Israel-Palestine Peace Process Essay, Research Paper

Introduction

The idea of peace in the Middle East has been fought over, discussed, caused physical battles, and political name-calling. The conflict caused by misunderstanding the will of God and the pride of man has been history’s leitmotif since the beginning of recorded time. In certain parts of the world, that recurrent theme is more of a constant heartbeat. Since the outbreak of the second intifada, people around the world have witnessed many bloody scenes where people sacrifice their lives for their own justification of peace. Many people had a hard time believing their own eyes when viewing a photo shot of a father trying to protect his son from pouring bullets and another shot of a frightened 12-year-old boy killed as his father tried to shield him from Israeli bullets were released throughout the world. There are those who blame Ariel Sharon, the rightist Likud party leader for triggering the revolt by offending Palestinians. There are others who are questioning his intention of entering the Islamic holy compound Harm al Sharif known as the Temple Mount to Jews. There are also debates on whether the Palestinian reaction was spontaneous or orchestrated. However, asking such questions would be only scratching the surface, for the conflict has historically and emotionally deep roots that stem from centuries ago. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a classic example of disharmony created by the lack of “fit” between nations and states. There are two traditional solutions to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: a two-state solution and a one-state solution. This doesn’t mean the “statelet” that has been created in Palestinian Authority, but rather Israel and a larger Palestinian entity in the West Bank and Gaza. For the Jews who contend that the land of Israel was given to them by God, the idea of giving up pieces of it is abhorrence. For the Palestinians who assert their right of primacy over Jewish settlements moving into their territory has been and continues to be intolerable.

The historical ‘rights’ to the land for the Jewish people are based on a covenant between Abraham and God. Therefore, overlooking this historical fact, which has been verified in a number of scholarly as well as historical sources including the Bible would be denying the origin of Jewish ancestry as well as how the Jews came into being as a people, which was based on “faith” not based on being a separate race. In fact, they were semetic in origin as were the Arabs. On the other hand, the idea of wiping Palestinians of the land would be unjust for Palestinians, who had been living in the land before the establishment of the State of Israel. Since the issue is emotional and religious, there are those who believe that peace simply is not an option in the region. Others are convinced that their opinion is correct and peace would be possible if the nation would follow this or that plan. Regardless of the many varying opinions, peace will never be achieved unless two main conditions are met; the status of the Holy City is clarified for both; and the two finally come to the realization that despite their hatred toward each other, they have to live with each other in any case. Therefore, the idea of the two nations achieving peace in near future doesn’t seem conceivable at this point.

Significant Events and Policies such as Israel’s Law of Return

Since the creation of the State of Israel, Israel has been a center of conflict in the Middle East. Six wars, four generations, incalculable pain and countless deaths have taken place since Israel gained its independence fifty years ago. For years extending back and beyond modern times, the official issue in the Middle East has been over land. Now, it has shifted to being a battle over national rights and the past. Between its founding in 1948 and the war of 1967, Israel was viewed as a powerless infant state, which could not survive without the help from its big bothers. However, this image was soon changed after its sweeping victory in the well-known Six-Day War. Within six days, the Israelis reoccupied the Sinai Peninsula, captured the Golan Heights in Syria and a piece of Jordan and took over the whole city of Jerusalem, which it had shared with Jordan.

After the 1967 war, the U.N. Security Council passed resolution 242 as the basis for solving the conflict: Israel would return the land it occupied in 1967 in return for peace and recognition. However, with its own interpretation of resolution 242, Israel’s occupation was prolonged and other facts were introduced that further complicated the conflict.

Chief among these were Israel’s practice of building Jewish settlements in the occupied territories which disrupted the cardinal formula of “land for peace” and intensified the Palestinian national feeling, which made the Palestinian people look for solutions beyond resolution 242. “The Israelis firmly decided that the Old City was their most cherished territorial acquisition and that regardless of the costs they would absolutely refuse to give it up.” It was hoped that after the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including the refugees, were addressed, all of the Arab world would recognize the Jewish state and peace treaties would finally be signed.

After the defeat of the 1967 War, Palestinians became more frustrated with their situation that left them subject to daily petty humiliation. With the resentment among Palestinians, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which was founded in 1964, have launched a series of retaliatory acts in an effort to regain its authority over the land they lost by the decision of the outside world. To a degree, its movement has been highly successful in terms of making the world more aware of the Israeli-Palestine conflict and getting international recognition as the representative body of Palestine.

Is Peace Possible?

Optimism about the peaceful settlement in the ‘holy land’ still exists although it has not yet occurred. Jerusalem, which is a bone of contention, could be a key to the lock. Over the centuries, Jerusalem, which is a Holy City for three religions, has been the cause of clashes like those between the Romans and the Jews in A.D.70 and in A.D.135 and between Christians and Muslims in the wake of the crusades. The U.N. Resolution 303(IV) of December 19, 1949, which ratified the internationalization of the Holy City formally continue to exist; but no implementation has taken place. Israel’s sweeping victory over Arab states in early June, 1967 brought the Old City back to the Jews. Despite warnings from its allies, Israeli government had decided to disregard the urgings of the U.S, Britain and the views of the Vatican and annexed the Old City quickly. When U.N. members passed the Pakistani resolution [2253(ES-V)] by decisive number, Israel quickly initiated major efforts to cut a deal with the Pope and other Christian leaders which would appease the anxieties of the delegates from Roman Catholic and other Christian nations before the General Assembly voted on the Pakistani resolution. In particular, Israel tried to convince other religious groups that their interests in the Holy Land could be shielded without internationalizing Jerusalem. However, even though Israel could persuaded major Christian leaders, the conflict couldn’t have been alleviated because of strong resistance from Muslim countries who are Israel’s closest neighbors.

Even in the presence, peaceful settlement seems difficult to be achieved unless the status of the Holy City is clarified for both. In July 2000, at Camp David, the Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat and Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak basically agreed that a Palestinian state would be established in Gaza and 90 percent of the West Bank, with Israel annexing its big settlement blocks. But, the talks collapsed over Jerusalem, which both Israel and Palestine want as their recognized capital. Palestine’s no intention of giving up the city has been well-conveyed in previous talks and actions taken by them in the past. Even if Israel agrees to meet ninety -nine percent of their needs, Palestine won’t settle unless Jerusalem is included in the deal and vise versa.

Another negative element contributing to the difficulty to achieve peace is lack of strong leadership in these nations. The leaders of both sides don’t seem to have solid supporting systems from their own political circles. The Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat, often seems to be confronted by other PLO members when it comes to negotiations with Israel. On the same token, Ehud Barak who’s facing another political election against Benjamin Natanyahu seems to have little space to maneuver. Elected with 56 percent of the popular vote but with only 26 seats in the Knesset, he was driven to form a coalition of right-wing religious parties that have now abandoned him. In particular of East Jerusalem issue, neither of their political leaders can move forward, knowing that both of them are bounded by their own people (Jews and Muslims) to keep the holy places under their control.

Israel’s near-pariah status in the region has forced itself to become one of the military super powers in the world. Economically, it enjoys today a per-capita income of $ 18.000, placing it far ahead of countries surrounding it. However, unlike many realists’ contention, either its economic or military superiority doesn’t seem to be sufficient enough to resolve the conflict that is heavily based on ideology. Some are evening saying that Israelis weakened morale doesn’t back up its military and economic strength in putting an end to the conflict.

“Israel today has money and weapons, the Arabs have will. Israelis want a resolution to conflict, Arabs want victory. Israel has high capabilities and low morale, the Arabs have low capabilities and high morale. Again and again, the record of world history shows that victory goes not to the side with greater firepower, but to the side with greater determination,” said Daniel Pipes, the director of the Middle East Forum, in his article in the February issue of Commentary.

But, this ongoing battle between the two has proved that no matter how Israelis are used to living comfortable lives, their morale in defense of their nation will be sustained.

Broadly speaking, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is based on emotion and religion. But, more specifically the problem rests on the several issues, which include issues of truth and acknowledgement, justice, accountability and reconciliation. One of the Israeli problems is that although Israel itself was founded on the basis of the determination of a group of people to reclaim or create a homeland for themselves and yet appear fundamentally unwilling to appreciate that passionate desire in others. Speaking of problems in Palestinian efforts to achieve peace, their youngsters are following the footsteps of the elders who have taken radical or even violent measures to achieve their goals. It’s shocking to hear young Palestinians saying that wounded are O.K. but martyrs are better because martyrs produce the media image that create the most pressure on Israel.

Conclusion

These on-going clashes between the two sides once again discourage those who hope to see peace in the region. According to some people, spasms of violence, historically, have led to peace breakthroughs such as the Oct. War in 1973 to the Israeli-Egyptian Peace of 1978 and the intifada that started in 1987 to the Oslo interim peace agreement of 1993. Nonetheless, many scholars are skeptical that this incident will bring about a permanent peace to the land. Some even expect another round or two of bloodshed might be needed before reaching the final agreement. Regardless of the opinions of those scholars, we just hope that the two will learn important and meaningful lessons from this bloody revolt.

On the surface, the issue is how to draw demarcation lines on the map. However, changing maps simply doesn’t bring about peace to these people who want something far less tangible, a whole hearted-acknowledgement by the other side of their right to the land. Taking in or giving up the Holy City won’t simply alleviate the conflict as long as there’s no change in their attitudes toward each other. To quote an informed and generally reliable source:

“The hope of the world does not lie in the efforts of man to bring about an artificial peace. Human hearts and human nature must be changed. Peacemakers are to be highly valued in any age and in any situation to come, but real peacemakers must reconcile men to God before they can reconcile one man to another.”

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