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Introduction

The main objective of this book is to analyze the continuing failure of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and to reflect on alternative solutions to its current format and assumptions. This study seeks to understand how and why the Oslo process failed. After studying this question, we will analyze the consequences of such failures and ask if, under the current circumstances, we can continue to pursue the bilateral Israeli-Palestinian negotiations with the same goals and strategies as we have been following.

This study will analyze both the shortcomings of the peace process as well as opportunities for advancement. At the same time, we will examine current changes in the region and explore how these changes could impact peace between Israelis and Palestinians and between Israelis and the Arab world. The book will advance conclusions and proceed to analyze the new ingredients that could lead to alternative solutions to the bilateral negotiations. The goal of this examination is to learn lessons from the past, examine current circumstances and new developments, and consider different solutions.

Launched in 1993, the Oslo peace negotiations provided hope for an agreement between the Israelis and Palestinians. Almost a quarter century later, and despite multiple efforts, peace has not been achieved; instead, stagnation has dominated the last decade. The book aims for new visions, theories and solutions to this prolonged conflict, while considering new political and geo-political developments in the region.

Negotiations to reach a final agreement failed at the 2000 Camp David Summit. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered a peace

agreement at the summit and even accepted parameters for a peace agreement proposed by U.S. President Bill Clinton in December 2000 that went further than Barak's own proposals at Camp David. The proposals went as far as Israel's offer to withdraw from most of the West Bank through land swaps to compensate the Palestinians for West Bank land taken from them. The proposals also included the division of Jerusalem and the creation of a Palestinian state in more than 90% of the West Bank and the entire Gaza Strip. At Camp David, the Palestinian leadership rejected Barak's proposals by demanding the right of return of millions of Palestinians and their descendants to what were their homes before Israel's independence in 1948. Palestinians also demanded control over the holy sites in Jerusalem, including the Western Wall. This proposal was rejected because it would mean that the Western Wall, an important landmark to the Jewish people, would fall under Palestinian control.

Negotiations continued against the backdrop of uncontrolled Palestinian violence (known as the Second Intifada) perpetrated by organized Palestinian groups. Negotiations failed again after Clinton offered his own proposal, the "Clinton Parameters," which were discussed in Taba, Egypt, early in 2001. The Clinton parameters proposed further Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank than the Barak proposal did and co-Administration of the Holy sites by the Palestinians, the Jordanians, the Saudis and the Israelis. Whereas the Israelis accepted the Clinton proposal, the Palestinians rejected it. Later, in 2005, Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza and dismantled all settlements in Gaza and several in the West Bank.

An additional offer was made by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in 2008. The Olmert proposal kept previous proposals in play and offered joint control of the holy sites, among other compromises. In each of these cases, the Palestinians either failed to respond to the offer, as was the case with the Olmert proposal, or placed the "right of return" as a key demand, despite Israel's categorical rejection of it.

On the Israeli side, expansion of the settlements in the West Bank continued. Israel argued that the issue would be resolved in the final status discussions, where issues of borders, Jerusalem, the case of Palestinian refugees, security and water supply issues would be decided and a comprehensive final agreement would be signed

after five years of confidence-building, as stipulated at the beginning of the Oslo process. However, many both in and outside Israel (including in the United States) believed that settlement expansion contributed to a crisis of confidence between both sides, the opposite of the Oslo process's intent.

As chances of an agreement diminished and the Israeli right gained strength, Jewish settlements expanded even further. Moreover, Palestinian terrorist attacks perpetrated during the Second Intifada (2000-2005) triggered the tightening of Israel's control over the Palestinian population, including the establishment of checkpoints and other restrictions on movement. Israel also prohibited the selling and construction of new Palestinian houses in areas next to Jewish settlements (the so-called Area C), further intensifying the crisis. Even the dividing fence built between Israel and the West Bank to prevent terrorist attacks, raised Palestinian concerns of Israeli intrusion into their property and everyday life. Although these Israeli policies were reasonably aimed at protecting Israeli citizens, they also weakened the confidence the Oslo process was designed to build.

Nevertheless, despite the turmoil of the Second Intifada, negotiations continued. Then President George W. Bush followed through with his "Road Map for Peace" and the Annapolis Conference; however, both failed. In 2009, Israelis elected Benjamin Netanyahu, a hawkish leader who offered the security and protection that the Israelis badly felt they needed. Netanyahu was less concerned about reaching a peace agreement, expressing the prevailing attitude among many Israelis that there was no partner for peace. Although U.S. President Barack Obama tried to revive the peace process by tirelessly pursuing bilateral negotiations, his efforts, did not generate even the slightest hint of potential progress.

In this book, we reject the idea that Israel alone was responsible for the failure of the peace process. We will also challenge the arguments made by those who claim that the Oslo process was a Palestinian sham or a mere stage toward the larger goal of restoring the entirety of Israeli land to Palestinian hands.

According to Israeli scholar Asher Susser, Israelis pursued negotiations with the Palestinians within the framework of United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, adopted in the aftermath

of the 1967 Six-Day War. According to this framework, negotiations with the Palestinians would be based on exchanging land conquered in 1967 for a lasting peace agreement. According to Susser, the Israelis did not understand that, "from the Palestinian point of view, to retrieve all of the West Bank was to retrieve only 22 percent of historical Palestine. Israelis already had 78 percent."¹ For the Palestinians, the problem was not 1967 but 1948, when the war that led to the creation of the State of Israel turned them into refugees. While the Palestinians have demanded the "right of return" and Israeli citizenship for Palestinian refugees and their descendants, the Israelis have demanded Palestinian recognition of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people. However, Susser claims, "the Palestinians will not recognize Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people, for to do so would be asking the Palestinians to recognize that Palestine is Jewish, and they won't. So, when it comes to these 1948 questions, there has been no progress between Israel and Palestine."

Israeli scholar Benny Morris claims that Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat's commitment to recognizing Israel and the two-state solution was doubtful given his public pronouncements and incitement against Israel, his failure to curb terrorism, and his constant public remarks denying Jewish history and its connection to the land.² For Morris, Arafat's anti-Zionism remained alive despite the Oslo peace process. Morris suggests that Oslo could have been the result of a strategy developed by Arafat deputy and a PLO leader, Salah Khalaf (also known as Abu Iyad). Khalaf proposed a gradual takeover of all historic Palestine (i.e. Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza) by accepting a two-state solution first, and later trying to take over the entire Israeli territory.³ Indeed, the fact that Palestinians demanded the "right of return" during the negotiations over the final status in Camp David and afterwards seems to be consistent with Khalaf's strategy.

Morris' view is reinforced by former Knesset member Einat Wilf, and Israeli journalist Adi Schwartz, as well as by historian Ephraim Karsh. After thoroughly analyzing Palestinian rhetoric and documentation, Wilf and Schwartz conclude that, peace has not yet been achieved because the Palestinians have yet to renounce their demand for an exclusive Arab Palestine "from the River to the

Sea” – a demand most evident in their continued refusal to agree to any language, any formulation, and certainly any agreement that would undermine and foreclose the Palestinian demand for return to the sovereign state of Israel. A true Palestinian reckoning with the notion that the Jewish people, as a people and as a nation, possess a right, no less than them, to self-determination in the land that both peoples call home, is yet to take place.⁴

Karsh argues that Arafat’s objective had been clear since 1968, the year in which the Palestinian National Charter called for the destruction of Israel. Arafat’s idea was to transfer all Palestinian resistance to the West Bank and Gaza. From there, a popular armed revolution would emerge and allow the undermining of Israel from within, by terrorizing the population, thereby inflicting damage on Israel’s economy, encouraging emigration and discouraging immigration, and creating an atmosphere of insecurity that would make life inhospitable for the Israelis.

Thus, Karsh argues that the Second Intifada was a war of terror deliberately launched by Arafat in which he succeeded in bringing “the Palestinian war from Israel’s borders into Israel proper by the politics of stealth. [Arafat] has every reason to hope that the work he began will be continued by the next generation of Palestinian leaders. That work is nothing short of the dismantlement of Israel.”⁵ Karsh believes that Arafat and his team, through the Second Intifada, wanted to bring about a situation as close as possible to the one experienced in 1948, where the Jewish population was at war with forces operating in the midst of Jewish civilians.⁶

Columnist Yossi Alpher argues that sensitive issues, such as the status of the Holy Sites and the refugee question, generated a gap between the parties and ruled out partial progress under the never-abandoned mantra of “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.” In this way, the Oslo process was held hostage to unbridgeable narratives. In addition, Alpher attributes the failure of the peace process to the emergence of extremism on both sides: on the one hand, Hamas, and on the other hand, the increasing power of Jewish orthodox groups who believe in a messianic mission in the expansion of settlements.

Alpher also points out that there are no leaders like Anwar Sadat, Menachem Begin or Yitzhak Rabin, who are able to take cou-

rageous steps toward peace with the enemy. Alpher rightly points out that Mahmoud Abbas, Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and President of the Palestinian Authority (PA), lacked the courage to take far-reaching steps to pragmatically overcome Palestinian dogmas and chimeras such as the “right of return.” This, in Alpher’s view, brought about Abbas’ rejection of the Olmert offer and led to an irreversible path away from peace.⁷

Seth Aniska, author of *Preventing Palestine*, offers a historicist explanation for the failure of the peace process. He argues that the failure of Oslo has roots in the Egyptian/Israeli peace agreements reached in the late 1970’s.⁸ According to Anziska, a Palestinian state could have been already established during the Egyptian/Israeli peace negotiations. Instead, the 1979 Camp David agreement between Egypt and Israel gave birth to the autonomy plan, which proposed limited self-rule to the Palestinians. Anziska believes that the autonomy plan was an idea proposed by then-Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, who rejected a Palestinian state. Egyptian president Anwar Sadat and U.S. President Jimmy Carter went along with Begin because Sadat wanted the Sinai back and Carter wanted a successful peace agreement in the end. The Autonomy Plan not only prevented a Palestinian state but also allowed the expansion of Israeli settlements in what Begin and his Likud party considered the historical and biblical land of Israel.

Aniska ignores two important points, however. First, during that time the PLO was a terrorist organization and an enemy of Israel; secondly, even if, in the Egyptian/Israeli Camp David Accords, a plan for Palestinian autonomy was conceived, this does not mean that Oslo had to necessarily follow that exact blueprint. The fact is that a Palestinian state, in addition to other concessions, was offered by Israeli negotiators at different junctures that were more generous than the idea of Palestinian autonomy conceived in the late 1970’s.

Yossi Beilin, a former advisor to then Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and a key player in the Oslo negotiations, points out that the Oslo peace process took place between two asymmetric partners. According to Beilin, Israel managed to convince the Palestinians not to insist on a settlement freeze, but Israel continued to build

settlements after the process began. In return, the Palestinians violated parts of the Accords, such as refusing to extradite to Israel Palestinian citizens who committed acts of terror. Benjamin Netanyahu, who was elected Prime Minister for the first time in 1996, delayed Israeli withdrawals from the West Bank as agreed to under the Accords. The election of Netanyahu confirmed Palestinian fears that a change of government in Israel could reverse the prospects of peace.⁹ Beilin implies that this provoked a violent reaction from the Palestinians.

Beilin, like his superior Peres, believed that mutual recognition and economic prosperity in the region was a sufficient foundation for a political solution to be reached. However, no political solution between the Israelis and Palestinians has been accomplished thus far, despite the multiple opportunities to rectify those miscalculations.

Along these lines there is another explanation offered by the scholar Jonathan Rhynold. Rhynold argues that since Israelis viewed the peace process as an issue of Israeli security (a divorce between Israelis and Palestinians that would end the occupation and stop security threats from the Palestinian territories) and not as an issue of Palestinian rights, they continued to build settlements without being sensitive enough to Palestinian concerns. The Palestinians, on the other hand, continued demanding the “right of return” since they viewed peace without the “right of return” as capitulation.¹⁰

There is no question that the Oslo agreements were ill conceived. They did not place limits on settlements, nor did they prescribe specific regulations and requirements. The Oslo agreements deferred the final status of borders and Palestinian statehood to future negotiations without establishing clear boundaries of permissible and impermissible actions while negotiations were taking place. The Declaration of Principles (DOP), which set the framework of the Oslo Process was vague, and there is no question that this vagueness distorted the meaning that each side gave to the nature of the negotiation. Oslo intended to do what Kenneth Stein and Samuel Lewis have described as the benefit of narrowing the topics of discussions to less contentious issues, while postponing the insoluble issues for later, presumably to maintain momentum toward

a final bilateral negotiation.¹¹ In other words, both sides held fundamentally irreconcilable narratives that exploded during the negotiations. However, this is only part of the problem and does not tell the whole story. In order to deepen our understanding of the problem and seek out alternative solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian problem, this book offers a comprehensive sociological explanation of what went wrong. The focus of analysis will be the PA's inability to establish governance and real legitimate authority, thus preventing the Palestinian leadership from assuming administrative and political responsibility for a Palestinian state.

Fatah, the PA's ruling party, was defeated in the 2006 parliamentary elections by the radical Islamist and anti-peace Hamas. The defeat was widely interpreted as the Palestinian population's reaction to what it perceived as a corrupt Fatah government. The PA's deficit of legitimacy was aggravated by its crisis of governance and authority. Indeed, in the Palestinian territories, there is a problem of factionalism and competing sovereignties that threatens the monopoly of violence of the central authority. This factionalism is multi-dimensional. It exists both within Fatah and between Fatah and other factions. Within Fatah, there is a conflict between the old guard of the PLO, which came from exile in Tunis, and the young generation, which actively participated in the First Intifada. Hamas undermined the peace process by conducting acts of terror in the aftermath of Oslo. Hamas terror challenged the authority of Fatah through violence aimed at the Israeli population, with the goal of sabotaging the peace process. However, as will be discussed, terror against Israel turned into an instrument of competition for popularity between Fatah's young generation and Hamas. The attitude of Fatah's young generation suggests that the PA was having problems to impose law and order and manage sovereignty. Thus, there is a crisis of legitimacy of the Palestinian government before a Palestinian state has even been officially created.

This book will argue that Palestinians suffer from factionalism, anarchy and a crisis of popular legitimacy that prevents them from exercising governance. This leaves them incapable of making risky decisions like signing a peace agreement or establishing an independent state. This book systematically argues that the PA is cur-

rently incapable of implementing a peace agreement and is also unable to sustain the stability of an independent state without facing the risk of a coup d'état, like the one Hamas carried out in Gaza in 2007. As such, the Palestinian leadership is presently unwilling to install a Palestinian state, in order to avoid a direct challenge to the integrity of the old Fatah leadership.

Furthermore, in order to placate the very forces that have challenged Fatah rule and, in an effort to regain popular legitimacy, the PA has resorted to anti-Israel propaganda, an element that has had serious negative consequences not only for the peace process but also for the prospect of peace in the generations to come.

We will argue that the Palestinians themselves are victims of such policies, because a permanent mobilization and war footing prevents the possibility of a normal life. The status quo may be convenient for the weak ruling Fatah, but it does not resolve the situation of Palestinians themselves who give up private goals by living constantly mobilized against disparate and imaginary collective goals that never materialize, such as the elimination of Israel, the re-conquering of the entire historical Palestine, and the return to their former homes.

We thus conclude that, given the political and social inability of the Palestinians to reach an agreement with Israel, the old formulas that advocated for a bilateral Israeli-Palestinian negotiation need to be challenged. This book moves in the direction of exploring the potential factors that could lead to a solution outside the bilateral framework.

This book turns to the Arab world, which has the potential to guarantee and secure an Israeli-Palestinian peace treaty. However, when such opportunities have arisen in the past, they have left the weak Palestinians to decide alone and with the feeling that any compromise (particularly on Jerusalem) may face disapproval in the Arab and Muslim world. The Arabs have historically shied away from supporting a genuine peace agreement and instead contributed to reinforcing the most intransigent Palestinian positions. It is here that the book attempts to find a way to restore a positive role for the Arab world given changes in their geo-political interest and in the domestic dynamics of the Arab states, particularly after the Arab Spring.

Israel and Sunni Arab countries have a common cause in defense against the threat of Iran and violent, radical Islamist groups. Furthermore, the Arab Spring has given slow birth to a more domestically oriented Arab civil society that is less inclined to zealotry on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and more likely to encourage discussion of political and public affairs and even challenge the Arab traditional understanding of Israel and the conflict.

Each of the chapters that follow will examine the political failure of Oslo, the complex responsibility for its demise, the role of parallel and competing narratives about the contested land, and whether it is possible to move the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into a place that can benefit both peoples. Chapter 1 will develop the idea of the crisis of the Palestinian Authority in more detail. It analyzes the Oslo negotiations from their inception to the present. The chapter examines events throughout the negotiations, including what Palestinians and Israelis argued, offered, and rejected, and how the parties justified their positions. Likewise, it will compare the negotiating experiences of both Palestinian leaders, Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas, as well as the differences between both personalities, including their ideas and attitudes. The chapter concludes that the Palestinian hesitancy and rejectionism during negotiations was linked not to a specific point of view but rather to a situation of structural decomposition and instability that paralyzed the Palestinian leadership. Thus, it will be argued that independence is not a national aspiration of the Palestinian leadership at the moment. This chapter will argue that such a situation has consequences that are detrimental in the long run to the entire peace process. The crisis of the PA not only delays the peace but in fact aggravates the crisis. The Palestinian leadership feels the need to appease Hamas, other radical groups, and Palestinian dissidents. As a result, the Palestinian leadership embarks on a fierce systematic anti-Israeli propaganda campaign with potentially devastating consequences for the mindset of younger Palestinian generations and for future chances of peace.

Chapter 2 explains the Palestinians move away from the peace process. The chapter explores in detail the connection between the weakness of the PA and the war of propaganda against Israel that

ensued. The propaganda is systematic and has toxic consequences for younger generations. It not only discourages reconciliation with Israel, but also perpetuates the Palestinian mindset of permanent revolution, which prevents the Palestinians from conducting normal lives based on free will and individual choice. The propaganda is not limited to criticism of the Israeli government's policies or manipulation to maximize gains in the negotiations; rather, it categorically denies the connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel.¹² Through school curricula and mass media, it conveys a message of complete rejection of the State of Israel and indirectly promotes violence against it even though Abbas has publicly rejected violence.

The chapter examines this phenomenon not only as it affects the current generation of Palestinians, but also as it may affect generations to come. As Palestinian feelings of hostility and anger towards Israel intensify, the possibility of a solution based on bilateral engagement decreases. Consequently, the book moves in the direction of solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict outside the bilateral track. It is in this sense that the book turns to the Arab world as we view Arab states and societies as an important force potentially capable of either having an influence on the Palestinians or of securing and enforcing a lasting peace agreement.

Chapter 3 analyses the role that the Arab world as a whole could play in achieving a sustainable peace between Israelis and Palestinians outside the track of bilateralism. This chapter acknowledges that the Arab world has not played an effective or active role in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process in the past. At Camp David when President Clinton requested several Arab countries to persuade Arafat to accept a compromise agreement with Israel, only Jordan and Tunisia answered the call.¹³ Arab countries rejected any compromise on Jerusalem that would have left the Muslim Holy Sites under Israeli sovereignty. Egypt, the only country in the Arab world to sign an agreement with Israel, walked away from such responsibility. Indeed, many Arab leaders withdrew from the multilateral talks which were supposed to facilitate and guarantee the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The chapter will analyze the complex sociological, psychological and political components that have motivated the Arabs to adopt such detached and sometimes even hostile attitude towards the peace process.

However, this book also identifies crucial changes in the Middle East that may be potentially important in the future of peace between Israel and the Palestinians and of course between Israel and the Arab world in general. The Arab world is undergoing a major transformation that involves two crucial elements. One is geopolitical and relates to the emergence of an aggressive competition between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Sunni Arab states. Israel has turned at least temporarily into an ally of Sunni Arab states. The big question asked and explored in the chapter is if this marriage of convenience between Israel and the Arab world can be expanded into a force capable of bringing about a solution to the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. Under the current circumstances, the rise of Iran as a threatening force in the Middle East and the rise of Sunni extremism in the form of the Islamic State (ISIS, also known as ISIL) have become serious challenges for these regimes. Nevertheless, they have also generated opportunities for cooperation with Israel. Thus, I will attempt to assess how transformational this new cooperation might be and to what extent it can generate a momentum that could open the door to improved Arab-Israeli relations and a more peaceful future.

The Arab Spring is another equally important element of change that will be analyzed in Chapter 4. The Arab Spring's most important consequence seems to be the unprecedented gradual entrance of civil society into the Arab polity and a more vigorous Arab public sphere. I will argue that this phenomenon is likely to change the social contract between the Arab states and civil society by giving a greater voice to the Arab grassroots that will impact the priorities of Arab states' national agendas. Chapter 4 explores the extent to which these changes could affect Arab attitudes towards Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian and Arab conflict.

Finally, Chapter 5 will suggest various solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It will recommend different alternatives to the Oslo peace process while considering the factors analyzed above: the current state of the Palestinians; the state of the Arab countries; the new geopolitical map in the region; and the Arab Spring.