymmetry is such that one party could at will alter the terms of the negotiating formula from land for peace as formulated at the Madrid conference in October 1991, to one of peace for peace or security for peace. *Strictly speaking then, there are no negotiations taking place between the Arabs and the Israelis even as they continue to talk to each other.* Israel's formula alteration capability reorders the whole process in its own image against the opposite number, a strategic advantage that is unlikely to be thrown away whether the Likud party is in power or Labor. Yet, Arab negotiators continue to project the personalized nature of their own governance onto the 'other' even when the Labor party had been doing by stealth what the Likud party implemented unpresumptuously.[5] Negotiations in October 1999, between the Palestinian and the newly elected Israeli Labor government, which set security matters in the hands of the Israelis on the "safe passage" road linking Gaza to the Western Bank, actually constituted an additional Palestinian

concession to the security formula. This concession was more than could have been possible earlier during the incumbency of Likud's conspicuously intransigent leadership.

Such attitude reflects Arab susceptibility to (and naive entanglement into) the psychologically deceptive good-guy (Labor)/bad-guy (Likud) routine. Within this framework, two parties on the same side stage a quarrel related to seemingly opposed stances with respect to a common adversary. The good guy offers promises of reward if the opponent cooperates, the bad guy raises the specter of punishments if no 'cooperation' was forthcoming (Fisher & Ury, 1983: 141-142). Arafat, during his appearance at the United Nations in October 1998, continued to hold to the belief that the assassinated Yitzhak Rabin was his partner in peace, and to lament his loss. This despite Kissinger's statement that the latter had repeatedly brought it to his attention that should the 'incongruities' of the Oslo agreements become pervasive, "he would initiate a strategic reassessment with all the greater determination because of a clear conscience" (Kissinger, 1997: C07). In between Labor (good guy) and Likud (bad guy) the psychological fabric of the target opponent is undermined, softening his will to the level of concessionary pliance in order to escape emotional distress. Any semblance of concession offered by the good guy would then be seen as a big favor to be reciprocated with a supposedly sizable concession lest ammunition be provided to alternative 'radical or extremist' forces. A dynamic of escalating demands for every concession offered, not necessarily made, is thus introduced into the negotiating framework.[6] Arab negotiators should not act perplexed as they come to face this situation with a Labor negotiator.

A dual routine of this kind, one should add, requires formal autonomous domestic institutional structures which, do not exist in the Arab world. One party to the negotiating table is capable of playing a game that the other side is structurally deprived off, and as such is at a constant disadvantage. Having been situated in an external rule structure the Arabs have come up against a no win situation. This applies whether they make one decision or its opposite. It should come as no surprise that Arafat has lost on both accounts when he continued to threaten to declare a Palestinian state in May 1999 only to back down as expected. To declare a state was simply to end up with a cluster of disparate villages beyond which he could make no further demands (assuming Israel does not respond by reentering the territory under PA authority). Having retracted however, he continues to lose much of his already shaky credibility not only with regard to his people, but also vis-a-vis the enemy. In strategic terms he has continuously and perpetually been placed on a 'horn of a dilemma.'

Thirdly, geo-strategic considerations related to the very nature of the Zionist Jewish homeland project continue to play a determining role in the negotiation outcomes and the politics of concessions. In a superbly detailed and documented three volumes study about secret negotiations between the Arabs and Israel over the last hundred years or so, Mohamed Heikal (1996b: 27ff) illustrated that the idea of establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine hark back to the days of Napoleon Bonaparte's French occupation of Egypt (1798-1801). This clearly was long before Herzl and the events of WW II. As part of his grand strategy, Napoleon believed that Egypt and Syria's security, both being situated along the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean respectively, were historically and strategically intertwined. In order to secure his power base in both countries, he believed that a foreign (Jewish) structure at their meeting point had to be created. The idea was to separate and prevent them from coming together in any form of common political framework. With the defeat of the Napoleonic armies this strategy was appropriated and actively pursued by Great Britain's Lord Palmerston, during the first half of the 19th century onward. While

the reduction of the Palestinian issue to a matter of land and territory veiled the significance of this purpose, the Israeli negotiators could not but harbor it, albeit indirectly, as a strategic factor in their policy calculations. Responding to a question by *Newsweek* as to whether he envisions a Palestinian state, Netanyahu answered a categorical "no." More interestingly, he added, "...I believe that the granting of unlimited self-determination would mean that we would face a Palestinian army with heavy weapons, a state that could make military pacts with countries like Iran or Iraq..." (Netanyahu, 1997a: 39). Israel, he declared, "will not reduce itself to a fragile ghetto on the shores of the Mediterranean" (Netanyahu, 1997b: 13). Given that the envisioned Palestinian pseudo-state could hardly pose such a serious threat as Netanyahu claims, even if such pacts were presumably to be made, more must be read between the lines. The Israeli negotiator seems to be hinting that no mass of land, however small yet adequate enough to help re-establish the severed Egyptian-Levant strategic link, would be allowed. Implicitly underscored is not the issue of a reduced territorial size, which had actually sustained this state until 1967, but one of *role* as a link-severing structure. This attribute contributes to a large extent to Israel's geo-strategic relevance. The Israeli negotiator is unlikely to accept a condition in which, the Jewish state could be by-passed or cut through. This after all, is what could turn Israel into a ghetto, and this is largely what will contribute to determining the Israeli position regarding a sovereign Palestinian state. Former Prime Minister and Labor Party leader Shimon Peres' suggestion that Israel should be allowed to take the "reins of leadership in the Middle East" instead of Egypt was part and parcel of this consistent vision (Gerges, 1995: 71).

The coming of Ehud Barak to power brought little change despite the visible sigh of relief among Arab officials. In the same vein as his predecessor, he called for combining certain "parts" of the 1998 Wye River agreement with Oslo's final status negotiations. Not only that, but shortly after he had come to power, his government expanded colonies construction at a much faster pace than that of Netanyahu's (*Al-Ahram*, 1999a: 8). In addition, he declared that Jerusalem was to remain "the eternal and indivisible Capital" of the Jewish state and, that there would be no return to the pre-1967 borders. He also rejected the return of Palestinian refugees to their homeland, and suggested only the possibility of a withdrawal "on" rather than "from" the Syrian heights. These positions were accompanied by a stream of statements declaring a commitment to peace, and even setting a year 2000 deadline for an agreement (Usher, 1999).

Finally, while any concessions that the Israeli side may offer or make can only be from gains and profits acquired at the expense of the Arab side, reciprocal concessions by the Arabs can only be offered from their own capital. A framework of mutual concessions while in appearance procedurally fair hides a substantive injustice inflicted on one negotiating party. If the claim is made that this is natural given the facts on the ground and that Israel has acquired Arab land by winning militarily, whatever the justifications may be, and that the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must, then the whole negotiating exercise becomes one in which the victor is basically imposing its will over the vanquished. This essentially, dissolves the very substance of negotiation and reduces it to one of how to yield the best surrender scenario.

The Palestinian leader committed a serious strategic mistake when he conceded to interim agreements at the expense of postponing the fundamental issues of Jerusalem, the refugees, and the fate of Jewish colonies for future talks, (i.e. emphasizing the process of interaction rather than the content of the negotiated positions). In so doing he was following in Sadat's prenegotiation footsteps

when, together with Israel, both had sought to narrow the upcoming negotiation agenda to be undertaken at Camp David, by elimination or postponing the most controversial issues. The purpose was to reduce uncertainty and complexity and to lessen anticipated costs for Israel (Stein 1989b: 255; Stein 1989a: & 174-205).[7] Blunders of the kind were a reflection of the Arab/Palestinian negotiators' inability to rank strategic priorities of collective national interests, goals and objectives, and their confusion of means and ends. Within the framework of a confidence building process as opposed to that of content, top priority tends to be credited to current and *ad hoc* problems as opposed to long term strategic considerations. Each and every concern as a result, becomes a matter of top priority to be addressed by the force of circumstances, basically propelling a policy of survival that renders equal importance to hierarchical issues. Strategies, however, must be set on a priority basis. If priorities are confused, which a framework based on process rather than content actually leads to, then no long term collective national interest strategy could be focused upon, nor could a decision about the channeling and commitment of resources be made. Process becomes an end in and of itself rather than the means it is supposed to be. This helps explain Barak's call upon Syria to join the "peace of the brave" and Syria's sober reluctance to do so. Syria's approach reflects an astute awareness of the dimensions of the conflict, which go beyond land. Unlike Sadat and Arafat, Hafez Asad does not seem inclined in his pattern of negotiation to lose the whole (Syria) so as to bring back the part (the Golan heights) into his fold.

Such loss of strategic balance is what has allowed Peres to acknowledge that at Oslo II Israel had in fact "screwed the Palestinians" (quoted by Chomsky 1996: 6). Whatever Western conflict management framework is put forth, Arabs can only emerge as losers. As Carl Schmitt (1976: 49) has observed,

> ...as long as a people exists in the political sphere this people must, even if only in the most extreme case...determine by itself the distinction of friend and enemy. Therein resides the essence of its political existence. When it no longer possesses the capacity or the will to make this distinction, it ceases to exist politically. If it permits this decision to be made by another then it is no longer a politically free people and is absorbed into another political system.

In ending the intifada and signing the Oslo accords Arafat gave up two of his most important trump cards without receiving anything of substance in return. His errors further lifted any embarrassment considerations standing in the way of other Arab and non-Arab countries normalizing and establishing relations with Israel. This effectively bolstered its regional and international status and ended its isolation. The PA winded up wasting the very limited leverage it might have had. In the process it placed itself in its enemy's grip, and in that of its American ally, in much the same fashion, although under much worse conditions, as the Egyptian negotiator had done earlier.

With the exception of the highly skilled Asad of Syria, a look at the behavioral characteristics of Arab decision-makers and their negotiating competence reveals a significant propensity to modify the values at stake in a fashion that ultimately challenges their own entitlements. This means that a pattern of unfair concessions is being made which will continue to

manifest loss of control over economic and political outcomes. An opened Arab agenda was, being unfairly reciprocated by a closed Israeli one. And while failure to match concessions may be a necessary though not sufficient condition of unfairness, the latter condition will inevitably exist if the opponent's payoffs have not changed (Bartos, 1978: 22). Palestinian rights and demands for viable statehood are unlikely to go heeded or materialize since nothing in the negotiating pattern of the PA would allow for such an outcome. Parallel expectations on the broader Arab front, continue further, to decreasingly vary in light of their adversary's initiative dynamics. Such concessionary patterns continue to undermine Arab political existence.

The Politics of Peace Dialectics

The key toward winning a negotiating outcome is to change the perception, and in the process, the stakes of the opponent. As a reflection of American thought logic and presumably their intent, I. William Zartman and Maureen Berman (1982) provided an example of two antagonists clashing over the same piece of land--without naming any specific parties. If 'both' parties' perceptions could be changed, they reasoned, so as to convince them that it is the resources which the land holds that matter, then the two may be able to negotiate a deal whereby one can be the owner of the territory while the other shares in the benefits of the resources (Zartman & Berman, 1982: 13). Translated into the 'peace' process context, Arab perceptions are to be changed in favor of remunerative incentives (e.g. through economic cooperation, joint economic projects, and aid), while Israel is to acquire the land and perhaps even, the water resources. Anis Mansour (1999), a columnist in Egypt's *Al-Ahram* newspaper, for instance wrote that the countries of the Nile basin would not object to Egypt extending the Nile water to adjacent countries such as *Israel*, Palestine and Jordan if they were to be adequately paid, and if Egypt was to be remunerated for allowing water to pass through its territory (Mansour, 1999: 36).[8] Since such statements are unlikely to be made nonchalantly, given the Egyptian social, economic and political scene, one can not but anticipate further concessions of the kind down the road. Especially so when they were published only one day after the same newspaper had disclosed an American commitment to Israel to assist it in accessing water resources from *within the region* (*Al-Ahram*, 1999b: 1 & 4).

The whole issue is transformed from entitlement values to utilitarian calculations. The strategic cost of such a transformation would be tremendous. Rather than being the most powerful Nile basin country at its downstream, Egypt instead would be squeezed between a more powerful Israel (which would now become a Nile basin country!) in control both at downstream and at the source. This is not difficult to gauge if one is to closely observe the American-Israeli collaboration in the heart of Africa. Matters could be worse of course, if that state were to have commensurate access to the Euphrates. Israel would make economic, territorial and strategic strides, while the Arabs, notwithstanding some meager financial benefits, if any, would lose on all accounts.

Much of the inherent failures of Arab decision-makers and negotiators arise from their lack of a solid and participating national constituency. Their perennial legitimacy crisis and personalized governing style inevitably reflects on their performance and conflict management competence. In his book *Egypt's Road to Jerusalem*, Boutros Ghali (1997), a key figure in the negotiations which led to the Camp David accords, indicated that the Egyptian delegation to the US did not know how to prepare for the conference. Nor was the general strategy upon which to base its movements clear. As he sarcastically suggested, "it was said that Napoleon Bonaparte never set a military plan until he

was in the battle field. It dallied my hopes that inspiration would come to us when we arrive at Camp David. However, I did not come across signs of Napoleonic genius among us" (Ghali 1997: 137, author's translation). This testimony, in itself, constitutes a most serious indictment of the pattern of negotiation followed by the Egyptian regime.

Such indictments, however, do not end with Ghali. Raymond Cohen (1995) in addition observed that "...surely the single most noteworthy feature of the Camp David conference of September 1978 was Sadat's willingness to place his own fate and that of his nation in the hands of the leader of a foreign power-President Carter." Being at a total loss as to the next step that should follow after his visit to Jerusalem, a condition emanating precisely from the absence of a clear vision or strategy, Sadat's only recourse was to rely on the American President. In as far as he had a strategy, it was to "put himself completely into American hands...project(ing) assumptions about the value of client status onto his relationship with the United States" (Cohen 1995: 55). Cohen cited both Kissinger and former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to make his point. According to Kissinger, Sadat worked at identifying Egypt's interest with America's own, repeatedly challenging the US to enter the negotiations not as mediator but as participant, *or else he offered to accept what was put forward* to him (Cohen, 1995: 55, emphasis added). In essence, he put his full trust in the American president willing, in the words of Vance, "to take Carter's word that a given step was necessary..." (quoted by Cohen, 1995: 56). Rarely, as Cohen (1995: 56) described it, "can a patron-client relationship have achieved such pronounced expression." The logical outcome of this negotiating pattern was that Carter put Sadat's trust to excellent use, although not quite in the way that the latter may have expected. "The US president, it turned out, was better able to separate business from friendship than the Egyptian leader" (Cohen, 1995: 56). This outcome was a product not only of traditional diplomatic frameworks, such as negotiation, mediation, conciliation and arbitration, but also the presumably more advanced methods of conflict resolution. The latter emphasize the process of interaction (such as confidence building, education for mutual understanding and the pursuit of super-ordinate goals, including of course economic incentives) rather than the content of the negotiated positions (Reychler, 1994: 5-7). The two overlapping approaches nevertheless compromised core issues, leading Sadat to undermine Arab strategic entitlements in favor of short-term Egyptian territorial and financial gains. This ultimately translated into continued foreign domination of that country's decision making structure while providing the negotiating adversary with an opportunity to single out its fragmented Arab opponents.

The tragedy is that the Palestinian Authority seems to be following the same pattern of concessions of the Egyptian negotiator, yet without the assets and the leverage that the latter possessed. By offering the Israeli side the strategic concession that the largest and most powerful Arab country would drop out of the conflict equation, as a bargaining chip, Egypt could make territorial gains. Those gains came nevertheless at the cost of a de-militarized Sinai, and almost total loss of national independence, sovereignty, and self-esteem, as well as a significantly diminished regional status. "In the realm of strategy (however), a course of action cannot persist indefinitely. It will tend to evolve into its opposite, unless the logic of strategy is outweighted by some *exogenous* change in the circumstances of the participants" (Luttwak, 1987: 18, emphasis in quote). This exogenous factor was introduced in Israel's favor by eliminating Egypt from the conflict matrix and neutralizing it as the principal adversary, and is currently being added to by bringing Turkey into the conflict as an Israeli ally. This is not in order that the latter may deliver more land subsequently to

the rest of the Arabs, but rather to enjoy a freer hand on Egypt's North-Eastern flank. The Camp David accords, in other words, were the high points of the peace strategy after which the reversal of opposites can only set in. The more it is pursued the less the returns, until a point is reached where negative results can only ensue.[9] As Heikal (1996a: 308, author's translation) has stated,

> there is nothing more dangerous-in regional and international politics- from a condition of war that has stopped without a decisive end and without a mutual consent that forsakes (resorting) to arms. Under such a condition, explosion becomes possible at any time and without need for convincing reasons: for the reasons are inherent in this very condition and its nature.

The above factors essentially constitute the dynamics of the peace dialectics.

The Arab negotiators have three main alternatives: 1--to accept whatever is being imposed on them, seeking the best conditions under the circumstances, 2--to stall for time hoping for a reversion to the original land for peace formula, or 3--to counter-transform the negotiating rules by bringing in their own new formula and redefining the conflict in terms of its broader religious and strategic horizons At the same time negotiators would work actively toward the construction of new regional and systemic alliances. Opting for the first choice could very well preclude the second but more likely add fuel to the third. Mubarak's (1997: 21) remark to Netanayahu that war is "...an old (fashioned) matter...and will not solve any cause" effectively presented the Israeli Prime Minister with an altered peace for peace formula. Furthermore, when the threat of economic boycott was furled by the Arab League, as a result of Israel's continued building of colonies in Jabal Ghoneim (Har Homa) in occupied East Jerusalem, it was declared as a 'recommendation' rather than as an obligation. Associated calls for Arab countries to freeze their normalization of relations with Israel were declined by both Egypt and Jordan, on the grounds that they were tied to peace agreements with Israel which restricted them from doing so.

To put forth a land for peace formula is to make a conditional statement. Intrinsic to it is a presumed *veto* power: if there is no land returned, there will be no peace. But to what extent can the Arabs exude such credibility? The Arab summit which, had convened in Cairo in June 1996, announced peace to be a "strategic choice." Such a declaration *de facto* rendered land a residual component. If war is not an option nor are economic and diplomatic sanctions, then this essentially dissolves the Madrid formula, and its supposedly incorporated veto or conditionality. In line with Mubarak's remark, the summit effectively reduced the formula to one of peace for peace's sake. Nations which attempt to present themselves as unfailingly peaceful to the international community can hope to obtain little in the way of suasion from any forces they may have (Luttwak, 1987: 194). If they do not project much in terms of coercive credibility, sporadic violence will not uphold the required veto power. Islamist militants' bombings for instance, is not the same thing as war capability, and could be dealt with at the local security level rather than within the broader context of the 'peace' process.

Lacking control over their concession behavior the Arab decision-makers have contributed to the elimination of the second option altogether, even though they continue to demand its implementation. From then on, they can only move and act within the strict confines of an American-Israeli security framework, tilting the balances heavily in favor of option one.

Netanyahu's intransigence and disrespect for agreements previously signed, and his successor's negotiating pattern simply reflect consistent Israeli strategy and beliefs, common sense negotiation principles and calculations, and a well thought out understanding of the hard facts of the evolving situation. If the Arab negotiators in the course of their concessionary behavior were willing to undermine their entitlements, then naturally their opponent would not feel obliged to substantively revert to the less favorable linkage of land for peace. This goes for Barak as much as for Netanyahu.

Netanyahu's less than subtle approach, served to expose three extremely important factors. In the maze of the perception altering processes that had overwhelmed the region, those factors were conveniently obscured from the Arab and Muslim people: 1--Israel's structural and expansionist threat, masked in terms of security concerns, to the whole region and not just the Palestinians, 2--the bankruptcy of the Arab regimes, and 3--the true nature and stakes of the civilizational conflict. In as far as there had been tense relations between the Clinton administration and Netanyahu, it had to do more with the absence of the subtlety required for the pursuance of the above strategy-a strategy which the Labor party is perceived to be much more adept at directing. Barak's style has been more effective in reestablishing the space necessary for Arab regimes to make further concessions. In many respects and contrary to the impression given by Arab media and officials, Netanyahu has been a blessing in disguise.

The Third Option

In what is tantamount to a vicious circle, capitulation can only add to bitterness, resentment and ultimately to the mobilization of forces of indigenous resistance. This would be expected to bring forth even if in the long run option three. The Palestinian core of the Arab-Israeli conflict obscured the underlying religious and strategic foundations of the colliding wills. In as long as the focus was on the presumed confrontation between two nationalisms, Jewish and Palestinian, over the same piece of land, these more inherent contradictions were made less visible.

With the gradual and steady collapse of nationalistic justifications and with the issue of Jerusalem coming to the forefront, the Arab-Israeli conflict is being relinked with the religious dimension and its coextensive strategic underpinnings. This linkage emerges from the insight that "a nation's interest derive from its identity" (Huntington, 1997: 1). No longer is the confrontation solely over the same piece of land or scarce resources, be it territory or water, but more so over belief systems and basic values. Since Jerusalem is a religious cause, the clash over it can not be secularized (i.e. become solely a political issue). As such 'peace' outcomes and legalities will always remain marginal considerations applicable in the domain of politics to the extent that the coercive framework that produced them continues in place. In the realm of religion such limitations may not function as a long-term viable deterrent. The religious logic of the conflict would very likely alter the terms of confrontation from reduced objective calculations to subjective metaphysical convictions. Such sources of neo-hostility can not be settled by imposing legal norms and enforcing them against rule-breakers, since ultimately they are irrelevant to the conflict. Strategic policies of deterrence are unlikely to contribute to peace and are more likely to promote conflict as they frustrate the pursuit of entitlements, identity, and basic values (Burton, 1984: 137-138).

In the Arab/Islamic World, Islamist groups are mostly motivated by the justice motive which is value oriented (entitlement-benefits), while actors committed to the 'peace process' tend to be more utility oriented (cost-benefits). Militant Islamic groups, and Muslims in general, continue as a

matter of faith and values to refuse to accept the basic existence of the enemy irrespective of what takes place at the political level. More fundamentally, these motives continue to be transferred from one generation to another in Islamic societies. Secondly, the contending parties to the conflict do not see anything in common with one another, nor is there any overwhelming desire or willingness to coexist (Abu-Nimer, 1996: 33-34). Thirdly, while the Palestinian issue is being transformed through the peace strategy, it is also being counter-transformed into a core religious principle, a substantive change foreshadowing a future Islamic-Jewish conflict. Whatever the political outcome of the 'peace' process, it is unlikely to resolve this broader confrontation which is now slowly but steadily taking a more ominous tilt. The constant foundations of Islam limit the possibilities of absorbing the changes induced or imposed by the 'peace' process. This poses an acute problem for the application of Western conflict resolution mechanisms in an Islamic context. If a negotiating formula is understood to reflect "a shared perception or definition of the conflict that establishes terms of trade, the cognitive structure of referents for a solution, or an applicable criterion of justice" (Zartman & Berman, 1982: 1-2), then it is clear that it is none of these. Therefore, there is no negotiating formula in the first place. Negotiation "as a process in which divergent values are combined into an agreed decision, ... based on ... appropriate stages, sequences, behaviors and tactics..." can only fade into irrelevance (Zartman & Berman, 1982: 95).

External mechanisms which, seek to emphasize or artificially construct common and super-ordinate goals or interests do not apply in this case. They could very well be seen as just another attempt at superimposing alien modes of thought and structures. 'Peace' as a process of de-escalation is not value free and does not bear the same implications for the different parties. Western power and conflict resolution principles for instance, frequently surmise that 'peace making' is not possible until conflicts have "ripened" to the extent where costs have escalated to the point at which parties are prepared to settle (Burton, 1990: 88). In the process, "[d]eciding whether or not to try to de-escalate a conflict and which strategy to pursue, necessarily involves value preferences regarding an acceptable outcome" (Kriesberg & Thorson, 1991: 24). While war may be condemned all along, "sanctions, punitive expeditions, pacifications, protection of treaties, international police, and measures to assure peace remain" (Schmitt, 1976: 79). A sweeping look at the Arab/Islamic World may help demonstrate the implications: Egypt prostrate and ineffectual, Syria isolated and pressured, Jordan an American-Israeli vassal, Palestinians cantonized, Iraq destroyed, Libya and Sudan embargoed, the Arabian Peninsula virtually occupied, Algeria having undergone a bloodbath, and Iran and other militant Islamist groups being contained or crushed. This condition is contrasted with a robust Jewish State, militarily more powerful than all its potential adversaries and nuclear capable if not accessible. Given such asymmetry, no substantive inducements exist for a just resolution.

Furthermore, to capitalize on the outcome of the Second Gulf War as an issue transforming event, Field (1994: 385) stressed that as a result of this war, the Arabs have come to recognize "...not only that they could not fight Israel but that many of them had no *interest* in doing so." A conclusion which the majority of the people in the Arab World-as distinct from their largely de-legitimized regimes-may not particularly share, yet which mind and perception altering mechanisms seek to induce.[10] Within this objective and psychological re-construction of the regional order, one can perceive Samuel Huntington's (1993) "Clash of Civilizations" argument not simply as an intellectual exercise to be supported or refuted at the academic-analytic level, but more so as the theoretical cover for a policy in the actual process of implementation. This policy attempts to procure and

justify the *ripe* environmental conditions for the establishment of 'peace' while reconstructing the Muslim world and crushing grass roots Islamist groups. To the extent that Islam is an active value that determines the subjective, and where and when possible the objective nature of the conflict, it constitutes an organizational counter-mechanism which will continue to prohibit the alteration of the conflict structure as a zero-sum game. This stems from Arabs' and Muslims' awareness that if American-Israeli 'peace' is to constitute the region's new *interest*, this will require the transformation of the region's *identity*. Islam will be attacked on the plane of its basic values not merely on that of the political.

The fact that Islam is entitlement driven (content-ontological) while the 'peace' process is cost articulated (process-epistemological), sets both on two incommensurable planes of interaction. Harmonizing thought systems alternatively necessitates that they be positioned within the same logical framework (Burton, 1990: 89). On the one hand, to harmonize 'thought logics' in the Arab/Muslim World, with that of the 'peace' strategy requires that counter-thoughts be either peripheralized and contained, or if necessary crushed. Identity configurations become at stake as land, despite its centrality, becomes secondary to more crucial civilizational considerations. Whereas an intractable conflict of the Arab-Israeli variety would require the consolidation and mobilization of a collective Islamic-Arab identity, the American-Israeli side conversely, has sought to impose the state secular identity as the highest value. Continued concessions by the Arab side have allowed their opponents to impose their own desired configuration. Primary and/or secondary identities are imposed not chosen as a result, as a direct outcome of the very structure of the negotiating process. This provided the Americans and the Israelis with the opportunity to single out the Arab parties. By accomplishing this purpose they have caused the Arabs to pursue contradictory and conflicting state policies, which ultimately led to their fragmentation, bringing them under virtual American (and Israeli) colonization and/or domination. Even by the standards of primacy of state values, the Arab 'state' has been a failure.[11] The exterme hostility to Islamist currents by parties to the 'peace' process actually reflects their opposition to any potential reconfiguration of regional identity in favor of religio-strategic valuations. Herein lies the essence of the so called'clash of civilizations' and its camouflaged link to the 'peace' process. All else is detail. On the other hand, an Arab negotiator whose thought logic is reconstructed within the very framework of his adversary's is reduced basically to a supplicant rather than a counterpart. His will and perceptions of reality continue to be managed and altered by the opponent, with any settlement arrived at likely to hinge solely on contingent power relations.

In focusing on the new Islamic enemy, the US has targeted what it calls 'fundamentalist' and 'terrorist' groups, aiming with the collaboration of client regimes and to different degrees of success, at neutralizing and marginalizing them. Any Islamist oppositional group was depicted as a "disturber of peace...(and) designated to be an outlaw of humanity" (Schmitt, 1976: 79). Yet in so doing, both parties seem to overlook "...the dynamic way in which the environment of conflict gets out of control" (Burton, 1990: 52). While it may be feasible to crush such groups through the overwhelming power of the state and/or external assistance, this does not solve the problem as long as the environmental conditions leading to their emergence remain in place and regenerate. Secondly, their suppression does not necessarily lead to the containment of Islamic dynamism, since the vitality of Islam is not constrained by, nor dependent upon their existence. Islam has a long and inherent tradition of revival, renewal and resurgence. Thirdly, even though many of those groups

could or had been actually marginalized, by mainstreaming Islam in public life and society at large, they have nevertheless succeeded in scoring a major strategic victory. Despite his assessment of political Islam as a failure, Olivier Roy (1994: 78) could still notice that although the specter of Islamic revolution has been fading, Islamic symbols continue to penetrate the society and the political discourse of the Muslim world more than ever. In a dialectical fashion, the retreat of political Islam has been accomplished by the advancement of Islam as a social condition. What Roy does not appear to anticipate is the dynamics of *exponential* change that is independent of the existence of politicized groups but which, if unhindered, would ultimately lead to their victory.

Exponential change is a substantive process, which involves a preliminarily slow and gradual subterranean shift.[12] In its earlier stages it borders on being imperceptible or even natural, calling for no special attention or in all practicalities not much could be done about it. Serious difficulties would arise, for instance, if Muslims were to be pressured or dissuaded from practicing their faith or rituals. But then, rituals do have practical social consequences and implications, which can not be isolated from the overall environment. They keep the faith and its values alive and are the foundations of its reproduction and its social and political influence. Under stress, they are frequently imbued with socio-political content as an expression of protest and opposition. Given the nature of the conflict promoting environment created by 'peace' dialectics and its concomitant structures, 'social' Islam at one stage or the other may very well transform into a political wave of mainstream religious activism engulfing society at large. 'Peace' dialectics become conducive to the development of a religio-national psychological mode, cutting across diverse social strata, strongly disposed toward resisting its impositions. This transformation, while subtle, inevitably reflects the substantive differences in conflict perceptions based upon costs as opposed to entitlements. In contradistinction to the former quantification, the latter demarcations will be "basic," "fundamental," "consciousness" based and "less mutable" (Huntington, 1993: 22 & 29). Very few if any of the existing regimes appear capable, willing or qualified to make credible claims to such alternatives or deal with their transformative implications. For instance, Osama al-Baz, (1998: 6) the political advisor to Mubarak responded to the Israeli negotiator's stalemating intransigence by declaring that the Arab states have 'several' options, the most important of which is the convening of a *new international conference* to save the peace process. Such statements which, reflect bankruptcy rather than the availability of any real choice structure, manifest a condition of *entrapment*. Entrapment is a decision-making process "whereby (regimes) escalate their commitment to a previously chosen, though failing, course of action in order to justify or 'make good on' prior investments." This dynamic frequently leads to 'irrational' decision making and outcomes to the extent that it escalates commitment when de-escalation or opting out may be the more intelligent thing to do (Brockner & Rubin, 1985: 5 & 7).[13] And while it may be argued that an alternative Islamist agenda may offer no assurances for a successful extrication, it would uphold a real measure of commitment and hope, given that the only guarantee the virtually failing 'state' seems to be able to offer is abject defeat.

The 'peace' process is contributing to the regeneration and the recharging of its own nemesis by reconnecting religion to the internal and external organizing principles of politics and strategy. Such linkage would allow for an ideological thrust to bear, that could serve to mobilize Arab/Muslim society and to channel its commitments toward the counter-transformation of the negotiating rules. Islam as a national resource could create options and space that are vital within the context of the threats that the Arab and Muslim nation face. By redefining the conflict in terms of its

broader religious and strategic horizons, while working actively toward the construction of new identity reconfigurations, Islam could provide for a situation in which "an asymmetry in the [re]evaluation of stakes may offset an asymmetry in the national power of the participants in a struggle" (Lockhart, 1979: 93). Such potential may heavily tilt the balance against the existing negotiating regimes and erode their sense of security and legitimacy. Neutralizing such challenges has called for a collaborative effort, between local rulers on the one hand, and regional and global forces on the other, in order to crush militant or serious oppositional manifestations. Through suppression and 'education for peace' they seek to snuff out the very value system upon which Muslims' motivations may come to be based on (i.e. Islam itself). 'Peace' and war on Islam/justice have become two congruent if not, in many ways, identical processes.

Conclusion

Religious and strategic factors continue to converge and conflate in their own special way, as the prospects of the American-Israeli 'peace' persist in harboring the roots of humiliation and bitterness. Defining Islam as the new enemy after the collapse of communism constitutes a strategic decision foreshadowing the American-Israeli project of redrawing the political and potentially geographical map of the Arab World. This upcoming wave will not only target disparate or marginalized Islamist groups or just Muslim regimes, but more broadly mainstream Islam and mainstream society. Expectations of the kind have slowly introduced a subtle messianic streak in conflict perceptions among many Muslims, and contributed to projecting images of upcoming apocalyptic events.

These policies, aiming at restructuring regional identities, are becoming increasingly transparent, exposing Israel not solely as a Palestinian national security threat, but a much broader Arab/Islamic one. The conflict will likely continue to transform in direct proportion to the increasing intensity of threat perceptions. That Islam is being politicized is not simply a matter of a religious doctrine that does not allow for the separation of religion and politics, but more fundamentally, a matter of justice and strategic considerations as well as religious convictions. In its call to arms, Islam is not about violence and extremism but about the legitimate and unequivocal right to self-defense. It is a statement that threats to security, identity and religious values can not be contained by suppression or by mere settlement arrangements. By the same token, 'peace' as cant is not about negotiations and cooperation but about the destruction of values. It is a statement that motives, at the very core of human needs and existence, will have to be neutralized and/or compromised.

Western conflict resolution mechanisms do not seem to be well equipped to cope with these unique characteristics of present and future Arab-Israeli antagonisms, nor with their neo-hostility structures. Available theoretical constructs have externalized religious beliefs as determining components, reducing them to culturally alterable variables. Religiously held convictions, and especially Muslims' views of their Jewish/Zionist adversary, remain fixed conflict parameters. Conflict theory's reaction was to continue to reject such factors, largely as a source of cognitive dissonance, and to perceive religion more as a matter of unwelcome complexity that falls beyond the limits of the field, except perhaps as a reduced cultural variable. As a result, acts of violence and resistance perpetrated under the rubric of religious justification are either condemned as terrorist aberrations or analyzed and understood in a rather condescending fashion. What these theories have utterly failed to do is to address crucial questions regarding whether "the weak have the right to

make a different set of rules for themselves" (Orwell, 1981: 40). More importantly, how conflict mechanisms can cope with the Israeli-Palestinian showdown as only one facet of a multi-dimensional conflict in which religion is a parameter not a variable, as these mechanisms imply. These implicit yet very real underpinnings will continue to undermine the impositions of the 'peace' process. The fear that the Arab/Muslim World would go 'Islamist' is the fear that Western settlement mechanisms do not and cannot meet the basic human needs of its people.

Notes

[1] The Balfour Declaration dated November 2, 1917 was just five weeks before Jerusalem fell to the forces of the British General Edmund Allenby. In so doing, Great Britain was basically reneging on its promises of independence made to the Arabs in return for their support against the Turks during WWI (Heikal, 1996: 28-29).

[2] According to the King-Crane commission, appointed by American President Woodrow Wilson for the purpose of determining which of the Western nations should act as the mandatory power for Palestine, "...the initial claim, often submitted by Zionist representatives, that they have a 'right' to Palestine, based on an occupation of two thousand years ago, can hardly be seriously considered." (Laqueur & Rubin, 1995: 27).

[3] Harkabi was a former Chief of Israeli Military intelligence (1955-1959), and an advisor on intelligence to the Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. While aiming at breaking-down the Arab consensus, the US subsequently proclaimed itself an "honest broker." (US Letter of Assurances to the Palestinians, October 18, 1991, in Laqueur and Rubin, 1995: 576). In the same letter, the Americans indicated that negotiations would take place along two tracks between Israel and Arab States and Israel and Palestinians, effectively singling them out through the very structure of the negotiation framework (Laqueur and Rubin, 1995: 574).

[4] In a *Report of a Study Group Convened by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* it was proposed: "Regional water plans would be an important component of the bilateral and multilateral accords. The opportunity to increase access to water would serve as one of the *inducements* for Israel to negotiate security accords with its neighbors. Projects to be given high priority would include the Unity Dam on the Yarmouk River involving Jordan, Syria and Israel, pipelines for water from the Litani River in Lebanon and from Turkey or Egypt, and a joint Jordan-Israel desalinization plant in Eilat/Aqaba" (Lesch, 1992: 158). Notice the pattern of concessions required of the Arabs so that Israel would simply *accept* negotiating security accords with its neighbors; Israeli security of course being paramount over other actors' considerations. A security for peace rather than the Madrid land for peace formula is clearly being suggested here several years before Netanyahu's coming to power.

[5] According to Benjamin Netanyahu, Yitzhak Rabin, the assassinated Labor party leader and ex-Prime Minister, "was very clear that there were no limitations whatsoever on Israeli construction in Jerusalem. Rabin was the one who authorized the building of Har Homa (Jabal Ghoneim colony)" (Netanyahu, 1997a: 51).

[6] For instance, despite Barak's intransigence and in response to abstract pledges, the US declared its commitment to maintaining Israel's "qualitative edge" and "deterrent capability." This included upgrading Israel's airforce and Arrow defense systems ($ 250 million), increasing aid from $ 1.9 billion to $ 2.4 billion a year, and finally obtaining congressional approval to provide $ 1.2

billion so that Israel can build "fortified" by-pass roads to isolated 'settlements' in the occupied West Bank to ensure a "secure" Israeli redeployment under the terms of the 1998 Wye agreement (Usher, 1999).

[7] Commenting on the result, and perhaps justifying Netanyahu's position and his own call for *redesigning* the Oslo agreements, Kissinger stated that any analogy to the early stages of the peace process was illusory. As he put it "in the earlier negotiation, step-by-step progress relieved tensions and built confidence. On the West Bank, the opposite was the case. Both sides had jumped into the "peace process" without having clarified workable objectives and expected to wrest that clarity from the process itself. Instead, it has compounded their perplexities. This was no accident. Clearly, Arafat was led to believe by Israeli, American and European interlocutors that the final destination was at least the '67 borders and recognition of a Palestinian statehood. But that ignored the vast difference in the negotiations between Israel and the PLO compared with those between Israel and the neighboring Arab states" (Kissinger, 1997).

[8] Note how Mansour equates Jewish Israel with Arab Palestine and Jordan. He also seems to be insinuating that extending the water to Israel may be the price Egypt, in its 'commitment' to the Arab cause, may have to pay. In what is tantamount to a trial balloon, Mansour appears to be reviving the offer which Sadat had made in the early 1980s to extend the Nile water to Israel in return for Arab land; an offer which the Menachem Begin Likud government rejected at the time. This is where the *Toushki* project, claiming to create a new living space in the South-Western part of the country, may come in handy as a scenario. Based on this project, Egypt would make a case for much needed additional sources of water supply, which could be accessed if an agreement is reached whereby African states would gain financially. Egypt would receive more water and so would Israel. Any internal opposition could then be denounced as unpatriotic, foolish and perhaps even treasonous since it would undermine the 'national project' of *Toushki*. In this set scenario, providing Israel with water would be the 'nationalistic' thing to do. Perhaps at the heart of this matter lies Egypt's real hostility to the Islamic regime in Sudan, which appears to be oblivious to financial incentives of the kind and therefore perceived as an obstacle to such a grand design.

[9] Moshe Dayan told President Jimmy Carter, before Anwar Sadat's visit to Israel that "the future is with Egypt. If you take one wheel off a car, it won't drive...." Mirroring this view, Carter indicated in his memoirs that "it was fairly obvious that the key to any future military threats against Israel was the Egyptians..." Yitzhak Rabin indicated "Syria alone was no problem whatsoever for Israel," and that "terrorism is not a threat to Israel's existence... I wish that the so called PLO would be the only problem." "Egypt," he stressed "is the key country" (quotes in Finkelstein 1995: 171).

[10] Commenting on several polls in the Arab World related to this matter, Edward Said (1995: 134) observed: "In every instance public opinion has in fact expressed no enthusiasm for normalization with Israel. On mass level this suggests that the sense of defeat is not quite as widespread and prostrate as official policy and the logic of capitulationist intellectuals would have us believe." In the same vein, an *Al-Ahram Weekly* poll result indicated that "the Egyptian public ... (has) its own ax to grind with Israel" (as quoted by Gerges 1995: 75). Even Shenouda III, the Coptic Patriarch of Egypt, prohibited his followers from making pilgrimages to Jerusalem, declaring that "(t)he Christians of Egypt will not be the traitors of the Arab World" (as quoted in Heikal, 1996a: 553).

[11] At the Oslo meeting held during the first week of November 1999, between Arafat, Barak and Bill Clinton, Barak, according to *Newsweek* "signaled his willingness to accept a Palestinian state. But to the consternation of the Clinton administration and Palestinian leaders, he also made it clear he wants to disentangle the two economies…. Many Palestinians believe that such disengagement would be a disaster…" Note the psychological pressure exerted and the clear Palestinian dependency on Israel. One can not but wonder as to the nature of the prospective 'state' (Klaidman & Rees, 1999).

[12] A typical exponential change curve moves along in an almost horizontal line for a long period of time (tradition) before showing any marked shift in direction. Then, once there is a significant increase in the rate of change there is a sudden acceleration until the curve moves into a nearly vertical direction--a wave of *mainstream* change or revolution (Burton, 1990: 53-54).

[13] Quote de-italicized. *Irrationality* here is not to be confused with the sense in which *non-rationality* has been used above in the Finnish and Vietnamese cases. Irrational decisions could be made based on extreme caution and calculations. To many it would seem to be rational not to waste away sunk costs--a situation in which seeming rational inputs could lead to irrational outcomes.

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