



# Geopolitical Conflicts: The Case of Israeli - Palestinian Conflict (1947 – 2012)

**Ajinde Oluwashakin, Ph.D**

Political Science and International Relations Department  
College of Business and Social Sciences Landmark University  
Omu-Aran, Kwara State, Nigeria

**Abstract:** In current history, as in the past, many international conflicts could be explained in terms of geopolitical factors. While geopolitical conflicts are raging in several parts of the world, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been most significant since the emergence of the modern state of Israel in 1948, resulting from the November 29, 1947 United Nations Resolution 181 adopted for two states creation in Palestine: one Arab, one Jewish. While the Jewish state came into being, the Arab one has remained a confounding issue. Why has the Palestinian state not been actualized? The paper argues that in last sixty-five years, efforts made to actualize the creation of a Palestinian state have suffered unnecessary paralysis due largely to socio-psychological perceptions and diplomatic conundrum between the two sides. The November 29, 2012 UN General Assembly resolution upgrading the Palestinian Authority from UN “observer” to “non-state member observer” status was a significant diplomatic achievement for the Palestinians, but laced with political landmines. But a Palestinian state can be actualized if certain impediments are removed, with honesty of purpose on both sides and the third party mediators.

## Introduction

Geopolitics can be viewed as the interplay between geography and politics, and how it helps to explain conflict in international politics and, in a broader sense, International Relations. Perceptions and the effect of geography on human development are the two basic assumptions underlying geopolitics. A nation’s location on the face of the earth is a profound factor that

affects its vital national interests, particularly its survival. This is the case of Israelis and Palestinians, and many other states in the world. Who owns the land or can claim autochthony? Because of the anarchic nature of world politics, it remains a difficult, if not impossible; task to resolve many international conflicts. However, the United Nations (UN) exists, playing the role, to a large extent, of a “world

government”, or a mediator in international disputes. Thus, the 1947 UN General Assembly Resolution 181 was adopted as an instrument for two-state creation in Palestine: one Arab, one Jewish. This Resolution 181 led to the declaration and establishment of a state of Israel in May 1948; but the provision of the Resolution was rejected by the Arabs, which aborted the establishment of a state of Palestine during the same period. But the 2012 UN General Assembly resolution upgraded the Palestinian Authority from observer to non-state observer status, which was significant diplomatic achievement for the Palestinians in the last six-five years of struggle. To what extent has this resolved or confounded the problem? How can the socio-psychological perceptions and diplomatic conundrum between the two parties be resolved, and in turn bring a relative peace to the age long conflict? Or, at a minimum move the peace process forward toward actualizing a Palestinian state?

The paper is structured into five parts; with part one constituting this introduction. Part two appraises the historical and conceptual background; part three analyses both the 1947 and 2012 UN resolutions; part four examines resolving the conflict beyond the two-state solution basis, and the conclusion.

### **Historical and Conceptual Background**

Mesopotamia was, once the heartland of what is now known as the Middle East, where patriarch Abraham migrated to a territory previously populated by the Canaanites, Hittites, Jebusites, Philistines, among others. Ancient

empires such as the Assyrian, Babylonian, Phoenician and Persian shaped the early Middle East and began its historicity (Lieberman, 2007). Foreign invaders, notably the Greeks, Mongols, and Romans, particularly the Romans played a role in the current crisis in the Middle East, especially the Israel-Palestine conflict. Between 68AD and 73AD, Jewish resistance against Roman rule resulted in ruthless crushing of the Jews and destruction of Jerusalem. Another revolt was again ruthlessly crushed in 131-135 AD. Emperor Hadrian (117-135) reconstructed Jerusalem as a Roman city and renamed it Aelia Capitolia and a temple of Jupiter was built on the original Temple site built by Solomon. More significantly, “the land of Israel was renamed Palestine in honor of the Philistines who had occupied only five cities on the Mediterranean seaboard, including Gaza (Irene Princewill, 2006). More than honoring the Philistines, the Romans wanted to shame and humiliate the Jews and futuristically to create the current intractable problem for Israel.

On the same territory, indigenous Arabs had ruled for centuries before finally displaced by nomadic Turks who formed the Ottoman Empire. In turn, the Ottoman empire collapsed during the First World War, then “the victorious allies carved out a complement of nations at the end of World War 1” (Lieberman, 2007).

And Crawford Young writes:

*The partition of the Ottoman domains in the Levant between Great Britain and France and the imperial calculus employed in territorial definitions and structures of domination left in its wake a series of cancerous conflicts. The*

*duplicity of incompatible World War I promises to Arabs and Zionists bore the seeds of inextricable conflict over whether the Palestine mandate awarded to Great Britain by the League of Nations would develop as a Jewish homeland (state) or an Arab state (a Palestinian state (emphasis mine) (Young, 2013).*

### **Earlier Partition Proposals**

In the 1917 Balfour Declaration, Lord Balfour – the British foreign secretary – affirmed that the British government viewed “with favor the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish people (with the understanding that) nothing should be done to prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine ....” (Mansfield, 1992; Wikipedia, 2013).

It should be noted that “neither partition nor statehood” was contained in the document as a means to actualize “the National Home”. However, Lord Curson, who succeeded Balfour as foreign secretary, noted in a memorandum a concern about the fate of the Arab inhabitants of Palestine who had “occupied the country for the best part of 1,500 years”, and would “not be content either to be expropriated for Jewish immigrants, or to act merely as hewers of wood and drawers of water to the later” (Mansfield, 1992: 172-175).

In addition, there were also the 1937 Peel Commission, the 1938 Woodhead Commission, and the 1939 MacDonald Commission. In May 1939, the MacDonald White Paper declared that it was “not part of (the British government’s) policy that Palestine should become a Jewish State” and therefore sought to end the immigration

of Jews to Palestine. The prohibition of Jewish immigration to Palestine led to the formation of Lehi a small Jewish terrorist organization, which opposed the British and fought on the side of the axis through the Second World War (Wikipedia, 2013).

Lord Curson’s mention of the Arab inhabitants who had “occupied the country for the best part of 1500 years” would need further clarification. It should be noted that the Jews had suffered series of dispersion, starting with famine-induced migration to Egypt (lasting over 400 years of captivity) which ended with the great exodus under Moses. Thereafter they experienced the Assyrian, Babylonia, Persian, captivities. The dispersion that started in 70 AD, with the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, lasted until early 18th century. By the second and third centuries ‘anti-Semitism had begun to spread across Europe’ and within the Church. Chryststom (345-407 AD), nicknamed “golden mouth”, demonized the Jews thus:

*The Jews worship the devil, their religion is sickness, they are the odious assassin of Christ and for killing God, and there is no expiation possible in indulgence or pardon. Christian may never cease vengeance and the Jews must live in servitude forever. God always hated the Jews. It is incumbent upon all Christians to hate the Jews (Quoted in Dagobert, 1966:42; Princewill, 2007:6-7).*

So, from the 400s, most probably from 417, by Curson calculation, to 1917, the Arabs occupied the country while the Jews were dispersed and suffering untold persecution all over Europe and other parts of the world. Reversely

today the Jews have been described as the ‘occupiers’ of Arab lands.

### **Geopolitics**

Geopolitics is the interface between geography and politics, a study of “how, and in what ways, geography and international politics interact”. A geopolitics framework of analysis examines “the many ways geography affects politics and foreign policy, from its impact on national identity and nationalism to the manner in which it supports and detracts from a country’s economic and social development” (Duncan et al, 2003 : 297-298) . Several roles played by geography in international relations, like engendering cooperation and conflict between states; affecting global climate change, environment, and natural disasters; conditioning trade and investment flows; and affecting the spread of information technology, all these and much more constitute “the heart and soul” of geopolitics(Ibid).

Applying the concept of geopolitics to the analysis of international politics throws up a number of relevant questions. Such questions would include: why does it matter where a state is located on the globe or who are its neighbors? Specifically, for this paper: why does it bother Palestinians (Arabs) where Israel is located, (or exists), and vice-versa? How big is the role strategic features like water-ways, peninsula, mountains, canals, and so on, play in relations among nations? How significant is it that the straits of Hormuz might be blockaded (say by Iran) to prevent oil tankers from entering or departing the Persian Gulf (to the Western world)? Then, what

constitute geopolitical conflict in international relations?

Geopolitics is anchored on two basic assumptions: the impact of geography on human development, and perception. Jared Diamond, in his book, *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* underscores the fact that “the impact of geography on human development is profound”. Beyond “where humans live and what territorial state they occupy” in great measure conditioning their level of development, Diamond equally notes that humans struggle with each other over territory “like most animal species”. This they have been doing since the beginning of time. In fact, Diamond theorized that human behavior is close to animal behavior as regards territoriality in that we humans share 98% of our genetic program with the primates. Much of that competition for territory, he argues, ‘takes the form of wars between adjacent groups, marked by hostility and mass killing’ (Diamond, 1992; Duncan et al, 2003: 297)

A second assumption is the world of perceptions. Scholars of global politics and foreign policy would argue that human perceptions of the world is composed a sort of prism through which we interpret realities around us (Rourke, 1999) and their accuracy or otherwise is irrelevant. In this regard, “territorially based perceptions” clues could be found as to how distinct population groups define their state identity and vital interests (territorial security, economic vitality, political goals) and the reasons they use various kinds of diplomacy in achieving those interests (Duncan et al). It is in this way that these factors shape the conflict and/or cooperation between

states, that is, the geopolitics in foreign policy and diplomatic relation.

### **Conflict**

Conflict, derived from the Latin word “confligere”, means shock, clash, collision (Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace and Conflict, 2008:391). Conflict can be understood from two perspectives: first as a difference, and second as a battle. As a difference it can mean discord, disagreement, dissention, confrontation and dispute. It can also mean antagonism, friction, opposition, hostility, strife and unrest or crisis. Conflict as a battle could mean war, warfare, combat, skirmish, fight, quarrel, feud, brawl, clash, fracas, and the likes (Chambers Large Print Thesaurus, 2006).

While there is a distinction between conflict and war, the second category of meaning given above may be confusing. It is so because conflict is ordinarily understood to mean a non-violent act. However, when a peaceful solution is not found and the situation degenerates, the opposing sides take up arms and it becomes organized “armed conflict”, which simply means war. So the warfare situation is also referred to as conflict. The difference tenable in the circumstance is that while conflict describes a prolonged disagreement of feud, lasting generations, war is armed conflict lasting a given period and occurring intermittently.

Conflict, from international relations perspective, is any given instance of the endemic antagonism in political life between various interests and/or principles. This may be ameliorated by respect for international law, through diplomacy (negotiation) or it may end in warm or cold war (The Greenwood

Encyclopedia of International Relations, 2002: 338).

### **United Nations Resolutions on Two-State Creation (1947-2012): The Palestinian Renaissance**

History is a good teacher for those who would learn from it, they will not perish but actualize their dream. This actively explains the current status of the Palestinians in their struggle towards statehood, if they would further learn from the hard facts of the historicity of their struggle.

The Middle East geo-political caldron has been burning almost continually since the passage of the 1947 UN General Assembly Resolution 181 which created Two States in Palestine: one Arab, one Jewish. The all-time big question is: Why and how did the state of Israel come into existence and the Palestinian state remains elusive?

#### **November 29, 1947: UN Resolution 181**

Lake Success, New York, U.S.A, was the meeting place of the United Nations General Assembly, November 29, 1947. Here, on this day, the UN partition plan was put into votes, in the 57-member global assembly. In Resolution 181, 33 states voted in favor, 13 against, 10 abstentions and one absent (www.mideast.com). In addition to two states: an Arab state, a Jewish state, Resolution 181 also declared Jerusalem was declared as *Corpus Separatum* – a separate body to exist under (international) UN Administration. The area in question includes all of Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Beit Sahour which encompasses the Christian holy sites (The UN Partition Plan for Palestine, November 29, 1947, Mideast Web).

The Jews accepted the resolution while the Palestinians rejected it. The Arabs and Palestinians felt that it was “a total injustice to ignore the rights of the majority of the population of Palestine”. Hence the Arab League and Palestinian institutions, following their rejection of the plan, “formed volunteer armies that infiltrated into Palestine” as from December 1947. The volunteer armies were composed of the Arab Liberation Army and the Palestinian Arab Army of the Holy War (Jihad), under the command of Abd al- Qadir al- Husayni and Hassan Salama (wikipedia.encyclopedia.mht).

In actual fact, violence swept Palestine the following day (that is, November 30, 1947) of the adoption of Resolution 181. To counter the Arab and Palestinian armies attacks, the Jews had their underground militias composed of the Haganah, Irgun and Lehi, re-inforced by several Jewish veterans of World War II and other foreign volunteers, all known as Yishuv forces (Ibid).

Amidst this violent conflict, the state of Israel was declared on May 14 1948; thus triggered the main phase of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. This initial fighting claimed about 15,000 casualties, and resulted in a cease fire and armistice agreements of 1949 (Ibid).

It was this chaotic and armed conflict situation, and in a state of “diplomatic morass”, that the Jews took a unilateral decision on their survival. Thus, on May 14, 1948, they informed the international community of the existence of the state of Israel (Gregory Mahler and Alden Mahler, 2010:11). Within hours of the declaration of the birth of a (new) state of Israel, a coalition of Arab states forces--Syria,

Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia -- began an invasion to “drive Israel into the sea”. Instead, rather than being scrapped into the sea, Israel fought hard believing its survival depended on it, conquering more territory (Ibid).

By April 1949, both sides reached a cease fire and an armistice. The armistice meant that each side would maintain the Status quo positions and as such Israel was “awarded significantly more territory than it had been given under the United Nations earlier partition plan”. Moreover, the armistice “did not allow for an independent Palestine State”. Rather, the West Bank came under the control of Jordan; Israel and Jordan shared Jerusalem; and Egypt took control of the Gaza Strip, lying between Israel and Egypt (Mahler and Mahler).

After rejecting the 1947 UN plan, the first move to establish what might be described as a Palestinian government was made by “the All- Palestine Government” as declared by the Arab League on September 22, 1948; but this was abandoned by Egypt in 1959. However, Yasser Arafat established a new organization- the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1964 (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, January 10, 2013).

In 1967, a pall of catastrophe gathered over Israel. Israel turned to the United States for help but declined. This was partly because U.S. President Lyndon Johnson was ‘very occupied’ during the period ‘with America’s challenges in Vietnam’ and therefore “not interested” in US forces getting involved in the Middle East (Mahler and Mahler).

Faced with escalating hostilities from both Egypt and Syria, and without “diplomatic recourse”, to any great power, Israel launched a pre-emptive attack on Egypt and Syria in June of 1967, and Jordan joined on the side of Egypt and Syria. Again, Israel fought for its very existence, and fought very hard. In six days, Israel found itself gaining control of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai and the Golan Heights. The 1967 Six-Day War was a major setback to the ability of the PLO to establish any control on the ground as Jordan, Egypt and Syria lost territories to Israel.

### **United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, November 22, 1967**

November 22, 1967, saw the passage Resolution 242 predicated on the ‘exchange of land for peace’ in Palestine. The resolution called for the “withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict”, that is, the Six- Day War, and “respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force.”(BBC News, 27 august 2010). Resolution 242 has remained a reference point of several diplomatic peace initiatives, and resolution 338 is often linked to it, which called for and brought the 1973 Yom Kippur (October War) to an end and recommended the implementation of 242 by all parties. In fact, 242 featured prominently in the 1993 Oslo agreement (Ibid).

### **Oslo Agreement, September 9, 1993**

The 1993 Oslo Agreement was a product of Second-Track diplomacy, a

diplomacy conducted off the public glare but later presented to it. It was so, in order to avoid extraneous influence that could derails negotiation process.

Diplomatic correspondence between the PLO chairman, Yasser Arafat, and the Israeli prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, set the tone of the Oslo agreement, as the negotiation took place in “secret” under the auspices of Norwegian diplomats; and the agreement signed on the white house lawn on September 13,1993, ”witnessed” by the united states of America and Russian federation (Ibid).

Chairman Arafat’s letter in paragraphs two and six, read inter alia:

*The PLO recognizes the right of the state of Israel to exist in peace and security. In view of the promise of a new era and the signing of the declaration of principles and based on Palestine on acceptance of the Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, the PLO affirms that those articles of the Palestinian Covenant which deny Israel’s right to exist, and the provisions of the Covenant which are inconsistent with commitments of this letter are now imperative and no longer valid... (September 9, 1993).*

On the same day, Prime Minister Rabin’s one paragraph letter read:

*In response to your letter of September 9, 1993, I wish to confirm to you that, in light of the PLO commitments included in your letter, the Government of Israel has decided to recognize the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and commence negotiations with the PLO within the Middle East peace process (September 9, 1993).*

Article XIV of the Declaration of Principles stipulated Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza strip and Jericho area....

Again, on the same day, Chairman Arafat's letter to the Norwegian foreign minister, the lead negotiator and mediator, read;

*I would like to confirm to you that, upon the signing of the Declaration of Principles, the PLO encourages and calls upon the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to take part in the steps leading to the normalization of life, rejecting violence and terrorism, contributing to peace and stability and participating actively in shaping reconstruction economic development and co-operation. (September 9, 1993).*

Unfortunately, there are rejectionist groups among both the Israelis and Palestinians. Hamas and other Palestinian rejectionist groups did not accept Oslo treaty and launched suicide bomb attacks on Israelis. In Israel the rejectionist groups opposed "land for peace" deal especially among the "settler-led groups". Sadly, Prime Minister Rabin was shot and killed, November 4, 1995, by an Israeli student who was against the Oslo treaties and "their subsequent developments"(Mahler and Mahler). Therefore, for the most part, Oslo Accords were only partially implemented.

After 1995, several diplomatic rounds had been held between the Israelis and Palestinians, and some form of agreements reached either partially or never implemented according to the spirit and letter of those agreements. Such agreements include the following:

- Oslo II, September 1995. This was an interim agreement in pursuant of 1993 Accord.
- Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, September 4, 1999. This memorandum was on Implementation Timeline of Outstanding Commitments of Agreements signed and the Resumption of Permanent Status Negotiations. Never fully implemented.
- The Wye River Memorandum. A consummation of the Protocol Concerning Safe Passage signed in October 1999, was "to contribute to the normalization of life of the Palestinians "by making it easier for them to travel to and from the West Bank to Gaza Strip, through Israel. Again, it was never implemented.
- Taba Summit, 2001. The Taba Summit in Taba, Egypt, was held in January, 2001, removed "temporarily Israeli controlled" areas, and the Palestinian side accepted this proposal as basis for further diplomatic discourse. In a joint statement, both sides agreed that: 'it proved impossible to reach to reach understandings on all issues'. However, Ehud Barak, Israeli Prime Minister, faced with stiff election in 2001, said: 'nothing is agreed upon until everything is agreed upon'.
- Arab Peace Plan, 2002. The main provisions of the peace plan were that Israel would trade all lands conquered and occupied at the end of the 1967 Six-Day War; that a Palestine state would be set up in the West Bank and Gaza Strip; and



that there would be a “just solution” to the refugee case. And all this would be followed by Arab states recognizing the state of Israel (Rubin, 2013).

- The Quartet Roadmap, 2003. The ‘Quartet Roadmap’ is a plan composed of the European Union, Russia, the United States, and the United Nations. It remains a roadmap never followed but “a reference point for negotiations.”
- Geneva Accord, 2003. The roadmap concept seemed to have been reversed by the Geneva Accord, in which “the growth of security and confidence” come before a political agreement. Essentially, it provided for certain land swaps on the Israeli side, with Palestinians having the right to “to have their capital in east Jerusalem, though with Israeli sovereignty over the Western Wall in the Old city.”
- Annapolis, 2007. The Annapolis Conference was aimed at a relaunch of the peace process.

US President George Bush Jr; hosted Ehud Olmert, Israeli Prime Minister and Mahmoud Abbas, Palestinian Authority president, at the U. S. Navy Academy at Annapolis, Maryland. Other officials that took part in the peace talks included those from the Quartet and over a dozen Arab states, including Saudi Arabia and Syria, even though without official recognition of Israel. It was hoped that both Israeli and Palestinian leaders would continue to engage in negotiations with “the goal of a full peace deal by the end of 2008”. However, the hope was shattered by the Palestinian ( Hamas group) incessant

rocket attacks on Israel, and the reprisal Israeli military offensive in Gaza in November 2008.

Here lies the diplomatic conundrum in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Hopes have been raised and dashed due to societal attitudes in both Israel and Palestine, thereby frustrating efforts of ‘third party’ negotiators and mediators. Virtually every diplomatic effort since 1947 to the present had been punctured and aborted. Palestinian society remains divided politically and geographically between the Hamas – controlled Gaza Strip and Fatah--controlled West Bank. Similarly, Israeli society is torn between peace activists and those opposed any deal with the Palestinians on account of security concerns. On both sides of the divide there exist the moderates and extremists.

As each peace talk was approached with great measure of apprehension and trepidation, “the more moderate” Palestinian Authority of the Fatah group based in the West Bank invested more in diplomatic strategy through the United Nations platform. Still, some analysts do not believe the Palestine Authority strategy could work out any meaningful solution to the conflict. But since 2011 the PA had applied to the UN for Palestinian statehood bid.

Ali Abunimah, writing in Foreign Affairs, argues that;

*The Palestine authority bid to the United Nations for the Palestinian statehood is at least in theory, supposed to circumvent the failed peace process. But in two crucial aspects, the ill-conceived gambit actually makes things worse, amplifying the flaws of the process it seeks to replace. First, it excludes*

*the Palestinian people from decision-making process. And second, it entirely disconnects the discourse about statehood from reality (Foreign Affairs, September 19, 2011).*

For over 65 years, the peace process has dragged on, rendering any hope to achieve Palestine statehood elusive. Consequently as peace talks continued to end in deadlocks, alternative avenues were being explored to reach a desired goal, even trying the recapture of once lost opportunity. It is an obvious realization that oppositions do exist both internal and external to the Palestinian society. Externally, the UN Palestinian bid set Israel and the US fiercely opposed to it, and most Arab governments. Internally, certain Palestinian officials and the people themselves provided little or no support at all for the effort (Abunimah).

### **November 29, 2012: UN Resolution 67/19**

Since September 2010, Israel and Palestine direct peace negotiations have stalled following Israel's refusal to extend its 'freeze on settlement activity' in the Palestine territory. Thus, Palestinian officials have argued that the process was already "so moribund that it was simple common sense for them to pursue an alternative path"(Kevin Connolly, BBC, Middle East correspondence, November 30, 2012). That 'alternative path' was their application since 2011 to the UN for full member status for the state of Palestine, even though some countries criticized this move for purportedly avoiding bilateral negotiations (<http://en.wikipedia.org>).

However a reprieve came the way of the Palestinians in 2012. In 1997 the UN had set aside an annual International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The day marked the date in 1947 (November 29) when the Assembly adopted Resolution 181. As the November date approached, the diplomatic tempo was reaching its heightened pitch in New York City, West Bank and Israel.

Then the Day came: Thursday, November 20, 2012. The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 67/19, upgrading Palestine non-member observer state status, came up for vote. Resolution 67/19 was approved by a vote of 138-9, with 41 abstentions, in the 193 – member Assembly. The resolution was adopted by the sixty-seventh session of the UN, and marked the 65th anniversary of the adoption of Resolution 181(ii) of 1947 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_Nations\\_General\\_Assembly\\_resolution\\_67/19](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_General_Assembly_resolution_67/19)).

Responses were mixed among diplomats and between Israelis and Palestinians. But in the words of the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, "Today's vote underscores the urgency of a resumption of meaningful negotiations. We must give new impetus to our collective efforts that an independent, sovereign, democratic, contiguous and viable state of Palestine lives side by side with a secured state of Israel. I urge the parties to renew their commitment to a negotiated peace"(<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=43640>).

The choice of date was not an accident but rather predetermined and attempts to bring some sense of order and direction into decades of diplomatic conundrum.

As Mossi Raz, a former Israeli lawmaker and veteran activist, succinctly puts it “it’s aimed at correcting a historical mistake” (Heller and Perry, 2012). But whose mistake was it?

Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian President, admitted in an Israeli TV interview in 2011 that the Arab world erred in rejecting the 1947 UN partitioning plan. In his words, ‘It was our mistake. It was an Arab mistake as a whole’ (Heller and Perry, <http://twitter.com/perrydan>)

Benjamin Netanyahu, Israelis Prime Minister reaction was rather not candid. He said “the decision at the UN today (Thursday, November 29, 2012) will change nothing on the ground. It will not advance the establishment of a Palestinian state; it will push it off....” (The Washington Post, Friday, November 30, 2012)

### **Resolving the Two-State Solution: How workable?**

The idea of ‘the two states solution’ to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is rooted in the 1947 UNGA resolution 181 as contained in parts I and II of the partition plan. Several diplomatic efforts have been exacted, and so far failed, to broker a two- state solution, with an independent Palestinian state existing side by side an independent Jewish state within secured borders.

However, there is a strong feeling among a majority of both Israelis and Palestinians with high preference for “the two-state solution over any other solution as means of resolving the conflict”

(<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/933214.html>).

In September 2012, during the 67th session of the UN, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu extended his hand in peace to the Palestine President Abbas towards ensuring the creation of “a solution of two-states for two peoples, where a demilitarized Palestinian state will recognize Israel as a Jewish state” (NY Times.com).

After the adoption of resolution 67/19, President Abbas spoke to the Assembly, that “the General Assembly is called upon ...to issue a birth certificate of the reality of the state of Palestine,” and by the same speech condemned what he referred to as Israeli ‘racism and colonialism’. Ethan Bronner and Christine Hauser write that Abbas’ remarks seemed aimed in parts at both Israel and Hamas, and both responded to “the parts they found offensive” ( NY Times.com)

Prime Minister Netanyahu responded thus: “The world watched a defamatory and venomous speech that was full of mendacious propaganda against the Israel defence forces and the citizens of Israel. Someone who wants peace does not talk in such a manner.”

Hamas spokesman, Salah al-Bardaweel, in utter contradictory response, reaffirmed their former stand that: ‘There are controversial issues in the point that Abbas raised, and Hamas has the right to preserve its position over them. We do not recognize Israel nor does the partition of Palestine and Israel have no right in Palestine. Getting our membership in the UN bodies is our natural right, but without giving up any inch of Palestine’s soil (NY Times .com).

Equally confounding is Mr. Abbas ‘attitude as regards the issue of ‘two

states solution'. Ron Prosor, Israel's UN ambassador, expressed the concern that the Palestinian Authority has failed to recognize Israel for what it is. That afternoon of November 29, 2012, ambassador Prosor says: 'In fact, President Abbas, I did not hear you use the phrase 'two states for two peoples' this afternoon. In fact, I have never heard you say the phrase 'two states for two people because the Palestinian leadership has never recognized that Israel is the nation state of the Jewish people (NYtimes.com).

Indeed, there is no credible and harmonious Palestine leadership. Mr. Abbas presides over a divided house between the Hamas in control of the Gaza Strip and Fatah in the West Bank. He is not welcome in Gaza since 2008 when he was forced out. He maintains only a weak control of Fatah in the West Bank, which clearly "shows that there is no viable Palestinian leadership" living up to expectation of realizing a two-state solution to the conflict. Therefore, the UN Resolution 67/19 to upgrade the status of the Palestinians by the 138 member states majority votes could only be taken as "largely symbolic". But "symbolism" is said to be something that matters in the Middle East (Connolly).

But for the actualization of the state of Palestine, symbolism must be translated to actual international person, a sovereign state with clearly defined boundaries and legitimate government. For this to happen, the question of the right of Israel to exist must be settled. In other words, Hamas and other Islamists and Arab governments such as Hezbollah and Iran must recognize the right of Israel to exist. Iran's position,

for instance, under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that Israelis have no roots in the history of the Middle East and that the nation must be "eliminated" or "wiped off the map" is unacceptable (<http://www.theblaze.com/stories/Ahmadinejad-Israel-has-no-historic...>).

'Come, they say, and let us wipe out Israel as a nation-we will destroy the very memory of her existence. This was their unanimous decision at their summit conferences – they signed a treaty to ally themselves against Israel.' "Scrapping Israel into the Mediterranean" "wiping Israel off the map", eliminating and annihilating the nation of Israel are some of the expressions that portray the Arab leadership attitude towards Israel, attributable to leaders like Nasser of Egypt, Ahmadinejad of Iran, and other groups like Hamas and Hezbollah. This may render "the Arab League Peace Initiative" covertly suspect (Rubin, 2013).

The Arab League Peace Initiative was first proposed and published in March 2002, at the Beirut Summit, agreed upon again in 2007 in the Riyadh Summit, and once again renewed in 2013 in Washington (USA), as led by Qatar. It is a proposed solution, tagged "final solution." It offers "full normalization of relations with Israel, in exchange for the withdrawal of its forces from all the occupied territories, including the Golan Heights, to recognize an independent Palestinian state with east Jerusalem as its capital" as well as a 'just solution' for the Palestinian refugees" (<http://en.wikipedia.org>; Rubin, 2013).

As Rubin clearly observes, the supposed peace plan, though "a good thing" but at best "a bluff" or 'a scam'. For one thing,

key member states of the Arab league are enemies of Israel, except Jordan, Bahrain and possibly Saudi Arabia. And for another, as Rubin argues, “if you factor in the Islamist- ruled places- Egypt, the Gaza strip, Lebanon, Tunisia, and soon Syria- into the equation, the picture looks different”. Furthermore, if one includes public opinion and the efforts of revolutionary Islamists ready to condemn any such deal as treason, the picture is further compounded. Even, the Hamas in control of Gaza “will refuse to abide by any such agreement” (Rubin, 2013)

Equally true also is Tunisia’s Muslim brotherhood-dominated leadership, which has already written in the country’s new constitution that it can never make peace with Israel. Iran’s position is also very clear on this matter; except, of course, if the new Iranian President Hassan Rouhani would soften Iran’s policy of annihilation of Israel, which is not likely in the immediate.

Nonetheless, “third party” diplomatic efforts may be good in conflict resolution, but in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian’s conflict, bilateral peace talk may be more effective. Both parties should continue to explore such approach. Also, the divided Palestinians must unite and recognize the right of Israel to exist. After all, the Hamas claims to have “natural right” to be a member of committee of nations. Why then should they seek the wiping off of another nation from existence?

Mutual recognition of each other’s right to exist and live in peace and security is a major step towards resolving other seemingly intractable issues such as the status of Jerusalem, and the return of displaced people.

The perception, that since several rounds of failed diplomacy between Israeli and Palestinian leaders have reinforced the people’s belief, “that the gap between the two sides remains too wide and that the largest concessions Israel could offer would still fail to meet the minimum that the Palestinians could live with”, could be altered. The conflict can be contained if mutual recognition is accepted. This is the core area the Palestinian people and the leadership must work on. As two Israeli authors write—Yosef Kuperwasser and Shalom Lipner – the disagreement and failed negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians is not so much over specific issues, such as settlements or Jerusalem, but fundamentally, “the Palestinians’ refusal to recognize Israel as a Jewish state” (Kuperwasser and Lipner, 2011; Naom Shaizaf, 2013).

The Palestinian leadership demands ‘a freeze in Israeli settlement – building’ in the West Bank as a precondition for bilateral peace talks. During President Barack Obama’s visits to both Jerusalem and Ramallah, in March 2013, he urged the Palestinians to drop such demands, but the Mahmoud Abbas’s administration insisted that “the precondition remained in place”. However, that did not stop President Obama from stressing the need for Palestinians to ‘share same values of self-determination and justice’ with the Israelis. In the same vein he told his young Israeli audience: ‘It is not fair that Palestinian children cannot grow up in a state of their own, living entire lives with the presence of foreign army that controls the movements of their parents every single day’(bbc.co.uk; the

Guardian{Lagos }, March24,2013, p.19).

Frankly, there is no meaningful talk about peace without justice. The only precondition for peace should be, and is, inclusive mutual recognition of each other's right to exist. It must be inclusive recognition because without other Islamist like Hamas and Hezbollah willingly recognizing Israel's right of existence, every effort by Abbas-led Fatah remains futile. Justice demands such inclusive mutual recognition of right of existence, which will in turn address other core issues that may be considered injustice. What drives Israelis settlement –building program has to do with their sense of uncertainty and security concerns.

### Conclusion

Understanding the geopolitics and historicity of the Middle East presents some good picture to appreciate the Israeli- Palestinian conflict. Even though two historians may never agree on what happened in the past, and 'the

damn thing is they both think they're telling the truth' in the words of Harry Truman (Mideast Web), but the fact remains that the truth lies between the stories. The denial of right of existence to Israel premised on the historical denial and distortion of truth that the Jews had "no historical roots in the Middle East" can be corrected by historical evidence.

Correcting some historical mistake has brought a glimmer of hope to the Palestinian march towards statehood. UNR 67/19 of November 29, 2012 has reinvigorated UNR 181 of November 29, 1947, 65 years after. Still, there are obstacles on the roadmap to actualize a Palestine state to exist side-by-side a state of Israel. Among such obstacles are both sides' preconditions, and lack of collective recognition by the Palestinians of the right of existence of a Jewish state of Israel on these rests other intractable issues for frank and principled negotiations.

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