



MANUEL HASSASSIAN

Ambassador from Palestine to London

Jim Hoagland, Associate Editor and Chief Foreign Correspondent, *Washington Post*

Thank you very much, Mr Peretz. I have a real sense of an extended hand reaching out from Israel. Our cleanup hitter is someone who knows baseball parlance very well, and we now count on him to make sense out of all that has gone before. He is the Palestinian Ambassador to the UK, and someone who has spent some time in my own country teaching as a university professor. I would like to introduce Manuel Hassassian.

Manuel Hassassian

Just to make a proper introduction, I think Mr Peretz failed to mention that Dr Tibi is the Deputy Speaker of the Israeli Knesset. Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, if Mr Peretz and Mr Sheerit were in government today I guarantee you that we would have a peace deal in three months. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a protracted conflict between two epistemic communities driven by two seminal factors for the last ten decades, mutual fear and mutual distrust, which in turn epitomise the psychological barriers between two traumatised societies.

A major pitfall of all peace processes that have dismally failed so far in addressing the concerns and needs of the people is that politicians jockeyed for peacemaking and discarded the peace-building process. The alienation of our civil societies which had been in the process of building bridges culminated in the entrenchment of hate, bigotry and demonisation of the other. The polarisation of such mindsets had exacerbated compulsive violence and inculcated the culture of impunity.

The lack of peace-building through a culture of peace education paved the way to zero-sum conflict and hence the negation of the other. It is unfortunate that today politics is imposed by the extreme elements, while the moderates and the mainstream are being marginalised and rendered irrelevant. Therefore, the entire peace process has been confined within the parameters of crisis management rather than conflict management, where win-win should be the endgame. Consequently, we are stuck between the historically inevitable and the politically impossible. We are moving from breakthrough to breakdown. The failure of linkages between our civil society and our people widened the gulf of inequity and emphasised xenophobic solutions.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, there will never be a military solution to this conflict, and in spite for Israel's military might and power politics, individual security will continue to be a major obsession, to the point of paranoia. Therefore, negotiation and dialogue is the natural outcome for such a conflict, sponsored by an honest third-party broker. Moral sympathy and pacified lexicons are not recipes for a solution. What we need is an action plan with a timeline imposed by a third party with proper monitoring and verification mechanisms, or else processes come and go, conferences like this come and go, and they will lead to nothing other than to deepening the wedges and polarising attitudes. It is unfortunate that the peace process has been a total charade; for the last 18 years, the negotiations emanated from a diktat of power politics. Without equity and mutual reciprocity, the process will continue to create stumbling blocks to accepting each other as equal partners to the conflict. Recent hopes for the revival of direct talks have been dashed by the intensification of settlement activities by the current government of Israel. Consequently, the dream for a Palestinian state is being systematically aborted, leaving us with difficult options. These tough choices will impregnate new political realities that will result in drastic measures of reaction that could deteriorate the issue of security and stability even further.



A Palestinian state is a must for Palestinians, and it is crucial for Israel's security as well as for the United States and the wider world's geostrategic interests. It is public knowledge that the crux of the Middle East conflict is the non-resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; hence, regional conflicts are the natural outcome of such deep-seated conflict. Peace and security are global as well as regional requirements, and definitely much-needed requirements for both Palestinians and Israelis.

Systemic policies and land confiscations, settlement building, separation walls, military incursions and checkpoints are not confidence-building measures for healthy solutions and dialogue, let alone hot pursuits and indiscriminate killings, along with total control over water aquifers and violations of basic human rights. These will never create the ambience of mutual acceptance and respect. Furthermore, the exclusivity of a Jewish state is another added critical dimension of this conflict, paving the way to denial of Arabs and other minorities, and total disregard of the right of return for Palestinian refugees, which is considered to be a cornerstone for any future peace deal.

A key observation is that Israel is becoming religiously fundamentalist, that it deliberately rejects non-Jewish races, and by defining itself as a Jewish state it turns itself into a hostile and isolated enclave in the Middle East. We the Palestinians are not the children of a lesser God. We are entitled to self-determination, and hence to our state, which is only 22% of historic Palestine. We know what we want, and our borders are clear, the 4 June 1967 borders. Now we ask the Israelis to draw their borders? Issues like security cannot be resolved with a perpetual hegemonic attitude and lack of sensitivity towards our needs.

Ladies and gentlemen, justice precedes peace and security, and they are mutually inclusive. It is evident by now that Israel has actual power; but we have the staying power, and Israel's military and nuclear power will never match our demographic power. Consequently, total separation should be a strategic option for Israel; otherwise it will eventually be considered an isolated pariah state. Israel should recognise a simple fact, that it cannot continue its occupation while seeking peace, and cannot disregard the Arab Peace Initiative, the only safety valve for its existence and acceptance in the Middle East region.

We the Palestinians are the only guarantors for a legitimate existence of the State of Israel. Peace will never prevail unless Israel gives up the Occupied Territories. It is only a matter of time before Israel will inevitably start to crumble from within and without if it does not face its reality.

This is the last window of opportunity to make it happen, but having the cake and eating it too will never bring peace and security, and Israel will continue its existence as a transient state.

I believe that the recipe for a peace deal is known to all parties, but we lack the political will to make it happen, because the ramifications are explicit to everyone.

Violence will only breed violence, and this is definitely not the panacea we are seeking to end this conflict.