

FROM THE UN

THE ISRAEL PALESTINIAN CONFLICT: WHERE IS IT GOING?

Sophisticated rockets are sent to Israeli cities from Gaza, enhancing the reputation of Hamas. Israel bombs Gaza and mobilizes forces on the border. Palestinian president Abbas goes to the UN and wins an overwhelming vote in the General Assembly enhancing their status allowing them to join many UN bodies as well as bring cases to the International Criminal Court.

Prime minister Netanyahu of Israel retaliates against the Palestinians. He announces plans to build more housing in contested areas of the West Bank. Most ominously, he proposes to continue the planning of a development in the most contested area near Jerusalem, known as E1, which could be a fatal blow to chances for a two state solution because building there would split the north and south part of the West Bank making a contiguous Palestinian state impossible.

The conflict between the Jews and Palestinians has festered for over 100 years with periodic violence. The conflict is getting increasingly dangerous as the weapons are getting more lethal and the Middle East is in turmoil with unknown consequences.

Where is all this going?

To get a feel for the situation lets hear from some voices. Many in Israel hope for a two-state solution with security for Israel. However, there is also increased skepticism that it is possible. Lets hear the voice of the sceptic with opinions unfortunately increasingly reflecting views of many Israelis.

ISRAELI SCEPTIC: We live in a dangerous neighborhood, surrounded by people who have never accepted our legitimacy and wish to destroy us. We must be vigilant, strong and never be victims again. Our proposals for accommodation have always been rejected. We have been attacked again and again both before the state was created and in the many wars afterwards. Can we trust a two-state solution? We left Gaza and were repaid by consistent hostility. The West Bank and Israel is our national heritage and we have a right to it. The Palestinians have had chances for a

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state. They rejected the UN partition plan in 1947 and attacked us. In 2000 at Camp David with US President Clinton, Israel offered a plan for a Palestinian state in virtually all of the West Bank. Arafat, the head of the Palestinian authority turned it down, with no alternative suggestions and then followed with an Intifada.

Lets hear now from a peace now perspective. a view we support.

PEACE NOW SUPPORTER: We do indeed live in a dangerous neighborhood. The oppressive occupation just makes things worse creating ever more hatred, The increasing number of settlements is making a two-state solution impossible enhancing their feeling of being dispossessed of their land. We must use every opportunity to try and try again to search for peace and not undermine any one in the Palestinian community willing to seriously talk. A good beginning is to halt the settlement activities and reduce the cruelties of the occupation. It is essential to have a negotiated agreement to try to avoid becoming a garrison state fated to rule over several million Palestinians forever. If not, Israel is destined to become a bi-national state with a permanent occupying force and an International pariah. The status quo threatens Israel's ideal of being a democratic Jewish state. A greater Israel consisting of Israel and the West Bank, which an increasing number in Israel support, will involve ever more violence. The Arab population is growing faster than the jewish one. Under a single state solution Jews would become a minority. Unless we are prepared for Arabs to dominate the country politically we have to deprive them of the vote. Such a scenario is not sustainable and leads to an ugly situation.

To see where this bitter conflict has led, lets hear a recent speech by Khalled Mishal, the political leader of Hamas.

MISHAL:Palestine is ours from river to the sea and from the south to the north. There will be no concession on any inch of the land. We will never recognize the legitimacy of the Israeli occupation and therefore there is no legitimacy to Israel. The Jewish state will be wiped away through resistance or military action.

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The UN has always promoted a two- state solution beginning with the partition plan of 1947. The two- state solution is in deep trouble. First, because there are already too many settlements and it is unlikely they can be dismantled. Further, most Israeli parliamentary members of the majority party Likud are against two states. This leaves the unsatisfactory status quo or one state increasingly favored in the Israeli parliament. Some are in favor of annexing the West Bank, What happens to the 2.5 million Palestinians there? .Will they become a majority ruled by a jewish minority? a formula for eternal conflict.

Recently, King Abdullah of Jordan visited Abbas in the West Bank. Jordan controlled the West Bank from 1948 to 1967 when Israel seizes it. In 1988 it ceded any claim to the area. An intriguing suggestion in the 1980's was a possible partition of Palestine into Israel and an Arab state Palestine- Jordan that fuses the West Bank with Jordan. A possible confederation between a Palestinian West Bank and Jordan was recently discussed between Prime Minister Netanyahu and King Abdullah. There would be many hurdles, the settlers, the Hashemite regime and the core bedouin population of Jordan. Many Palestinians already live in Jordan where there is a lot of room. It is a difficult sell but in the currently volatile Middle East nothing is foreclosed.

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