

## ***DATELINE MEI***

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**MEI Event:**

**Chances of Israeli-Palestinian Peace**

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**Jawaharlal Nehru University**

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**I**n partnership with the India International Centre, New Delhi (IIC), on Monday 4 February the Middle East Institute, New Delhi (MEI@ND) organized a round table on *Chances of Israeli-Palestinian Peace*. This was led by Prof. Galia Golan from the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel. The audience comprising of academics, former diplomats, young researchers and students enjoyed the spell-bound discussion at the IIC. Forcefully arguing that the majority on both sides want peace, Prof. Golan expressed optimism despite the protracted and complex nature of the conflict. In response, Prof. Kamal Mitra Chenoy of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi (JNU) stressed on the stake of global powers in the conflict for hegemony in the Middle East.

Prof. Golan gave an overarching outline of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. According to her, the demand for a Jewish homeland in historic Palestine met with opposition from the Arab Muslim population. Though the Zionist demand culminated in formation of the State of Israel in 1948 with international mediation, the Arab refusal to accept the UN partition plan and subsequent attack by Arab armies instilled a sense of insecurity in Israel. Surrounded by hostile neighbours and lack of recognition gave way to a conclusion that Arabs would never accept Israel as part of the Middle East. It was this understanding and continuous threat of war that resulted in the Israeli emphasis on security. The outcome, in the words of Galia Golan, has been a 'security-insecurity dilemma' that has lingered in the Israeli psyche when it comes to its approach towards peace.

Prof. Golan argued that there have been two turning points in the conflict; the 1967 war and the 1987 Intifada. The June war when Israel established its military might over the Arabs and gained

an upper-hand in the conflict resulted in millions of Palestinians residing in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip coming under Israeli rule. On the other hand, it was following the Intifada that the PLO officially accepted the 1947 UN participation plan indicating for the first time the willingness on Palestinian side to accept the two-state solution. She also said that the visit of Sadat to Israel in 1977 and the subsequent Egypt-Israel Peace Agreement is an example that peace is possible if there was political will on both sides. However, the rise of militant Islamist Hamas, coming into power of religious right in Israel, failures of Camp David talks and Oslo process, increase in violence and disunity among the Palestinians had not helped the cause of peace. Thus the Israeli policy focuses on other aspects and not on achieving peace because it is understood that there is no partner in peace on the other side.

Reacting to her arguments, Prof. Chenoy pointed towards the role of global political order in protracting the conflict. He asserted that the people of Palestine were not responsible for Holocaust and thus the formation of the state of Israel in historic Palestine was unjustified. He argued that the State of Israel was formed to establish the super power hegemony in the region. Giving peace a chance, according to him, is a responsibility of Israel because it is the stronger side and that Palestinians have already made historic compromise and do not have anything left to make further compromises. He further emphasized that any solution to the conflict has to be based on UN resolutions and concluded by critiquing Indian position on the conflict.

Commodore C. Uday Bhaskar, who heads the Academic Council of the MEI@ND, chaired the event. In his presiding remarks he said that there is need for more discussion and debate on the issue and that a solution to such an entangled conflict cannot be found without bringing together the plethora of narratives which makes Israeli-Palestinian much more complex. The Round Table ended with Prof. P. R. Kumaraswamy, Honorary Director MEI@ND proposing the vote of thanks.

**Pictures taken during the occasion are available at:** RT1

(<http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.387511461345773.88353.288759447887642&type=3>) and

RT 2

RT 2

(<http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.388313821265537.88482.288759447887642&type=3>)

RT 2

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