



MEI MEDIA WATCH

(A Survey of Editorials)

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The Israeli-Palestinian Meeting in Washington, September 2010

**Compiled by
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[After months of hiatus, the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations began in Washington 2 September when President Barak Obama hosted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. It was also attended by King Abdullah II of Jordan and President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton hosted the direct talks between Netanyahu and Abbas. Both sides agreed to seriously pursue the negotiation with the next round to be held in the Egyptian resort of Sharm al-Sheikh. Commentaries of various international media on this development are reproduced here. **Editor, MEI Media Watch.**]

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THE DAILY STAR
LEBANON

Beirut, Editorial, 29 July 2010, Thursday

1. Time is running out for Palestine

As time is running out for Palestinians and Israelis to choose between direct peace negotiations or the status quo, one cannot but feel compelled to mull over, once more, the causes that lay behind this Sisyphean conflict.

When asked this question, Palestinians of all political stripes tend to share one opinion. They will blame all setbacks on the malicious strategies of their enemies in Israel.

But the time has come for Palestinians to also see eye to eye about another predicament, which has been infinitely more damaging: that by remaining divided, they are stuck with a losing strategy.

Yasser Arafat's long rule at the head of the Palestinian Authority (PA) is not always remembered as an era of halcyon days. But one has to call a spade a spade: Arafat had his flaws, but he was most of all an outright king of manoeuvring, one who played the diplomatic game when a situation lent itself to diplomacy, and jabbed his adversary if it called for a more aggressive stance.

This cohesion has been scrapped by the secession of the PA, with Hamas and Fatah endlessly bickering to their own detriment. The two parties' political divisions have even led to the emergence of a territorial one that has rendered Gaza and the West Bank divided Palestinian territories.

Sooner or later, those domestic disputes must be brought to an end, and a common, well-defined, strategy devised – it is the inescapable fate of those who share a national identity to cyclically forge alliances anew.

Differences need not to be trashed. A moderate Mahmoud Abbas flanked by a hardliner Khaled Meshaal, or vice versa, might be just the right combination to constitute a unified front which, in a mirroring effect, could deal with both the radical and moderate political factions found in Tel Aviv.

Not too long ago, one would have advised Palestinians to take a step back and get their house in order. But the time is pressing. With the Israeli practice of land-grabbing in full spin, and settlements mushrooming with no end in sight, there soon will be no Palestinian house at all.

Over 50 years ago, the Palestinian conundrum topped the international community's agenda. But, today, other, more pressing conflicts are making the headlines and capturing the attention of world leaders, and politicians are hungry for success stories.

Palestine, if it keeps pursuing this current course, is more likely to share the feature and fate of Somalia and the like – nations so hopelessly failed that no politician in his right mind would promise to get that house in order.

Source: http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=17&article_id=117577

THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

Beirut, Editorial, 31 July 2010, Saturday

2. Calm offers Lebanon a chance to mature

In parsing the significance of the Friday's (30 September) summit of Saudi King Abdullah, Syrian President Bashar Assad and Lebanon's leaders, it is crucial to grasp that this is not exclusively about Lebanon. The effort, led by Abdullah, represents part of a regional initiative indivisible from the push to revive direct Palestinian-Israeli negotiations.

One should see Abdullah's work on Friday (30 September) as another milestone on this path of his that includes the summit he backed in Kuwait in January 2009 to resuscitate the peace talks. What happened in Lebanon on Friday is also inextricably linked to the involvement of the Obama administration in the peace process, as well as the support expressed this week by the Arab League for Palestine to enter direct talks with Israel.

The summit brings home to us this major departure from previous approaches; hitching the Palestinian narrative to other issues percolating in the region is designed to create the international stability required for Palestinian-Israeli negotiations to move forward.

Of course, we must also note that this new approach might be short-lived, because a major variable in the equation— Obama's attempt to defuse the Iranian nuclear file— remains up in the air, to put it mildly. It also depends on what Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu is willing to put on the table; to be sure, Mahmoud Abbas also faces difficult constraints ahead of any direct talks, and all of these unknowns might well stay unresolved until the November (2010) midterm elections in the US, which could also recalibrate the dynamic.

Despite increasingly belligerent rhetoric from Israel this year toward Lebanon, Friday's (30 September) summit also reduces the threat of any confrontation on that front. The presence of Abdullah and Assad establishes the diplomatic precedent that Saudi Arabia and Syria are going to cooperate to avert strife in Lebanon, which is certainly a welcome development. To be sure, fears still smoulder here about what Hezbollah will do if the Special Tribunal for Lebanon indicts Hezbollah members, and Prime Minister Saad Hariri has a most difficult task in managing the situation here until an indictment is handed down.

The coming period will require a great deal of self-control and calm from Lebanon's leaders. Although they have allowed regional powers, in some sense, to direct the affairs of Lebanon, and while the summit set parameters for how top officials here should proceed, Friday's (30 September) milestone does not absolve this country's leaders of their responsibility to take advantage of the stability handed to them. However long the calm might last, they need to use this space for the germination of a Lebanese state that could one day manage its own crises.

Source: http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=17&article_id=117654



Jeddah, Editorial, 1 August 2010, Sunday

3. Fruitless talks

Obama's pressure on Abbas will only please Israel and Hamas

Suddenly the mood music for a resumption of direct talks between the Palestinians and the Israelis has changed key and grown louder. The Arab League Thursday (29 July) endorsed such negotiations subject to Palestinian judgment on timing. It would seem Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu's speculation that direct talks could be under way by the middle of this month, was not merely diplomatic window-dressing.

However, it would be wrong for all those who long for a just Palestinian settlement to raise their hopes too high, if indeed at all. The problem is that we have been here too many times before. On each occasion what has happened is that the Palestinians, having been drawn forward by encouraging noises from the Israelis, have seen the prospect of a deal evaporate like mirage, because the Israelis have acted in some way that is unacceptable to the Palestinian side. It might have been the continued construction of illegal West Bank settlements, the building of the illegal wall or a violent and bloody reaction to an apparent rocket attack from Gaza, which might very well have been organized by Israeli agents' provocateurs within the Hamas-controlled enclave.

What opens this latest initiative to even greater doubt was the revelation from chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat that fully two months ago, President Barack Obama's Middle East envoy George Mitchell received from the Palestinians a definitive paper on their negotiating position in direct talks. Eight weeks later there has still been no response from the Israelis. Instead it has become clear that the White House has been exerting pressure on President Mahmoud Abbas threatening that US-Palestinian relations would suffer unless direct talks resume soon.

Obama's attitude is disheartening.

His administration had originally deplored the continued expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem but met with insult and obduracy from Netanyahu. Abbas, no doubt encouraged by Washington's stance, felt able to make a settlement-freeze a precondition of resumed talks. Now the Americans seem to have resoled from their original position and instead turned the heat from the Israelis to the Palestinians.

It must be hoped that Obama is calculating that the big issues can be addressed in substantive talks and not deployed as preconditions. If Abbas goes along with this, he is running a political risk in that many ordinary Palestinians have backed his conditionality approach. Hamas, meanwhile, seemingly remains as set against any talks as it is against the rival Fatah that is dominant in the Palestinian Authority-administered West Bank.

If, and it still has to be a big if, any deal emerged from direct talks, it would still need to be accepted by Hamas, which as long as it is excluded from the political process, where it won a place in a fair general election, seems most unlikely. Therefore Washington would seem to be driving Abbas toward negotiations that one way or another could easily end up in humiliation for the Palestinian Authority and further radicalization of ordinary Palestinians who finally despair of any just and lasting

Source: <http://arabnews.com/opinion/editorial/article94067.ece>



Muscat, Editorial, 1 August 2010, Sunday

4. Direct peace talks

The Arab League's endorsement of direct Palestinian talks with Israelis is another attempt to revive the moribund Mideast peace process. In the latest bid, League members gave the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas the go-ahead at their Cairo meeting on Thursday (29 July). But by leaving the timing to the Palestinians, the League, in effect, has put the ball in the Palestinian court. The issue at stake is not when or where the talks should begin but how far the Israelis are prepared to go in conceding the Palestinians' legitimate demands. Ever since the Obama administration has been pushing for a settlement, Israeli leaders have been putting up roadblocks on the roadmap to peace. Even Obama's special envoy George Mitchell has not been able to bring both sides to a negotiating table despite year-long efforts, including indirect talks to facilitate face-to-face meetings at a later period. The reasons are well known.

Now, the scenario has not changed much or the position of both sides. If there is any shift in their position it is the Palestinian and Israeli leaders' acceptance to meet and talk it over. They have agreed to it under tremendous pressure from US President Barack Obama whose aides see the direct talks as the only way to break the deadlock. But it's not an easy task for Washington which has to play the key facilitator role. Before doing that it has to address the Palestinian concerns and conditions. Chief among them are Israeli freeze on settlements and return to 1967 borders—the two pre-conditions Israelis have been rejecting. In fact, Netanyahu has been consistently ruling out talks with pre-conditions. How the Israelis and Palestinian are going to reconcile their differences and resume direct talks after a gap of nearly two years is anybody's guess. Nevertheless, Netanyahu has been publicly saying that he is keen on starting "direct and frank talks with the Palestinian Authority as soon as possible." With the Arab League backing Abbas, he can finalise his agenda in consultation with his party which is expected to support his conditions.

But questions remain about Israeli leaders' honesty in tackling the core issues that have been

stalling the progress for years. The forward movement of talks when they begin will depend on a single point: Whether both sides will make compromises on the core issues. It is a hypothetical question at the moment. But it will determine the course and future of negotiations. Arab League chief Amr Moussa says written guarantees are needed for direct talks, a view Abbas has echoed. Bringing the Palestinian and Israeli leaders to an understanding is now Obama's job. The League's letter to him explaining the Arab position and the 'fixed principles' relating to a near agreement during talks between former Israeli premier Ehud Barak and the late Palestinian president Yasser Arafat should help him in preparing a common ground for the direct talks. Let's hope if the two leaders meet they can probably try to open up. If they can, it's a good beginning.

Source: http://www.omantribune.com/index.php?page=editorial_details&id=1686&heading=Editorial

HAARETZ.com,

Tel Aviv, Editorial, 1 August 2010, Sunday

5. Burden of proof

*P*alestinian President Mahmoud Abbas must decide whether to bow to American pressure and accept Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's invitation to begin high-level discussions.

The Arab League resolution on Thursday (29 July) supporting direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority was an important step on the path to renew talks to establish a Palestinian state. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas now must decide whether to bow to American pressure and accept Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's invitation to begin high-level discussions.

It is incumbent upon Abbas to answer in the affirmative because there is no benefit - neither for the peace process nor for the Palestinians - in more pointless delays that perpetuate the intolerable situation in the territories. The US President Barack Obama's backing of direct talks removes the possibility that the administration will impose its own two-state solution on Netanyahu before the two parties begin negotiations. Under these circumstances, Abbas must examine Netanyahu's statements in which he professes a desire for a final-status deal.

Netanyahu, who waged a diplomatic campaign to get the Palestinians to the negotiating table, persuaded the United States, the Europeans, Egypt and Jordan to give him a chance and support him. But the goal is not to hold talks, but to strike a deal. Netanyahu will be expected to prove that his speeches touting peace and his calls for expedited negotiations are not just deceptions designed to buy time while portraying the Palestinians as the intractable side. To that end, he must continue the government's construction freeze in the settlements and agree to partition the

land, actions that are antithetical to the ideology on which he was reared and the platform of the rightist coalition he leads.

Since his return to office, the prime minister has avoided clashes and key decisions. If he seriously works to promote the two-state solution, he will soon have to meet his base constituency head-on. Netanyahu's remarks to the Spanish foreign minister whereby extending the settlement freeze beyond 26 September (2010) "is impossible from a political standpoint" and would lead to the collapse of his coalition do not bode well. If Netanyahu is afraid of the settlers and their supporters, or his ministers Eli Yishai and Avigdor Lieberman, how can he make the compromises and concessions necessary in negotiations with the Palestinians?

Netanyahu likes to say he did not return to power just to sit in his chair but to make fateful decisions that will shape Israel's future, including the advancement of an agreement with the Palestinians. The burden of proof now rests with him. The Arab League's decision to support direct talks was aimed at the Palestinian president, but the prime minister's moment of truth is also approaching.

Source: <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/burden-of-proof-1.305225>



Dubai, Editorial, 12 August 2010, Thursday

6. Direct Talks: To be or not to be?

US efforts to re-launch direct talks between Palestinians and Israel have come to a grinding halt. Or at least until Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas concedes in the eleventh hour. So far, he is refusing to budge and has demanded that Israel agree to the two key conditions of a cessation of settlement expansions and withdrawal from all territories to the pre-1967 borders. A tall order indeed, since Tel Aviv has promptly dismissed conditional talks.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, however, has indicated a willingness to start direct talks. He has conveyed this to US Special Envoy George Mitchell who has been burdened with the Herculean task of restarting the Israel-Palestinian peace process by President Barack Obama. It may be prudent to take the Israeli position with a grain of salt since what really matters is how Tel Aviv negotiates the major issues eclipsing the peace process.

Abbas is in a difficult position to say the least. He is wedged between losing popular support by sitting down for talks without any assurances, guarantees or withdrawal schedule from Israel. Despite the Arab League having given their support for direct talks, Abbas has at least publicly stuck an obdurate stance. He is currently facing immense pressure from Washington. President Obama recently sent Abbas a detailed letter expressing his reservations and warning him of the consequences of lesser US support in case he does not agree to the talks. At the same time the

date for the expiry of a partial Israeli moratorium on settlement construction is drawing closer. Israel might not extend it in case direct talks are not restarted. At the same time sitting on the table with Israelis without any guarantee is bound to make Palestinians look bad.

Previously, Obama was forced to retreat from his stand on settlements and defer to the Israeli position. Now that the Palestinians are insisting on the same, they are being coerced to revise their position. Unfortunately for the Palestinians, they do not enjoy the same clout with the US as Israel.

The viability of these talks is also being questioned. To date, Israel-Palestine talks have been mired in frustration and obstacles. The majority of that responsibility falls on the shoulder of Tel Aviv. Israel's refusal to stop committing violations of international law and human rights is the main reason peace has been so elusive. If, Netanyahu wants direct talks then let him prove his critics wrong and show some mettle in breaking free from the typical mindset and policy diktat bogging Tel Aviv down.

Source:

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/editorial/2010/August/editorial_August22.xml§ion=editorial&col=

THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

Beirut, Editorial, 14 August 2010, Saturday

7. Obama's Mideast peace game

Barack Obama's peace plan for the Israel-Palestine conflict has apparently taken off, nearly two years after his momentous election to the world's most powerful post. It has been a busy time for the young president, who sought to rescue the international image of his country.

Obama began his presidency by delivering an important speech in Cairo, addressed to the Muslim world, and appointed George Mitchell as his Middle East peace envoy, as his first "diplomatic" act. Along the way, the White House has engaged in sparring with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, briefly raising hopes that Washington's total and blind support for Israel might be changing.

Much of the media's focus has been on Netanyahu, a natural lightning-rod for criticism and controversy, but the Middle East peace game is actually Obama's.

One is inclined to ask whether the latest moves represent the last American credible drive for peace. Along with this question is the following: should we brace ourselves for another big disappointment? If the peace process collapses, there will be serious ramifications for countries like Jordan, and Syria has been wearing its “Sunday best” for more than a year, declaring its readiness for peace. In fact, the credibility of the Arab state system itself is at stake.

Thus far, the details of the peace plan are fairly elementary, with little in the way of “vision” of evidence that the White House is prepared to pressure Israel. Meanwhile, the Palestinian political situation presents a complicated picture, and poses the question of whether the Palestinians will be able to speak with one voice.

Anyone who is fond of searching for dark clouds can easily capitalize on the war of leaks in Israel, as Netanyahu is rumoured to be willing to give up almost all of the West Bank, while his rivals engage in counter-leaks, claiming that there can never be linkage between settlers and “terror.”

All of this commotion is beside the point: what matters are the Oval Office, and Foggy Bottom.

The Rand Corporation has released a fairly credible state-building proposal for the West Bank and Gaza part of a vision that will allow the Palestinian Authority to fill the space that Israel leaves, if it chooses to do so.

Meanwhile, Obama’s credibility in the region is falling, as people have become tired of hearing the noise of a mill that doesn’t produce any wheat, as the local expression has it. If the statements, and the leaks, and the counter-leaks, end up producing nothing, the region will be in for a dire situation whose consequences are difficult to predict.

Source:

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=17&article_id=118223#axzz0xWO7FJ2a

TheNational

Abu Dhabi, Editorial, 14 August 2010, Saturday

8. Obama’s risks have so far been rhetorical

Thomas Jefferson was the first US president to hold an *Iftar*, hosting an ambassador from Tunisia more than two centuries ago. At a Ramadan dinner on Friday (13 September), the US president Barack Obama recalled something that Jefferson had written: “All men should be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion.”

They should be free, Mr Obama continued, to build a mosque and Muslim community centre a few blocks from where terrorists toppled the twin towers in 2001, killing more than 2,700 people.

This position is not popular in the United States; nearly 70 per cent of Americans oppose the construction of the mosque in lower Manhattan. In his forceful support for the mosque, Mr Obama took a political risk at a time when his popularity is suffering.

Mr Obama has pursued engagement with both his words and symbolic gestures since his inaugural address, when he pledged “a new way forward” with the Muslim world. But hosting dinners and delivering speeches is one thing, leading the US to become an honest broker in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process is another. It is admirable and risky for the US president to support the mosque near Ground Zero; why then, does he not take the risk of challenging the Israelis for their intransigence?

On Mr Obama’s watch, the Israeli Prime Minister agreed to a temporary halt in settlements of the West Bank, only to allow construction of hundreds, if not thousands of new units there. When Mr Netanyahu said he was ready for direct talks with the Palestinian Authority in a visit to Washington last month (July), a few days later his government demolished the homes of Palestinians in East Jerusalem and approved the construction of new ones for Jewish families.

Because of the inconsistency between Mr Obama’s rhetoric and his results, his standing in the Arab World has plummeted. According to polls released this month by the Brookings Institution, a Washington-based think tank, only 16 per cent of Arabs are optimistic about US foreign policy in the Middle East, down from 51 per cent last year (2009). It came as no surprise that “disappointment on the Israeli-Palestinian issue” was the leading cause for the drop, according to Sibley Telhami, who compiled the numbers.

Of course, Mr Obama’s tenure in the White House is far from complete. The Israelis and Palestinians may begin direct talks in the coming weeks and months. But if and when they do, which Barack Obama will help to steer their course?

The security of both the Israelis and the Palestinians depends on Mr Obama being forceful not only in his words, but also in action, so that the parties make concessions, and that they are held to their word. Far more than just his popularity is at stake.

Source:

<http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100815/OPINION/708149932/1033/editorials?template=opinion>



Dubai, Editorial, 15 August 2010, Sunday

9. Peace talks need to cover core issues

Resolving Palestinian conflict depends on tackling major problems, not ignoring them. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is right to have refused for months to take part in indirect talks with Israel about the supposed peace plan for Palestine and Israel. It is also encouraging that he is seemingly close to agreeing to direct talks. US President Barack Obama would like to use any talks and pretend that he is trying to do something about peace. But talks have to go somewhere and the sad fact is that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is not interested in a peace deal, and will do anything to tangle up the Palestinians in talks while continuing to impose his iron grip on the ground.

Both Egypt and Jordan urged the Palestinians to return to talks in their meeting on Thursday, in a tripartite summit between Abbas, Jordanian King Abdullah and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Egypt and Jordan had agreed with the US that indirect talks should start, and they would have applied substantial pressure on the unfortunate Abbas.

Abbas has been right to insist that talks can only succeed when there is something to talk about, and the Israelis have made it very clear that they are not willing to change their position on the substantive issues: complete withdrawal from the West Bank, a return to 1967 borders, and agreement on the status of occupied Jerusalem, along with open recognition of Israel and a start of normal diplomatic, social and commercial relations. None of this is forthcoming from Netanyahu who is sitting pretty with the Obama administration.

The Arab foreign ministers were right a few weeks ago when they called for direct talks on the basis that they should cover all the important issues, and not mess about with fringe conditions for further talks. Netanyahu has refused to take part in such talks, and the Arabs have been right to continue to expose his refusal to talk about genuine issues.

Source:

<http://gulfnews.com/opinions/editorials/peace-talks-need-to-cover-core-issues-1.668249>

TheNational

Abu Dhabi, Editorial, 21 August 2010, Saturday

10. It is Netanyahu's turn to take a risk for peace

Benjamin Netanyahu has what he wanted, or so it would appear. Since he began his current term as the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr Netanyahu has pushed for direct talks with the Palestinian Authority; they are now scheduled to begin in Washington on 2 September (2010). But for the talks to bear fruit, Mr Netanyahu must grapple with what he has long sought to avoid.

Mr Netanyahu's Likud party has never directly negotiated final-status issues with the Palestinians. This has allowed them to avoid making unpopular decisions; they could dodge the difficult issues rather than work towards their resolution.

A favourite tactic of the Likud party has also been to depict the Palestinians as obstructionists. That won't do this time around. The president of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, has agreed to come to the table at a considerable political cost. The onus is on Mr Netanyahu to take the next risk for peace.

When a 10-month moratorium on the construction of new settlements in the West Bank expires at the end of next month, Mr Netanyahu's seriousness will be tested. If he allows settlement construction to resume, he will reveal that he values the support of radical members of his government more than the comprehensive peace that he claims to desire.

To arrive at a compromise on every core issue, from the status of Jerusalem to the nature of the Palestinian state, Mr Netanyahu will have to break with one or more of his coalition partners. Eli Yishai, the leader of the Shas party and a member of Mr Netanyahu's government has already made his opinion clear on settlements: "The prime minister can't continue the freeze, formally or practically." As for Jerusalem, it "was given to us by the Creator".

Both sides have their share of radicals. Mr Abbas has already chosen to reject the views of those within his own camp, and within the membership of Hamas, opposed to him sitting down with Mr Netanyahu. Immediately after the talks were announced, Hamas said that they would lead "to more Palestinian suffering". It is now up to all parties involved to prove Hamas wrong.

It is true that Mr Netanyahu's past behaviour is not encouraging. He has offered little to the Palestinian Authority or to George Mitchell, the US special envoy to the Middle East.

But recalling the peace he helped to broker in Northern Ireland in 1998, Mr Mitchell advised persistence: "We had 700 days of failure and one day of success."

The US has largely allowed Mr Netanyahu to set the terms for the resumption of the talks. We will soon see if the US president Barack Obama has the courage to compel him to compromise. Peace will require persistence but also, US pressure.

Source:

<http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100822/OPINION/708219906/1033/editorials?template=opinion>



Editorial, 21 August 2010, Saturday

11. What Israelis and Palestinians must concede if they want a lasting peace

It took a lot longer than he hoped, but President Obama has managed to persuade the leaders of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to sit down together and negotiate without preconditions, as Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton announced Friday [20 August]. This is good news and an important diplomatic achievement. If Israelis and Palestinians could, within the one-year time frame specified by Ms. Clinton, agree to live in two peaceful neighbouring states, the benefits would be unbounded: for Palestinian well-being, for Israeli security, for progress in the Middle East more broadly.

But the welcoming of good news shouldn't morph into naive celebration. Ms. Clinton was amply justified in warning of obstacles ahead.

The most obvious of those, as she said, will come from the unambiguous "enemies of peace." Hamas, which controls a good chunk of what would become a Palestinian state, might well respond to progress in the talks with increased attempts at violence, and terrorism from other quarters is also likely. Israeli settlers and their supporters who oppose not peace but any ceding of territory may engineer provocations of their own.

There are also potential obstacles within the talks. Is Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu truly committed to a two-state solution? Many Arabs have their doubts. It will be important for him not to allow next month's scheduled end of a settlement moratorium to abort the negotiations.

Is Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas truly willing to accept, once and for all, Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state? Given his inability to say yes to past reasonable offers, many Israelis have their doubts. It will be important for him to engage substantively and not wait for the United States to impose terms. And even if both leaders are willing to compromise, are they also capable of bringing their polities along?

Finally, the obstacles lie in the necessary compromises. Yes, the outlines of a deal are well understood by all, but that does not make them easy. Palestinians will have to accept that Palestinian refugees and their descendants will never move to Israel, except perhaps in token numbers. Israelis once again will be asked to cede control over territory for intangible and reversible promises of peace and recognition. No one should underestimate the risks of that, especially given the unwillingness of Arab states to offer to Israel even the minor concessions of goodwill that Mr. Obama asked for.

The region can hardly afford another cycle of raised expectation giving way to terror and warfare. While talks proceed, so must the efforts to build Palestinian institutions on the West Bank and to promote Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation there. We can hope that, this time, the cynics about Mideast peace will be proved wrong. But we shouldn't count on it.

Source:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/20/AR2010082005368.html>



Dubai, Editorial, 21 August 2010, Saturday

12. Here come direct talks

Months of hectic diplomacy by the United States seems to have paid off, at least in pushing matters ahead in the Middle East.

There is to be a resumption of direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians. Moreover, the latest round of talks having a one-year time frame is expected to be launched by US President Barack Obama.

While the contentious issues dominating the agenda have become increasingly complex, the time limit is a good idea. It does not leave the new negotiation initiative open-ended. In fact, it can help streamline the discussions and sharpen the focus on the sticking points. The framework for the talks remains the same; Israel's withdrawal from occupied territories to the pre-1967 borders. But it is not merely a release of occupied territories.

The issue of Israeli settlements on occupied territories poses a major impediment in the future as well. Tel Aviv has not as yet given any indication that it might extend the moratorium— on a partial halt of settlement construction— that expires end September. The Israeli government under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has taken a strong stand on the issue of cessation of settlements despite US pressure.

It is an issue that is likely to figure prominently during the talks. The Palestinians agreeing to the talks despite not having obtained a guarantee from Israel on settlements is obviously under US coercion. This may have won Israel round one even before the talks, but coercion is not going to work when it comes to battling it out during negotiations. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, for one, will not be in a position to concede further ground. Already the sentiments on the Palestinian street are running high on what is being perceived as a renegeing on the stand of settlements. It is likely to be further fanned by Fatah's rival group Hamas.

Besides, other key issues in the talks will include the fate of Jerusalem's political status, the return of Palestinian refugees and the borders of a new Palestinian state. A two-state solution while accepted internationally as the only viable solution for the Israeli-Palestinian dispute remains shackled by these very issues.

Despite the difficulties looming large, holding of talks, especially those bound in a time frame, is a positive development. The Obama administration can at least for the time being heave a sigh of relief for having managed to get the two sides to resume talks. The rest of the challenge remains to be seen.

It is hoped that the US plays a positive and fair role during negotiations. It must bear on Israel to relinquish its obdurate stand, not commit further violations of international law and end the pursuit of policies that has left it in a reviled and isolationist position in the region.

Source:

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/editorial/2010/August/editorial_August40.xml§ion=editorial&col=



Jeddah, Editorial, 22 August 2010, Sunday

13. Mideast talks

The goal set out by the US to reach a settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict within a year is ambitious and probably sets the bar too high.

When Mahmoud Abbas and Benjamin Netanyahu come face to face for dinner and talks in Washington, we know where they're coming from. They will meet a decade after the last real final-status talks, 20 months after the last direct talks and after around three months of largely futile indirect negotiations.

Beyond that 2 September (2010) date, it's anybody's guess where Abbas and Netanyahu will be heading. If the Obama administration wants peace within a year, there will need to be more

substance soon. Prospects of a comprehensive deal are slim as serious disagreements exist on the core issues. A withdrawal from occupied lands, the construction of Jewish settlements on occupied territory, the status of Jerusalem, the borders of a future Palestinian state and the right of return will be difficult to overcome, mainly because of the man at the Israeli helm.

Since winning election last year (2009), Netanyahu has given few signs that he is willing to make the tough concessions demanded by the Palestinians and the international community. He says he will not give up east Jerusalem and has not talked about the possibility of a broad withdrawal from the West Bank. And he makes it appear that the hard-liners he leans on will bring his government down should he offer the Palestinians anything more than a cup of tea. This has made the Palestinians extremely leery about talking to the Israeli leader.

Meanwhile, Abbas has his own set of domestic political complications to think of. He represents only about half the Palestinian people. The other half takes its orders from Hamas which can impede or facilitate any peace deal and which immediately condemned this new US-sponsored initiative. Abbas, already weakened by Hamas' takeover of Gaza three years ago, rightly fears a failed peace process could further damage his standing.

The conditions for these talks are not right. For instance, the first real test comes all too soon, when the Israeli government's moratorium on Jewish settlement expansion in the West Bank comes to an end on 26 September (2010). Running in favour of Netanyahu and going contrary to Palestinian demands that the talks be contingent on a temporary freeze on settlements, the talks will be held without preconditions.

Still, left to their own devices, Palestinian and Israeli leaders will never make progress on their own. It was the Obama administration that insisted on the direct-talks format as the way forward, so the ball will now be in their court. But to help ensure that the new initiative does not peter out like past efforts, the US administration must create sustainable momentum. It needs a plan, and unless US officials are keeping their cards close to their vest, it looks for now as though they do not have one. The US is prepared to submit bridging proposals if the two sides fail to make progress but that will simply not be enough.

So, starting direct talks between the Palestinians and the Israelis is a small step but it could become a significant one. For now, though, it looks more form than substance which is why scepticism is high and expectations are low.

Source: <http://arabnews.com/opinion/editorial/article110032.ece>



Muscat, Editorial, 22 August 2010, Sunday

14. Another peace talks bid

When US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced on Friday (20 August) that direct talks on the Middle East would begin on September 2 (2010) in Washington, her statement has raised more than usual interest in the forthcoming negotiations. Its optimism laced with scepticism because after months of American shuttle diplomacy and countless statements by Israeli and Palestinian leaders, not to speak of non-starters like indirect talks, at last a date has been fixed. Besides the leaders from both sides, two other key players – President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and King Abdullah of Jordan – will join them. The Washington meet should augur well for making a beginning to break the long deadlock. But other factors cloud the hope generated by Hillary’s taut statement. Foremost among the shadows lurking behind the scenes is the trust deficit: How to bridge the gulf between the two sides and bring them to a common platform of understanding from where the Palestinians and Israelis could start working towards a final solution. Nevertheless, the Obama administration is optimistic, though it is difficult for us to understand the reasons stoking the hope unless it has chalked out a strategy which it will unveil after monitoring the progress of face-to-face talks. But, if we go by the immediate reactions to the peace summit among Palestinians and Israelis its chances of success are slim. At least in the first round. If they take off with compromises from both sides we can expect a little progress.

More than the Israeli and Palestinian leaders going to the negotiating table, ominous signals of doom have emerged from their respective camps. Israeli hardliners are out to undermine Prime Minister’s Benjamin Netanyahu’s efforts with a campaign to pressure him against conceding to halt West Bank constructions, one of the stumbling blocks in peace talks. Some of his right-wing coalition partners have gone to the extent of threatening to bring down the Netanyahu government if the premier gives any concessions during the parleys. The question is how far he can go in accepting the Palestinian terms. Even if Netanyahu takes a conciliatory stance under US pressure, which is unlikely, anyway, some of the Palestinian groups’ stand appears to be inflexible.

However, as the saying goes, we have to give peace a chance, the September 2 (2010) talks should be viewed in the light of recent developments and the US under President Obama should be given an opportunity to explore the prospects for a ‘final settlement’ of the decades-old problem. He is the eighth consecutive American president trying to resolve the Middle East conundrum. All earlier attempts have floundered in various degrees and at various levels, mostly

due to Israeli intransigence and insincerity either in its approach or obstinacy to consider the Palestinian point of view. Now, will Netanyahu go to Washington with an open mind since “there are no pre-conditions” and be a team player in bringing a lasting solution to the region? Or, will he change his mind in 10 days and make a mockery of the direct talks? An unpredictable situation. But even if the talks yield zero result, the meeting should be considered as breaking the ice after a 20-month freeze in direct contacts.

Source:

http://www.omantribune.com/archives/index.php?page=editorial_details&id=1707&heading=EDITORIALS&archdate=2010-08-22

HAARETZ.com,

Tel Aviv, Editorial, 23 August 2010, Monday

15. Time to pay up

Soon it will be clear whether Netanyahu's manoeuvre was an empty one, designed to buy time and ease international criticism of Israel, or whether he is ready for a compromise that will lead to the creation of a Palestinian state.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is pleased: The US administration and the Arab League accepted his position and pushed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to renew direct talks with Israel "with no preconditions." Next week Netanyahu and Abbas will be guests in Washington, where they will re-launch the foundered negotiations over the final agreement and the implementation of a two-state solution.

Netanyahu got what he wanted, but now his promises are coming due. Soon it will be clear to all whether his manoeuvre was an empty one, designed to buy time and ease international criticism of Israeli actions in the territories, or whether he is ready for a compromise that will lead to the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. By expressing doubt at yesterday's cabinet meeting about whether there was a "genuine partner on the Palestinian side," Netanyahu showed that he is preparing an escape route from being blamed for the failure of the talks before they have even begun.

The Middle East Quartet announced that the negotiations could be completed within a year. But Netanyahu's first test will come much sooner- next month (September 2010) when the construction freeze in West Bank settlements ends.

The right is pressuring the prime minister to renew settlement expansion in full force, and Netanyahu is maintaining ambiguity; soon he will be forced to dispel the ambiguity and make a decision.

The choice is clear: The construction freeze must remain in place for the duration of the negotiations.

New building across the Green Line would constitute a provocation and cause the talks to fail. The flimsy excuse under which previous Israeli government expanded the settlements while conducting peace talks with the Palestinians is misleading. The truth is that these actions undermined Israel's credibility and spurred the Palestinians to reject Israel's proposals.

Netanyahu's rationale for the freeze- that it served Israel's interests by demonstrating its desire for peace- is still valid, perhaps even more so.

If the suspension of construction was necessary to get the talks started, it clearly must continue while they are underway. If Netanyahu wants his peace declarations to be believed, they must also be seen in his actions on the ground.

Source: <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/time-to-pay-up-1.309642>



Dubai, Editorial, 24 August 2010, Tuesday

16. The Israeli stance

Come September [2010] and the Middle East will be in the eye of the storm. President Barack Obama is to meet the Israeli and Palestinian leaders as well as the Jordanian and Egyptian leadership to launch the next phase of direct talks.

There is inevitable scepticism regarding these talks and the end objective of achieving peace. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu seems to think that peace is “possible” albeit “difficult”. He, who himself strongly opposed any pre-condition for Israel, has laid one for the Palestinians. According to the Israeli leader, the success of these negotiations is dependent on how Israel’s interests are protected. That would entail the Palestinians accepting Israel as the state of the Jewish people and ensuring its security.

Conveniently, the bigger issues of borders, the fate of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements and return of Palestinian refugees have been circumvented totally. Or maybe Netanyahu wants to keep these issues fresh for the negotiating table. For him peace is achievable only if an agreement is reached between Israel and a demilitarised Palestinian state when it is established. Thus, a Palestinian state that does come into being would be a demilitarised one and thus not pose any threat to Israel. Of course, here the question of Israeli disarmament does not even figure. A cursory reading of what Israel is hinting at reveals that it would only agree to a Palestinian state if it was defanged and docile to an extent that would appease its Jewish neighbours.

At present the US is pushing the efforts aimed at achieving the impossible within a one-year time frame binding the direct talks. With Obama personally involved in these talks, the idea is to

push through some sort of resolution for the decades-old conflict that has spawned the worst conflict in the region. The consensus among the Arab states and the wiser counsels in Europe and beyond is that a two-state solution is the only way out. Despite having acquiesced to this previously, the Israelis have been always renegeing on commitments to even start the ball rolling. The last direct talks between Palestinian Authority and former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert were called off in face of unavoidable tensions with Israel in late 2008. The subsequent Israeli offensive on Gaza in December 2008 proved the last nail in the coffin.

While Obama has vowed to restart the peace process and achieve some sort of resolution, the looming negotiations are hardly going to be easy. It is hoped that the US exerts the much-needed pressure on Tel Aviv to give up its obdurate stance and make a real commitment to achieving the proposed two-state solution. It means making those sacrifices the Israelis have been loathe making so far.

Source:

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/editorial/2010/August/editorial_August45.xml§ion=editorial&col=

THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

Beirut, Editorial, 24 August 2010, Tuesday

17. Palestinians should call Israel's bluff

After all the time that has elapsed since the last round of direct Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, the Palestinian side does not have any excuse not to be fully prepared for this latest go-round. Taking into consideration the track records of the Israelis and the Americans in previous attempts at the peace process, the Palestinians need to exercise great prudence and proceed carefully, but there is no other option than to go into these talks with the goal of achieving a comprehensive peace deal.

The situation on the ground has changed since the last talks, both in terms of the construction of settlements as well as the continuing explosion of the Palestinian population relative to the growth of the Israelis' numbers. The situation in the US has changed, with the Obama administration so far appearing serious in its lengthy efforts to return to direct negotiations. However, the untenable situation of the Palestinian people has not changed; if anything, their lot has gotten worse in recent years, evidenced by the Israelis' asphyxiation of Gaza and their suffocating of economic life in the occupied West Bank.

Despite their suffering the Palestinians need to act with all the statesmanship they can muster. It helps their position that the Arab League has given its full backing to the return to the talks. Paradoxically, it also could benefit them that many in Palestine have rejected direct negotiations; Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas should use this stiff opposition to exact more concessions from the Israelis, in order to assuage the many antagonistic Palestinian groups.

Of course, the sight of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu leading the Israeli Cabinet does not create high expectations for the bargaining. Netanyahu said on Sunday that he was “seeking to surprise the critics and the sceptics” by succeeding in the direct talks; we heartily encourage the Palestinian negotiators to call his bluff and see what this hawk – and the loyal son of an even greater hawk – is willing to do to surprise the naysayer.

In the end, the chances for the success of these negotiations might rest most in the hands of the mediator. US President Barack Obama and his envoys have pledged that the United States will act as an honest, unbiased broker. After decades as Israel’s greatest benefactor and friend, that would be a new and welcome approach.

The US has a great responsibility in these talks, because it has the ability to take steps which could ease the sacrifices that both sides will have to make. If the parties realize what a peace deal could do, they must expend all efforts to see these negotiations through to a successful end.

Source: http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=17&article_id=118520



Jeddah, Editorial, 25 August 2010, Wednesday

18. What Bibi really wants

September 26 (2010) marks D-Day for determining if Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is interested in achieving peace or in continuing the occupation of Palestinian land. It is on that day that the 10-month moratorium – or slowdown – on settlement building comes to an end, an inconvenient three weeks after the scheduled start of new face-to-face peace talks on 2 September (2010).

This time around the onus of keeping the talks going truly lies in Israel’s hands as the settlement freeze was long a precondition for Mahmoud Abbas returning to the negotiating table. Israel met that demand halfway, and the US and its allies have prevailed on Abbas to return to the table despite Israel’s less than perfect halt of settlement building. Abbas, however, has stated unequivocally that he will leave the talks immediately should settlement activity resume.

And why shouldn’t he? If Israel chooses to ignore Palestinian and international demands that it stop colonizing Palestinian land, then there is no basis for peace talks. The only manner to achieve peace in Palestine is through justice and compromise, and the time has come for Israel to undo some of its injustices. The Palestinians, on their part, have already agreed to compromise and let go of many of their legitimate demands. Surrounding states, in fact the entire Arab world, proposed a peace process that Israel has ignored till now.

Now, however, the frighteningly obvious issue of Israeli construction on occupied land has

become such an inevitable flash point, and the one and only way to remove such a catalyst for potentially dangerous confrontation is to end its existence. The colonization policy has been in policy for a long time. It is time for Israeli governments to ignore the rabid calls of the right to continue extending the country's borders into land it has no legal claim to and, in fact, belongs to other people.

We will see what kind of diplomat Netanyahu really is.

Source: <http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.slcontent&ContentId=2010082581885>

THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

Beirut, Editorial, 25 August 2010, Wednesday

19. Ideal time to test Israel's intentions

Amid the stream of news, comments and positions cropping up every day about next week's resumption of direct Palestinian-Israeli peace talks, few participants or observers have noticed the crucial fact that the Palestinians have never before prepared the conditions for peace this well.

Since the last recognized incident of peace talks, in 2007 in Annapolis, the Palestinian Authority has overseen the near-total absence of any security breaches threatening Israel. Moreover, security coordination and cooperation between Palestinian and Israeli forces has increased exponentially, with a concomitant, though halting, increase in the freedom of movement for Palestinians and a decrease in the number of roadblocks.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Salam Fayyad has done an admirable job— under extremely adverse conditions— in creating and fostering the growth of the institutions of the prospective Palestinian state. Fayyad's economic and state-building successes, it should be noted, have come in the face of suffocating Israeli controls on Palestinian life, from restrictions on employment and exports to the withholding of wages; at the same time, Fayyad is operating despite the unceasing antagonism between Fatah and Hamas.

In Annapolis, the difference between the amount of land in the potential Palestinian state, as drawn up in the Palestinian and Israeli proposals, was about 4 percent. Benjamin Netanyahu has promised positive surprises for those who doubt the chances of the renewed negotiations; with such a tiny difference in the official stances of the two sides, even a modest move on Netanyahu's part would open the door to real discussions of Jerusalem and the right of return.

The Palestinians have also proceeded correctly in their relations with the US, whose role as mediator will likely decide the outcome of the talks. The Palestinian leadership refused to kowtow to George W. Bush, whose fealty to Israel knew no bounds. Instead, the Palestinians

have delivered what the US and Israel demanded: a stable security situation in the occupied West Bank and laying the groundwork for a state.

In other words, in spite of its unpopularity in many corners, the Palestinian Authority has never done a better job; they have put together a track record during the last three years of action relevant for statehood– building a political and security infrastructure– instead of mere political posturing or manoeuvring.

This means there has never been a better time to test Israel’s intentions and determination to reach a peace agreement; the expiration next month of the moratorium on settlement construction will serve as an important indicator. From the Palestinians’ point of view, this round of bargaining looks like a moment of reckoning, after their previous three years of progress. What more must they do?

Source: http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=17&article_id=118566

THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

Beirut, Editorial, 28 August 2010, Saturday

20.Obama is facing grave risks

President Obama appears to be taking the imminent Palestinian-Israeli peace talks seriously– an encouraging and long-unseen indicator, to be sure– but we would like to warn him that the consequences of failure for his country could be far graver than he realizes.

It has long seemed as though this era marks the last hope for a possible Palestinian state, and these talks therefore the last genuine opportunity to establish that nation. Another factor adding to the danger inherent in this round of negotiations is that the Israeli moratorium on settlement building is set to expire on 27 September (2010)– should settlement construction resume in earnest, which would almost certainly scuttle the talks before they even get off the ground.

Most unsettling for the US and its allies around the world, however, should be the critical mass achieved by the armed movements either supporting the Palestinian cause or using it as a justification for violence. We have indeed come a long way from the beginnings of the PLO as disembodied rhetoric on Voice of Cairo; yes, backers of the Palestinians have for some 40 years created havoc for their cause, but the scope of the arsenal and the supply of fighters willing to back the Palestinians has never reached today’s scale.

Should these talks fail, however, what could change is the perception of the US role in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. A poll released on Friday (27 August) by the Pew Global Attitudes Project determined that respondents from 22 countries evaluated Obama’s performance positively– with the exception of his approach to Palestine, where nearly two-thirds of the 22 nations’ respondents viewed the administration’s performance negatively.

The poll's authors also supplied a wealth of polling data to cement the view that Arab nations have an almost unanimous view that the US favouritism toward Israel has led the US to botch the Palestine issue.

The deeply antagonistic view of the US in the Middle East, though, is nothing new. In a memo from May 1950, then-US Secretary of State Dean Acheson instructed US diplomats how to counter the anti-US vitriol already then boiling in the Arab media.

While the old US line— that Arabs merely whacked the US piñata because they could not criticize their own leaders— have been entirely discredited, failing in the looming direct talks would rewrite the narrative. Because of the decisive US role in the peace process, attitudes would shift from seeing the US as an ally to corrupt Arab regimes or Israel's closest friend to a view that the US is the perpetrator of the Palestinians' suffering. In plotting the US strategy for the talks, Obama needs realize the consequences of such a paradigm shift for the US' own security.

Source: http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=17&article_id=118705



Editorial, 30 August 2010, Monday

21. New Chance for Peace

Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, will open talks on a two-state solution on Thursday (26 August) in Washington. These will be the first direct negotiations between the two sides in 20 months, and there will be an early test of the two leaders' seriousness of purpose.

Mr. Netanyahu's moratorium on settlement construction expires on 26 September (2010). Mr. Abbas has threatened to withdraw from the face-to-face talks if the moratorium is not extended; Mr. Netanyahu has signalled that he plans to let building resume. The two leaders may be jockeying for political advantage, but the idea that the negotiations could collapse before they really have a chance to get off the ground is worrisome. The Obama administration needs to work hard— and creatively— to help find a solution to get by the 26 September (2010) flash point.

Palestinians are justifiably concerned that settlement projects nibble away at the land available for their future state. If Mr. Abbas is engaging in serious direct talks, Mr. Netanyahu should have no excuse to resume building. To Mr. Netanyahu's credit, settlement has slowed considerably since the 10-month moratorium was put in place, and that has improved the atmosphere for negotiations.

There are other positive currents. Violence against Israelis is down. Palestinian security forces are increasingly competent at policing the West Bank. Palestinian authorities have clamped down on incitement, including removing imams and teachers who encourage attacks against Israelis. More can still be done.

The biggest plus may be President Obama's commitment. His predecessor ignored the conflict for seven years before arranging a peace conference in 2007 that had insufficient preparation and inadequate presidential investment. Mr. Obama made Middle East peace an early priority. He correctly sees the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a factor in wider regional instability. He is more balanced in his approach than his predecessor, and his chief envoy, George Mitchell, have spent countless hours bringing the parties together.

There are serious obstacles. Mr. Abbas is a weak leader, representing only the Fatah faction and ruling only the West Bank while the rival Hamas controls Gaza. Mr. Netanyahu heads a hard-line government, and even if he is serious about making peace (the jury is out on that) will his political allies let him? We are encouraged by reports that he wants to participate in the negotiations with Mr. Abbas and that he named a trusted long-time friend as his chief negotiator.

Mr. Obama has set an ambitious one-year timetable for the two sides to settle their longstanding final status issues: borders of a new Palestinian state, security, refugees and the future of Jerusalem. The parameters and the solutions are well known from years of past peace talks. But there is deep mistrust between the parties, and the administration must be willing to point fingers when needed and put forward its own proposals when progress slows.

Mr. Obama will kick the talks off on Wednesday (1 September) night with a White House dinner attended by Mr. Netanyahu and Mr. Abbas, and by President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and King Abdullah of Jordan, whose countries have peace treaties with Israel. Tony Blair, the former British prime minister, will represent the United Nations, the United States, the European Union and Russia—the “Quartet” supporting Middle East peace.

That will make for a fine ceremony and important symbolism, but Mr. Obama's involvement cannot end there. He needs to keep pressing everybody— his dinner guests and other regional leaders, including Saudi Arabia and Turkey— to stand behind peace efforts.

Pessimism about these talks is understandable, given the depressing history of failed peace attempts, but it is no excuse for the leaders not to make a serious effort, and Mr. Obama is right to try to compel them to do that.

Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/31/opinion/31tue1.html?ref=global>

Khaleej Times
ONLINE

Dubai, Editorial, 31 August 2010, Tuesday

22. A doomed proposition

Middle East Institute @ New Delhi, www.mei.org.in

The direct talks between the Palestinians and Israel seem doomed to fail. While this may sound highly pessimistic, it is but a realistic assessment of how things stand at present.

Only days before the launch of these talks in Washington by no other than US President Barack Obama, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has deemed it fit to warn the world what to expect. In a strong statement, Netanyahu said that he never told the US that he would be renewing the moratorium on settlement freeze in the West Bank beyond its 10-month expiry, end September. With this, any hopes the Palestinians may have harboured on the settlement issue have ground to a halt. Of course, while this may be for public consumption, the Israeli leader has also made a strategic move. He has left that extension dangling above reach for both the Palestinians and Washington.

The US is fully cognisant of the significance of the settlements freeze. It is a major contention with the Palestinian and one that is likely to grind the talks to a complete halt. This is something Israel needs to keep in mind. There is no point in launching the whole exercise of starting these talks when it is not sincere about making a real commitment for peace. The continued construction of illegal Israeli settlements is but a mockery of the peace process. For the Palestinians it is but a reiteration of Israeli policies and intent that ruthlessly usurp their rights, not to mention the blatant violation of international law. The question is that if Tel Aviv is not ready to cede to freezing settlements construction how will it accept far bigger ‘sacrifices’ that are in the pipelines. These entail a return of illegally occupied Arab territories, return of Palestinian refugees and a decision on the political status of Jerusalem. It is simply not possible to envision a resolution to the conflict without considering every single issue.

The catch in Netanyahu’s statement on settlements was that no decision had been taken on extending the temporary cessation order. While he stressed that it will be dealt with in later discussions, his present stance is only indicative of an obdurate stand. Especially so, when he has sharply criticised the Palestinians for demanding the cessation of settlements. This leaves little hopes for reconciliation between the disputing parties.

The general speculation in the Arab world is that the Palestinians were coerced to agree to the direct talks under US pressure since Israel refused to give a commitment on the settlement issue. However, there is a limit to being pressured. The US needs to understand that it cannot push Palestinians anymore and maybe revise its approach with Israel since so far its efforts in persuading its Jewish ally have failed.

Source:

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/editorial/2010/August/editorial_August58.xml§ion=editorial&col=

TheNational

Abu Dhabi, Editorial, 2 September 2010, Thursday

23. An audacious attempt and hope for peace

The audacity of hope. Change we can believe in. These slogans resonated not only in America during Barack Obama's campaign for the presidency but also throughout the world.

Mr Obama's speech in Cairo last year raised expectations further for what he could achieve in this region. The new beginning that Mr Obama sought between America and the Muslim world—so necessary after the 11 September (2001) attacks and the presidency of George W Bush—appeared not only possible but well underway.

He could never have lived up to every hope for his presidency. In Mr Obama's attempts to accomplish what 11 US presidents before him had failed to, helping to bring an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people and the hostilities between them and the Israelis, he has made missteps. While Mr Obama has stood up to the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, he has too often back-tracked. In particular, Mr Obama's failure to force an unqualified end to Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank has damaged his standing in the Arab World.

The resumption of talks this week between Mr Netanyahu and Mahmoud Abbas provides a chance for Mr Obama to live up to the promise for the region that he once embodied. And of course, there is far more riding on the talks than Mr Obama's or America's standing.

Mr Obama has made miscalculations but not because he has failed to realise the urgency of achieving a two-state solution. He has admitted that brokering a deal between the Palestinians and Israelis has been far more difficult than he had imagined. The Arab world should not also underestimate these difficulties as the talks move forward.

Unlike most other presidents, Mr Obama entered the mire of Middle East politics on his first day in office. He understood that waiting until it was politically convenient to push for peace would not be an option if peace were to be achieved. Now it falls on Mr Obama to compel Mr Netanyahu to see this as well.

Mr Netanyahu said many of the right things as the talks opened in Washington yesterday (1 September). But with each passing day, Israeli settlers lay deeper roots in the occupied West Bank. Israel must see how its claim to be a bulwark of democracy grows ever more spurious as it continues an occupation that the United Nations has repeatedly described as illegal. But in the

end, only the US has the leverage to compel changes in Israel's behaviour. For decades the US has been all too reluctant to put it to use. This must change.

The probability that the negotiations will collapse may be high; their failure could bring their own painful consequences to the region. But for peace to be achieved, whether in Northern Ireland or South Africa, leaders had to begin by prizing the possible over what it is probable. There is great risk in being hopeful and audacious, and yet, that is where any lasting peace between the Israelis and Palestinians will start.

Source:

<http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100903/OPINION/709029882/1033/editorials?template=opinion>



Muscat, Editorial, 2 September 2010, Thursday

24. Testing time for Obama

Every beginning has an ending. So is the case with US war in Iraq. More than seven years of military involvement, ostensibly to destroy weapons of mass destruction and establish democracy, President Barack Obama closed a bloody chapter in the long American war history with a spirited speech from his Oval Office, only the second so far after assuming office, seen as a morale boosting one to a country sagging under monumental economic problems, partly caused by Iraqi and Afghan wars. While it is debatable whether Washington has achieved its mission in Iraq after a huge loss of men, material and the taxpayer's money, Obama has used the occasion to address the immediate concerns: To restore voters' confidence in his presidency and party in the November [2010] congressional elections and to counsel patience on economy. He has made nursing the economy back to sound health and restoring millions of jobs for Americans as his central mission in the days to come. We need not dismiss these words as empty rhetoric to pep up a disillusioned electorate which is increasingly turning to Republicans. Apparently, Obama is hoping that the pullout of combat troops from Iraq and Afghan withdrawal in August [2011] next year as per his set timetable would give him enough time to focus on pressing domestic problems. But until then his hands are still full as he is bogged down in war on terrorism primarily focused on Afghanistan and Middle East peace.

No doubt, he extricated himself from Iraq without giving any commitment to the war-torn country about the remaining 50,000 troops still based in Iraq to advise and assist the security forces would do if the situation goes out of control. Instead, in his address, he urged Iraqi leaders to form a government which, in a way, is telling the fractious nation to set its house in order without looking for Washington's help. The Obama administration appears to be looking at that

kind of exit strategy from Afghanistan as well. The deadline set for Afghan pullout is so unrealistic that a tangible outcome in the US war against insurgents or a strong civilian government emerging in Kabul is unthinkable. A decade of fighting in treacherous mountainous regions has not helped the world to ward off terrorist threats. The futility of these two wars is increasingly telling on the American public and its exasperation is manifest in opinion polls. Will Obama's efforts to bring to an end the American military involvement, including total withdrawal of troops from the warring zones, help him douse the flames of discontentment among people?

Hardly because his stakes in the new round of Middle East peace talks in Washington are too high to be ignored. Obama has invested his reputation, time and good will in bringing Palestinian and Israeli leaders to a negotiating table after a prolonged impasse. Though nobody is expecting a spectacular breakthrough at the talks, a modicum of success in keeping the ball rolling until a final solution is reached will help Obama in shoring up his image. The breakthrough has to come before the November polls to trumpet the most significant achievement of Obama's presidency. That will serve as a trump card for Democrats to turn the tables on opponents. Will it happen?

Source: http://www.omantribune.com/index.php?page=editorial_details&id=1717&heading=EDITORIAL



Jeddah, Editorial, 2 September 2010, Friday

25. Mideast peace talks

Direct talks have begun between the Palestinians and Israelis in Washington after a 20-month hiatus and to give the negotiations a good start, President Barack Obama organized a glittering political gathering.

Not only were Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu there, so were Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and King Abdullah of Jordan.

The presence of the Jordanian monarch and the Egyptian president is significant. Within the context of Arab Peace Initiative adopted at the Arab Summit in Beirut in 2002, Jordan and Egypt have been designated as the sole states to negotiate with the Israelis (other than the Palestinians themselves) on behalf of the Arabs. Their presence in Washington demonstrates symbolically that the negotiations have the active support of the Arab world and that the negotiations there are aimed not only at bringing about Palestinian-Israeli peace but also a new relationship between the Arab states and Israel.

Nonetheless, despite the star-studded cast, there is little Arab confidence in the talks. The scepticism is based both on previous experience of peace negotiations and Benjamin Netanyahu's record as a politician who pretends to want a deal but has done everything to prevent one from happening. In particular too, in the Arab world (and probably among Israelis), the negotiations are seen as Obama's talks, with the Israeli and Palestinian governments turning up and going through the motions largely to suit the American president's agenda.

While there is no doubt about Obama's sincere desire for peace, it cannot be built to suit his wishes. The White House wants peace, the Arabs want peace, and even the Israelis want peace. But the fundamentals for it are not there. Blocking any realistic progress is the Israelis' refusal to permanently freeze the settlements.

The issue is crucial. The Israelis say: "We want peace." But they also say: "We want more Palestinian land." They cannot have both. It is one or the other. Land-for-peace is the only basis of the Arab Peace Initiative.

It is plain that there are those, both on the Israeli and the Palestinian and Arab sides, who want the talks to fail, who in their vicious fantasies dream of total victory and the destruction of the other— such as Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the spiritual leader of the Shas political party who, donning the mantle of Hitler and wanting a very different final solution, calls for the destruction of the Palestinians. There are those who, for less bloodthirsty reasons, likewise want the talks to fail. It may be that the drive-by shooting of four Israeli settlers in the West Bank this week, for which Hamas claimed responsibility, was an attempt to derail the talks. Hamas is certainly opposed to them.

The Arab position is wholly different. The negotiations are fully supported, if more out of hope than conviction as to the outcome.

There has to be hope— and the comments by Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak that the Arab areas of Jerusalem will be handed back are encouraging, although he may have been speaking for himself, not for the Israeli government. But while there have been warm words by both sides in Washington, what is needed are concrete offers. Of them, there is scant expectation.

Source: <http://arabnews.com/opinion/editorial/article124324.ece>

gulfnews.com

Dubai, Editorial, 2 September 2010, Thursday

26. US reputation as a peace broker at stake

Obama must stand up to Israel and take the process forward or lose face. Today [2 September], the first session of direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations will resume in Washington, despite the fact that the likelihood for success is very slim and regardless of the tremendous domestic pressure being brought on the Obama administration from the pro-Israel lobby.

One way to look at this is that US President Barack Obama wants to jump-start the process (which he promised he would, shortly after being elected 20 months ago) in the hopes that he can carry it over to next year and concentrate on garnering results post-mid-term congressional elections.

The problem is that it is difficult not to be pessimistic. Since 1993, when the peace process was initiated, Israel has managed to strengthen its position and control while carrying out illegal policies against the Palestinians.

Tel Aviv has already declared that colony construction will continue and has demanded Palestinian recognition of the "Jewish character" as a precondition for any peace agreement. This has put a lot of pressure on the Palestinian camp which already announced it will withdraw from talks if Israel doesn't extend its colony freeze. Another major issue to contemplate is the exclusion of Hamas from these talks which will lead to major obstacles in the coming months.

Until now, the Obama administration has not put forward a clear peace accord proposal that satisfies both sides and addresses the long-term problems. We still don't know what his stance is on critical issues like occupied Jerusalem or the right of return. Moreover, when Obama took a strong stance on the illegal construction of colonies, Israel did not listen and a flimsy compromise (in the form of a temporary freeze) came about.

America's reputation as a peace broker and influential player is at stake and the Obama administration will suffer both domestically and internationally if the talks turn out to be a failure. The onus is on Obama to set the tone from the beginning and stand up against Israeli intransigence and arrogance, though this is very much unlikely.

Source:

<http://gulfnews.com/opinions/editorials/us-reputation-as-a-peace-broker-at-stake-1.676299>



Dubai, Editorial, 2 September 2010, Thursday

27. Here come the talks

An attack on Jewish settlers by the Palestinian militant group Hamas has led to Washington issuing an appeal to Israel and the Palestinians to not let this derail the direct talks. Both the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas are at present in the US capital on the invitation of President Barack Obama who is personally involved in restarting the stalled negotiations.

The accompanying baggage brought by the two sides to the negotiating table is cumbersome enough without such incidents that only complicate matters.

The decades-old conflict has not only spurred extreme reactions in the Middle East but across the world. It is also the chief contributor to insecurity and instability in the region. While worldwide consensus is that peace is achievable only with a two-state solution, the inherent complications born out of Israel's unjust policies and illegal actions have created mammoth obstacles. One presumes the two parties and the United States playing the role of mediator recognise the challenge looming large. The question is if they are willing to work beyond the grandstanding and make concessions? US Special Envoy to the Middle East, George Mitchell seems to think so. Mitchell is optimistic of a definite peace agreement between the two by the end of the year. Maybe he is privy to how the two are likely to steer their way out of the murky waters of Israeli settlements and a host of other issues. These include the political status of Jerusalem, withdrawal from occupied territories, drawing of borders and the return of millions of Palestinian refugees. In the middle of all this hangs the Israeli moratorium on settlement freeze. Believed to expire end September (2010), it may prove to be a litmus tests of Israel's sincerity. It will also prove to the Palestinians how serious Tel Aviv is this time about settling the dispute.

While we all know what the Palestinian demands are, Israel too has been harping its own tune. It insists on a demilitarised Palestinian state with strict guarantees about dismantling of militias and groups like Hamas. Israel's paranoia about a threat to its security is the driving force behind its policies. What it does not realise or at least refuses to acknowledge in public is, that its blind pursuit of a doctrine of brutality has been its undoing. As a result, it has set about a vicious cycle of violence. Israel's refusal to redress injustice and brutalities on hapless Palestinians has only spun it a cobweb of reprisals. Israel can rest assured of a secure environment only when it makes amends for past injustices and proves its intent to live in peaceful coexistence with its neighbours.

It is hoped that the ongoing talks bear fruitful results that will gain Palestinians their own state. Moreover, it will usher in a new era of peace and stability in a region torn asunder by conflict.

Source:

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/editorial/2010/September/editorial_September3.xml§ion=editorial&col=



Editorial, 3 September 2010, Friday

28. Another Start for Peace Talks

The resumption of direct peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians this week was auspicious; despite a long history of failed attempts that fosters justifiable pessimism about the ultimate chance of success.

Two days of meetings in Washington struck the right tone. Unlike in 1993, when Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel and the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat had to be forced to shake hands at the White House, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel and the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, had no trouble.

The results were good: a decision to meet again in Egypt in two weeks and every two weeks thereafter to negotiate an agreement on all the core issues. That means the borders of a new Palestinian state, security for Israel, the status of Jerusalem and the future of Palestinian refugees. The leaders set an ambitious one-year deadline. If they are truly committed, that seems plausible. But that's a big if.

We have long been sceptical that Mr. Netanyahu really wants a deal. But he insisted he had come to "find a historic compromise" that would end the conflict and that he recognizes that "another people shares this land with us." He even told Mr. Abbas, "you are my partner in peace." We will soon see if it was all political theatre.

Mr. Abbas came to the table reluctantly. He is the weaker party and most at risk of being blamed for any breakdown. Still, he promised to "work to make these negotiations succeed" and said security—a major issue for Israel—"is vital for both of us."

Predictably, peace opponents tried to torpedo the talks. But Mr. Netanyahu didn't walk out when Hamas rejectionists killed four Israelis near Hebron. And Mr. Abbas not only condemned the attack but his security forces went after those responsible. He didn't walk out when some Israeli settlers began new settlement construction even before a Sept. 26 moratorium is to expire.

President Obama and his team seem to have found a firmer footing than last year. Now he needs to follow through on his promise to make the United States an active participant in the talks.

A durable peace deal will take even more. Saudi Arabia and other Arab states who have long called for a Palestinian homeland must join Egypt and Jordan in actively backing the Palestinians and the talks. The Israeli and Palestinian people must begin to see tangible evidence that this time is different.

Sept. 26 is the next flashpoint. The Washington conference would have had far more impact if the two sides announced an agreement to deal with that. Mr. Netanyahu should extend the moratorium.

Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/04/opinion/04sat2.html?ref=editorials>

THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

Beirut, Editorial, 3 September 2010, Friday

29. The race for Obama's peace

King Abdullah II of Jordan has called 2010 the “year of decision” on the Middle East peace front. The king was in Washington this week for the launch of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, where he noted succinctly that “time is not on our side.” Providing another sound bite, Barack Obama said he was “cautiously hopeful” about the prospects for an agreement, stressing the word “hopeful,” and not “cautious.”

Irrespective of the spin, the starter’s gun has been fired, for a race that is destined to end up as Obama’s peace. Obviously, complications will arise, but these shouldn’t be read as indications of certain failure. The current Israeli government is enthusiastically attached to the “cause” of illegal settlements in occupied territory. But all Israeli governments have supported such a phenomenon. Palestinian politicians have a visceral attachment to their land and the prospect of a seeing the return of refugees; this issue is not going to magically disappear overnight. An American peace, to be viable, will likely balance between limiting the settlements phenomenon, and limiting Palestinian aspirations to having a full-fledged state.

It’s easy to throw cold water on the entire exercise; there have always been extremists on both sides, ready to derail any progress. Palestinian politicians have allowed extremists to express their ambitions to block a solution, while the Israeli government of Yitzhak Rabin, which signed the Oslo Accords, allowed settlers to hijack the process. America’s role is to limit both sides’ ambitions but somehow produce a durable, legitimate and satisfactory solution.

The negative factors can sometimes be exaggerated; there are social challenges, economic problems, political instability and non-state actors in a long list of areas in the world. But the problem lies in seeing public relations efforts replace real statesmanship. USAID is now funding an ad campaign in Israel, to convince Israelis that the Palestinians are true partners for peace.

Such moves of encouragement aren't bad in themselves, but will the White House invest serious capital to keep things moving? Secretary of State Hillary Clinton says that peace will not be enforced by the US, but if America doesn't put its foot down, who will?

The simple fact is that the practical solutions lie with the Americans, or they do not exist at all. If the American option fails to take root, the future for the region is chaos, if not a doomsday scenario. Countries like Jordan are going to be the first to pay the price if this "year of decision" remains an exercise in caution, and not forceful, creative peacemaking.

Source: http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=17&article_id=118928



Dubai, Editorial, 4 September 2010, Saturday

30. Constructive or doomed to fail?

The first direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians in two years recently launched in Washington have been hailed as constructive.

Despite fresh optimism surrounding the talks, there is a genuine concern of a breakdown. September 26 (2010) is the date the Israel moratorium on the freeze of settlements ends. It is a date marked by the Palestinians, since Israel's willingness to resolve the conflict is being gauged by whether it will halt further settlement construction. In all likelihood it will not happen. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is unlikely to concede, given his continuing stand on the issue and his government's policy. Any concession he does make will probably be nominal and in private.

The question is that after having pressured Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to come to the table in the first place, would the US allow the whole process to pack up? Abbas had previously refused to enter any negotiations unless Tel Aviv issued concrete guarantees about settlements. Thanks to US pressure the Palestinians were left with no choice but to start the talks. Given they are in a weaker position but that does not mean that Washington only coerces them? How about some arm-twisting of the Israelis who have been the aggressors for the past so many decades? A Nobel peace laureate US President Barack Obama must not allow Israel from jeopardising his one great chance of achieving the ultimate peace accolade— resolving the Mideast conflict. His sincerity in achieving this is beyond doubt but half measures that were

previously witnessed on a number of accounts leaves Obama diminished in stature not to forget credibility. If the US that is an “active and sustained partner” and has “pledged full support” to the talks in Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s words, dithers on keeping the pressure on Israel, then there is no point going on with the charade. The fact remains that Israel needs more sustained pressure from the US and the world community to make amends for its territorial occupation and violation of Palestinian rights. It is simply not fair to subject the Palestinians to further coercion in order to bulldoze a resolution through.

The good thing is that even Israel has conceded that sacrifices will have to be made by both sides. Viewed through Israel’s perspective, while this may entail more concessions from Palestinians, the fact remains that come what may, some key sacrifices will have to be made by the Jewish state. For once it has to return occupied lands, allow the return of millions of displaced Palestinians refugees and decide on the borders of a Palestinian state.

Ironically, while the two leaders discussed security for Israelis and settlement construction at the meeting, there was an eruption of violence in West Bank. A poignant reminder that peace and stability is not possible unless all Palestinian factions are on board. That seems tricky since the US and Israel refuses to recognise Hamas and label it a terrorist organisation. The bigger problem is with the infighting between Hamas and Fatah that must be done away with. Unless the two reconcile their differences and work together for the rights of their people, a separate state will remain an elusive dream.

Source:

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/editorial/2010/September/editorial_September7.xml§ion=editorial&col=



Jeddah, Editorial, 4 September 2010, Saturday

31. US and the lobby

The truth that sets men free is the truth men prefer not to hear.

The storm of protests that has greeted EU Trade Commissioner Karel de Gucht’s innocuous remarks on Middle East talks and the Israeli lobby must have come as a shock to him. But those familiar with the overarching clout of the Jewish lobby in the United States and Europe would hardly be surprised by the overwhelming reaction to de Gucht’s comments.

Today, just as it’s not possible for anyone in the West to debate the Holocaust facts and fiction, talking about the stranglehold of the all-powerful Jewish lobby over America has become a

taboo. All de Gucht had done was that in an interview to Belgian radio, he talked about the unhealthy influence of the Jewish lobby on US politics and how it has historically undermined the peace process. The swift and furious response to his remarks has now forced the former Belgian foreign minister to offer an abject apology. In a separate statement, the European Union has also apologized, distancing itself from de Gucht's "faux pas." Which ironically only goes to prove the Belgian politician's suggestion in the first place? Indeed, the whole episode is a tribute to the awesome power of the lobby and how it controls, manipulates, bullies and dictates global agenda.

The US, as the sole superpower and hegemony, may rule the world, but some of its actions and policies give the impression that it is in turn controlled and manipulated by the Israeli lobby.

What was once dismissed as the figment of imagination of some nutty conspiracy theorists is now being recognized by some independent observers and analysts— of course at great risk to their professional reputation and career prospects. Thanks to globalization and the power of the Internet that have brought the endless trauma of Palestinians into the homes of hundreds of millions of people across the globe, the world is waking up at last to this long-festering conflict and how Israel fuels it with the help of its powerful protectors in the West.

"The Israel Lobby and the US Foreign Policy" by Prof. John Mearsheimer and Prof. Stephen Walt, two of America's most respected and brilliant minds, that came out in 2007 is by far the first objective and courageous attempt yet to confront this state-within-state or, should we say, super state.

The Zionist lobby has not just blindly protected Israel egging it to endlessly spar with its Arab neighbours and steal their territory; it has used its pernicious influence over the Capitol Hill, military establishment, media and its deep pockets to derail all attempts to find peace in the Middle East. The Palestinians have been made prisoners in their own land and for seven decades subjected to some of the gravest crimes in history while the world community looks the other way.

More important, many see the hand of the Jewish lobby in putting the US on a perpetual collision course with the Muslim world, successfully employing the deadly firepower of the world's most powerful army to take out one Muslim country after another. So if the US is loathed across the Muslim lands today and our world finds itself on the brink, you know where the blame lies. Will this state of affairs ever change and is there any hope for our world? Signs are not good if what happened to Karel de Gucht is any indication.

Source: <http://arabnews.com/opinion/editorial/article126418.ece>



Muscat, Editorial, 5 September 2010, Sunday

32. At last, they are talking

The much-hyped US-brokered Middle East peace talks between Israeli and Palestinian leaders in Washington were over with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Mahmoud Abbas promising to meet every fortnight to review the progress. Since nobody expected any breakthrough after the first handshake in 20 months between the two leaders, the result has not surprised us or those who have facilitated the meeting to take place. It's only an ice-breaking event which, by all accounts, had gone surprisingly well despite new roadblocks thrown in on the eve of talks in the form of an Israeli announcement not to continue the temporary freeze on building new settlements in occupied areas and a Hamas attack in which four Israeli soldiers were killed. Fortunately, neither attempt has torpedoed the Washington meet, an encouraging sign that pragmatic thinking got better of quick-reflex emotional response to such developments. However, the business-like approach to the first of a series of sessions could be considered as an opening gambit and in the next 14-15 September (2010) round in Egypt, both sides will probably begin their tough Middle East peace moves.

But the success of each session depends on the progress achieved at the previous one and the steps contemplated thereafter. We can't really say that each round would automatically lead both sides to the next step and a logical conclusion would follow. There are two ifs and buts that could make or mar the push towards a permanent peaceful solution at the next few rounds of talks. These are Israel's moratorium on the settlements activity in the Occupied West Bank that expires on 26 September (2010) and the Palestinians' warning that they will break off if the freeze is ended. Either of the two can throw a spanner in the works and bring the whole process back to square one. That's what has been happening since the Camp David Accords in 1978. Even after three decades, no tangible progress has been made to resolve the 60-year-old problem which has remained the epicentre of Middle East troubles.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was right when he told Netanyahu, on the eve of talks, that "you should not let it slip through your fingers." That's what Arabs and the rest of the world feel and hope for. But will the Israeli leaders accept the Palestinian olive branch and move forward or once again throw it will be the crucial question that the world will be awaiting an answer from Israelis in the coming days. However, we need not assume that even if Israel extends the current ban on settlements for a few more months every other issue will automatically fall into its place as the talks progress. Israel's positive response will help take another step in the right direction. A negative decision, even if taken under right-wing pressure or to test the Palestinian patience, will undermine not only the peace process but deals a major blow to Obama's Middle East mission. Once again, it will be an Israeli requiem for regional peace.

Source: http://www.omantribune.com/index.php?page=editorial_details&id=1720&heading=Editorial

HAARETZ.com

Tel Aviv, Editorial, 5 September 2010, Sunday

33. Doubtful declarations

The Washington summit met the goals set for it. It ended with an announcement of the renewal of negotiations to reach an Israeli-Palestinian settlement that will resolve all the core issues and lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state.

The Washington summit met the goals set for it. It ended with an announcement of the renewal of negotiations to reach an Israeli-Palestinian settlement that will resolve all the core issues and lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state. In his speeches in Washington, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed readiness for an historical compromise. "Another people shares this land with us," Netanyahu said, and called Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas "my partner in peace." He promised that Israel will not enter direct talks to argue, but to end the conflict.

Netanyahu, who in the past sharply opposed the idea of a Palestinian state and saw it as a threat to Israel's existence and security, has changed his approach since he returned to power about a year and a half ago. Now he talks about sovereignty in return for security, a state for the Palestinians in return for strict security arrangements. Netanyahu convinced the leaders of the United States, Egypt and Jordan to sponsor the direct talks, and demonstrated impressive political ability in preserving his coalition intact at a time when he is entering discussions about a withdrawal from the West Bank, the future of the settlements and the status of Jerusalem.

But, as generous as he was with declarations, Netanyahu was short on details, and the doubts regarding the seriousness of his intentions and ability to promote a settlement have yet to dissipate. His opening positions, and his hints that he will propose leaving the settlers in the Palestinian state instead of removing them, raise the suspicion that Netanyahu is looking for ways to extricate Israel from its international isolation, and that is why he pushed for direct talks, though he has yet to grasp the necessary price of compromise with the Palestinians: withdrawal from the West Bank, dividing Jerusalem and evacuating the settlements.

The first test of his intentions and ability will come at the end of the freeze on building in the settlements, in another three weeks. If Netanyahu will give in to the pressure of the settlers and their supporters and renew construction at full steam, it will become clear that he is not capable of promoting the historic compromise that he promised. If the prime minister wants people to believe his declarations in Washington, he must translate them into decisions that he made in Ariel and Emmanuel, and avoid expanding settlements during the talks. That is the necessary conclusion to be drawn from the Washington summit.

Source:

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/doubtful-declarations-1.312214>

THE JERUSALEM POST BETA

JPOST.com Israel's Best-Selling English Daily and Most-Read English Website

Editorial, 5 September 2010, Sunday

34. A climate for peace

Delegitimizing and de-glorifying terror, indeed, is a prerequisite for coexistence— a necessary step en route to actually fighting terror, as peace partners must.

The latest drive-by shootings in Judea and Samaria are no bolt from the blue. They were eminently predictable. Making an effort to restart a peace process in our region— its actual prospects for success notwithstanding – is akin to stirring a mega-hornets’ nest.

Conventional wisdom depicts Mahmoud Abbas’s Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority as beset by extremist elements spearheaded foremost by the Gaza based Hamas.

This postulate resonated consistently in reactions by US President Barack Obama, his Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and even Abbas himself to the slaying last week of four Israelis (as well as a nearly full-term unborn baby). They all subscribed to the theory that this was part of a design to derail the peace process.

Abbas, consequently, is viewed almost as much as the victim of the purported extremists as the Israeli civilians who were executed cold-bloodedly at close range.

But is this an accurate picture? It is true that the no holds- barred struggle between Abbas’s Fatah faction and its Hamas rival continues unresolved. Were it not for the Israeli forces deployed in the West Bank, indeed, it is likely that Fatah would have long ago lost its last foothold. The PA security forces, trained under US supervision, have brought a rare sense of law and order to the Palestinian cities, but only the IDF’s presence— as Abbas knows full well— deters Hamas from attempting to replicate, in the West Bank, its violent 2007 takeover of Gaza.

Unfortunately, the complex reality doesn’t end there.

In a climate in which Israel is routinely delegitimized and demonized, any new Hamas offensive, bitter experience suggests tends to “oblige” Fatah’s own Al-Aqsa Brigades and their like to prove that they can spill no less Jewish blood. The concern now is that competition will be renewed for the “glory” of who can inflict more pain on Israel.

Abbas, Who on Wednesday (1 September) at the White House spoke heartrendingly of his desire to prevent any more blood being spilled on either side of our conflict, may be far better

intentioned than his malevolent predecessor Yasser Arafat. But he, too, has failed to stem the tide of anti- Israel incitement, and he, too, continues to preside over Fatah gatherings where unchanging opposition to the very fact of Israel's existence is the central theme.

And thus, the simplistic depiction of Abbas and his Fatah stalwarts trying to stand firm in a bid to stem the terrorist tide is unfortunately inaccurate. So too the notion that terrorist acts are perpetrated by fanatics far outside the PA consensus and devoid of even minimal support within the Palestinian public.

This misrepresentation unhelpfully belittles the complexities of peacemaking, and creates a skewed image of terrorists who are as out-of-sync with average Palestinians as isolated Jewish extremists are out-of-sync with average Israelis. Mainstream Israeli society sincerely rejects extremist violence, which is consequently relatively rare. Palestinian terrorists are not similarly ostracized– and Abbas is at least partly responsible for that.

Whether he has been disinclined to counter the phenomenon, or felt himself too weak to do so, terrorists past and present are revered and feted under his aegis.

Examples abound. The Ramallah Street that houses the new presidential compound was named for arch-terrorist Yahiya Ayash, who gained notoriety in the mid-1990s as the “engineer.”

His professional specialty was rigging explosives designed to take as many lives as possible. Primarily, Ayash was an anti-Oslo saboteur, a fact that makes it doubly troubling that the PA, born of the Oslo Accords, would even consider commemorating Ayash in what constitutes an affront to the very notion of coexistence and a gross violation of the Oslo premise.

The glorification of “heroic” terrorists, “martyred” in the cause of murdering Israelis, is manifest in the streets named after them, the honours bestowed upon them, the school hours devoted to them, the television broadcasts that laud them, and the agitation to release even the convicted mass-murderers among them. Any and all of this inherently contradict the aims of a peace process.

Delegitimizing and de-glorifying terror, indeed, is a prerequisite for coexistence– a necessary step en route to actually fighting terror, as peace partners must.

The ostensibly shared objective of Abbas and Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, for our two peoples to live “as neighbours and partners forever,” to quote Abbas, is simply irreconcilable with a climate in which Palestinians are taught, from the cradle, to venerate the slaughter of Israelis. Change that climate, and our yearned-for peace becomes a realistic prospect.

Source:

<http://www.jpost.com/Home/Article.aspx?id=187099>



Jeddah, Editorial, 6 September 2010, Monday

35. Vision and reality

A grand opening it was but that's about all it was. To those who thought bringing Benjamin Netanyahu and Mahmoud Abbas into the same room was a marvel in itself, but please wait for the serious business that is about to begin.

From now on, and for the next year, every two weeks the two leaders will meet, and with every fortnight, a set trio of questions by the parties concerned will be asked: How much progress was made, how much was not and will this be their last meeting?

The goal is a permanent settlement that ends the Israeli occupation of territory captured in 1967, and an independent, democratic Palestinian state existing peacefully beside Israel. But none of the parties believe that a year of talks will result in the implementation of a two-state solution. The goal is a "framework agreement" which special US envoy George Mitchell describes as "more detailed than a declaration of principles but... less than a full-fledged treaty." In other words, a guideline to be implemented when the weather gets better. However, Abbas is convinced, with good reason, that Netanyahu won't offer even that. After all, the Israeli prime minister refused to halt settlement construction or accept the 1967 borders as the basis for talks, and he insists Israel will not share Jerusalem.

But Abbas has little alternative but to go along with the US, though he stands to lose much because his political fortunes depend on his ability to win concessions from Israel. Ironically, on the other hand, Netanyahu could become a hero at home if the talks fail, for the majority of Israelis either are no longer interested in the peace process or believe the concessions Israel must make to achieve peace are too high and not worth it.

Still, if he is serious about the talks, Netanyahu may have to build a new coalition, one more amenable to making peace than the current right-wing ideologues.

If Netanyahu sticks to the preconditions he cited, Abbas may be hoping simply to demonstrate, with Hillary Clinton in the room, that he is not the problem, that Netanyahu will not willingly implement a viable two-state solution and that if Washington believes, as the secretary of state emphasized, that a two-state peace is important to US national security, it had better be prepared to pressure the Israelis, though that may be wishful thinking.

The Abbas-Netanyahu face-to-face did pass an initial and very early test following the drive-by shooting by Hamas of four Jewish settlers in the West Bank. The deaths could have stopped the talks before they began. Hamas, dead against the negotiations, did not expect to stop the talks but signalled what they could do to derail them.

Of more serious concern is that if Israel were to resume expanding Jewish settlements in the West Bank after a 10-month freeze expires on Sept. 26, the Palestinians warn that there will be no agreement. This surely is the talks' first biggest hurdle.

If history repeats itself, then the talks will come to nothing. After all, it has been almost 20 years since the first of several peace processes started: Madrid, Oslo, Wye, Camp David Two, Mitchell, the Arab peace initiative, the Geneva Accords. Annapolis and the road map. They all had visions of peace which has not yet materialized. We can now add the Obama Plan to the list of attempts being made but it should be noted that both Bill Clinton and George W. Bush's failed efforts were followed by huge surges in violence.

Source: <http://arabnews.com/opinion/editorial/article127369.ece>



Beirut, Editorial, 6 September 2010, Monday

36. Peace requires more US action

When Hillary Clinton addressed the media on September 3 [2010] following the resumption of Palestinian-Israeli peace talks, she got much right. But in suggesting that the US will not invoke an agreement, Clinton misinterpreted the reality under which the talks are being held.

While America does not wish to be seen forcing the hand of either camp, the perception is unavoidable. It does not approach the talks from a neutral standpoint, allied ideologically and militarily as it is to Israel, and Mahmoud Abbas' corner knows already what it stands to gain – and lose – from any breakthrough.

Awkward questions over illegal settlements and Jerusalem's capital status continue to be deftly dodged by White House officials. Robert Gates' initial call for a freeze in Israeli illegal construction in the Occupied West Bank has been expertly batted to the side. These demonstrate an overt US drive to relieve some pressure on its ally.

America needs to differentiate between impartiality and inactivity, for Israeli-Palestinian benefit, as well as its own. As Clinton pointed out, this may be the final chance for peace “for a very long time.” It may also be the last opportunity for the US to achieve some long-held regional policy goals.

None but the most hopeless optimist is under the illusion that a perfect compromise can be reached. It is also inconceivable that peace, if achieved, will not bear an American hallmark. The US should know by now that a deal is not meant as ideal justice but a practical political solution to a problem also concerning American national security.

Solve this intractable conundrum, and the US's regional interests suddenly become far less daunting: peace accords between Israel and other Arab states potentially follow, progress is made on the repatriation of refugees and Afghanistan and Pakistan do not implode in an orgy of anti-Americanism.

Failure offers dire consequences for the Middle East. It also raises the spectre of irrevocably relegating the US in the hearts and minds of people already familiar with a vertiginous decline of American credibility in the past decade.

Using its position as mediator, the Obama Administration's principal aim should be to extract compromise wherever possible, without fear of being labelled as biased. It is up to it to force progress, not for the purpose of meeting deadlines, but in order to prevent further Middle East chaos. If it can nourish its own agenda of neutralizing widespread hostility to Washington in the process, it will placate a related source of conflict.

Clinton spoke the US weighing in "on the side of leaders." With that ambition comes the responsibility of action.

Source:

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?article_ID=119016&categ_ID=17&edition_id=10#axzz11Ma67it

gulfnews.com

Dubai, Editorial, 7 September 2010, Tuesday

37. Tel Aviv is desperate to get out of talks

The danger is that in its efforts to disrupt negotiations, Israel may spark a war.

The Israelis, pushed by the Obama administration into talking peace with the Palestinians, seem to be having second thoughts. Over the past few days, Israeli leaders have been signalling their displeasure with the Direct Talks, initiated by President Barack Obama at the White House on Thursday [2 September].

It is not a secret that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was forced into these talks, for which he set so many conditions.

Now the Israelis seem to want to get out. Extremist Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman says the negotiations are creating "too many expectations" and that peace is "unattainable".

He says his fanatical Yisrael Beitenu party will block any attempt to extend a partial moratorium on colony construction, due to expire on 26 September (2010).

The Palestinians have warned that failure to extend the 10-month freeze on most colony construction in the West Bank outside occupied East Jerusalem would jeopardise peace talks.

Yesterday, the Israeli government said it would resume the construction of colonies in the Occupied Territories, claiming that this "does not compromise" a potential deal with the Palestinians.

On Sunday (5 September), Israel launched deadly aerial strikes against Gaza, provoking anger and further resentment. The attacks could very well lead to an expanded conflict that will end the peace talks.

Israel has also deployed large numbers of troops on the Lebanese border. Last month, Israeli tried to provoke the Lebanese army by trespassing into Lebanese territory to cut down a tree that hindered Israel's ability to install a spy camera across the border.

Israel is obviously not interested in peace. It has been forced into direct negotiations which, according to the official Quartet statement, should lead to full Israeli withdrawal from Arab lands occupied in 1967.

Israel has always rejected this principle. The danger today is that in its efforts to get out of the peace talks 'trap', Israel might very well spark a regional war that would definitely bury the last of hopes in this region of achieving a just and lasting peace.

Source: <http://gulfnews.com/opinions/editorials/tel-aviv-is-desperate-to-get-out-of-talks-1.678396>

THE HINDU

New Delhi, Editorial, 7 September 2010, Tuesday

38. Dim summit outlook

The Obama administration initiative to bring together Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestine Authority President Mahmoud Abbas for face-to-face talks in Washington is notable for two reasons. It has set the tone for future negotiations. Instead of dealing with peripherals, Israelis and Palestinians will from now on focus on issues that are at the heart of their dispute—the status of Jerusalem, the borders of a future state of Palestine, and the right to return of millions of Palestinian refugees who were uprooted by the wars of 1948 and 1967. Secondly, the Washington summit has set a demanding one-year timeline to resolve all the outstanding issues. The whole world knows that, notwithstanding the positive spin imparted, nothing short of a miracle will fulfil the lofty aspirations spelt out for these talks. The reason is

perfectly obvious: Israel's obsession with its security and its fixation with its Jewish majority status will continue to undermine the emergence of a viable Palestinian state. Citing security considerations, Israel's ruling elite has virtually dismissed the formation of a Palestinian state defined along 1967 frontiers.

Some influential Israeli think tanks, which are believed to reflect the Netanyahu administration's thinking, have advocated that Israel should exercise complete physical control over the entire Jordan valley, the eastern part of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, as well as the airspace to the west of it. Such a hawkish stance on borders conflicts fundamentally with the Palestinian territorial aspirations— and is bound to be rejected. With its Jewish majority status being cited as central to its national identity, there is also not much hope that Israel will lower its hostility towards the right to return of millions of displaced Palestinians, most of who are currently packed in impoverished refugee camps across West Asia. This unwillingness to contemplate a just solution to core final status issues implies that once again Palestinian negotiators will be left empty-handed. Without substantial gains, Mr. Abbas and his team will be powerless to carry the majority of Palestinians with them. Mr. Abbas's failure will also greatly embolden militant Hamas, which, in any case, has to be drawn into negotiations at some point. A serious shortcoming of the Washington summit has been its inability to address the relevance of Iran and Syria in the resolution of the Israel-Palestine dispute. Without the involvement of Tehran and Damascus — the core supporters of Hamas, which rules the coastal Gaza strip — there is little hope that a stable and independent Palestine, at peace with Israel, will emerge any time soon.

Source: <http://www.hindu.com/2010/09/07/stories/2010090753911000.htm>

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