

## **Israeli – Palestinian Conflict and the United Nations’ Peace Initiative**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined Israeli - Palestinian conflict with a focus on the United Nations’ peace initiative. The paper examined how this peace option has affected the realization of a two-state solution in the Israeli -Palestinian conflict. The study adopted explanatory research design, which enabled us to explain the variables in the conflict and used qualitative research technique and content analysis due to the availability of existing data sourced from secondary sources. The study adopted the zero sum two person game theory which enabled us to understand the win – win or loss – loss attitude of the parties involved. The paper discussed and analysed the research objectives in which we utilized to evaluate the research hypotheses and provide the findings. We found that the UN peace initiative has failed to achieve its goal of resolving the conflict due to the veto powers of US and her allies, and the goal of the UN to achieve world peace has been defeated since they cannot achieve peace in Middle East and the world at large leading to the proliferation of terrorist groups and escalation of terrorist related violence and wars in the Middle East and all over the world. We recommended that there is a need for permanent member states in the Security Council who have the right of veto to cooperate and achieve unanimity in seeing to the end of the conflict so as to restore international peace and security. Again, the United Nations should re-assess all its’ peace initiatives it has embarked upon in attempting to resolve the conflict and put-up a grand design with adequate implementation strategies and financial provisions in order to address squarely the issues of settlement, status of Jerusalem, border, security and refugee problem in the conflict.

**Keywords:** United Nations: Conflict: Peace: Initiative: Middle East

## **Introduction**

The roots of the Israeli - Palestinian conflict is traceable to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century AD and 20<sup>th</sup> century AD which witnessed rise in national sentiments and movements in the world politics. Zionism and Arab nationalism were among these national movements at that time. Zionism — the Jewish national movement was established as a response to Russian and European anti-Semitism against the Jews.

During the mandatory period, the League of Nations approved and more Jews entered Palestine. The Palestinian Arabs resented the immigration into their home. The tensions between Arab and Jewish groups in the region erupted into physical violence - the 1920 Palestine riots, the 1921 Palestine riots, the 1929 Hebron Massacre and the 1936 - 1939 Arab revolt. The Jewish Zionists immigrated to develop the land as well as to escape persecution from Europe.

Between 1939 and 1945, the World War II was raging; Nazi Germans attacked and overrun most European countries. Nazi's persecution of Jews heightened, eventually culminating into the famous genocide called the Holocaust. This Holocaust resulted in the mass murder of 6 million Jews. Both groups — the Arabs and the Jews directed violence against British in order to expel the mandatory government.

The violence and heavy cost of the World War II made Great Britain to turn the issue of Palestine to the fledging United Nations. On November 27, 1947, the United Nations deliberated on the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) report, and approved the partition of the British mandate of Palestine into two states; one Jewish and one Arab. The Jewish state would be 55% of Palestinian territory and that of the Arab state would constitute 42% of the territory while the remaining 3% would be Jerusalem which was approved to be an international zone. This approval became known as the United Nations General Assembly resolution 181. The Jews accepted the partition while the Palestinians rejected it (Cleveland and Bunton, 2009: 261-267).

On June, 1967, Israel began a six day war against Egypt, Syria and Jordan. The Israeli army decimated the Arab armies and destroyed over \$82 billions worth of Egyptian military equipment (Owen, 2002: 305). The Israelis captured the Golan Heights from Syria, the West Bank including the East Jerusalem from Jordan and Gaza strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt. About 180,000 Palestinians who were not previously refugees fled the West Bank and Gaza Strip and they are technically known as displaced persons (Jeremy, 2005: 7). Accordingly, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in response to the development of the conflict passed resolution 242 which embodied that Israel should trade the captured land for peace agreements. The resolution failed to address the Palestinian question especially the quest for self - determination. Israel accepted to return the land captured and returned the Golan Heights to Jordan and Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in exchange for peace treaties and recognition of its right to exist (Jeremy, 2005: 7). In July, 1968, the Palestinian Liberation Organization adopted the Palestinian National Charter (Jeremy, 2005: 8).

On September 23, 2011, Mahmoud Abbas, the Prime Minister of Palestinian Authority (PA) applied for full membership in the United Nations. US threatened to use her veto in the United Security Council and to withhold funds from UN bodies that choose to support the bid. On the alternative, he sought for a non member observer status. The UN voted on November 29, 2012 with 138 in favour, 9 against and 41 absentions. The UN peace initiatives are in encapsulated in such calls and the moves to end the conflict (1948, 1956, 1967, 1967, 1969, 1970, 1973, 1978, 1981, 1982, 1983) (Basu, 2004).

Against this backdrop, this study examines the Israeli - Palestinian conflicts with a special focus on the Palestinian state question by attempting to analyse the UN peace initiative towards achieving a two state solution in the Israeli - Palestinian conflict.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The State of Israel and the Palestinians have continued to engage each other in an endless violent conflict for many decades. This conflict has attracted the peace efforts of Britain, United Nations, Quartet (comprising US, UN, EU and the Russian Representative), Arab League, United States and the Palestinian -UN Initiative. In spite of these peace efforts, none has been able to produce a final status agreement that could end the conflict. Among these peace efforts, the UN peace initiative remains distinctively prominent in terms of its currency as competing alternatives for the resolution of the conflict. Despite these efforts, the conflict is still unresolved and escalating.

The UN peace initiative refers to the peace efforts of United Nations to end the conflict. Recently, the two separate moves by the Palestinian Liberation Authority first on 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2011 in which it sought for full membership, admission into the United Nations through United Nations Security Council and second, Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> November, 2012 the United Nations was sought for and the members voted which elevated the UN status of the Palestinian Authority (PA) from permanent observer entity to non-member observer status. The first move suffered a threat of veto from the US while the US, Israel and five other states voted against the non-member observer status. Even though the Palestinians got the non-member observer status, the desired goal of Palestinian statehood is still a mirage.

The major thrust of the study is to examine the UN peace initiative in the realization of a two-state solution in Israeli – Palestinian conflict. The UN peace initiative was chosen among other peace plans because apart from US comprehensive peace settlement process, other peace plans have been overtaken by events and presently do not attract scholars' attention. The peace initiative has for several times generated controversies and reactions among scholars.

Despite the controversies which the UN peace initiative has generated currently among scholars (Eden, 2012: 1; Alpher, 2011), there have not been systematic study on why this peace plan has failed to resolve the conflict. This study analyses this peace initiative with a view to understanding why it has failed to resolve the conflict.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the foregoing, the following research questions are posed:

- (1) Does the use of veto powers by US and her allies affect the UN peace initiative in achieving its goal of resolving the Israeli – Palestinian conflict?
- (2) What are the implications of the failure of UN peace initiative in resolving the Israeli – Palestinian conflict?

### **Objectives of the Study**

The broad objective of this research is to analyse the UN peace initiative and its impediments to addressing Palestinian State question. Consequently, the research is guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To analyse how the use of veto powers by US and her allies affect the UN peace initiative in achieving its goal of resolving the Israeli – Palestinian conflict.
2. To x-ray the implications of the failure of UN peace initiative in achieving the goal of resolving the Israeli – Palestinian conflict.

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following research hypotheses were formulated:

- (1) The use of veto powers by US and her allies affects the UN peace initiative in

- achieving its goal of resolving the Israeli – Palestinian conflict.
- (2) The failure of the UN peace initiative at resolving the Israeli – Palestinian conflict has led to the proliferation of terrorist groups and escalation of terrorist related violence and wars in the Middle East and all over the world.

### **Concept of Conflict**

Conflict is a phenomenon that has widely attracted the attention of scholars. Conflict has remained an intrinsic and inevitable part of human existence (Isarch, 1992: 1; David, 2006: 20). Conflict is a pervasive concept; it is seen as a natural part of human daily lives (Weeks, 1992: ix). To the contrary, David (2006: 20) argues that violent conflict is not inevitable, maintaining that it is an anomaly. He defines conflict as "the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups. Implicit in this definition is the incompatibility of interest being pursued by different groups. In the view of Ojiji (2006: 117), conflict occurs when one party perceives the action of another party as blocking the opportunity for the attainment of a goal. Corroborating this position, Schmit and Kochan (1992: 359-360) maintained that for conflict to occur, two prerequisites must be satisfied, namely, perceived goal incompatibility and perceived opportunity for interference or blocking. These authors refer to goal incompatibility to a zero-sum relationship between the two parties involved (i.e. the total benefits to the two parties if one wins a benefit (+1) and the other loses (- 1), the sum is zero). Interference or blocking refers to an intended activity that is perceived as detrimental to the attainment of a goal. Goldestein (2003: 183) defines conflict as "a difference in preferred outcomes in a bargaining situation". Coser (1956: 8) also defines conflict as "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals". It is seen by Otite (2004) as cited in Obi (2007: 213) as "arising from the individuals and or groups' interests, goals, aspirations by individuals and or groups in a defined social or physical environment".

However, despite the fact that conflict has been a pervasive reality in human existence, finding an acceptable definition of conflict has always remained an uphill task. Thus, Mark and Snyder cited in Faleti (2005: 36) opined that:

*Given the pervasiveness of conflict phenomena and the diversity of approaches of enquiry, it is legitimate to ask whether the apparent intellectual disorder reflects an inherently incoherent focus of social analysis — a focus artificially created by a label or whether the disparateness of data interpretation is due in part to interdisciplinary compartmentalism to academic individualism or rapid growth with its consequent inattention to direction, ~*

In this regard, Obi (2007: 214) questions "whether the complex and changing nature or the environmental context has contributed this seemingly anarchy.

### **Conflict Resolution**

Conflict resolution is seen as efforts and interventions employed to limit, contain or regulate conflict as well as a sub-field of peace and conflict studies. Conflict resolution is seen by Miller *et al.* (2001: 21) as "a variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflict through the constructive solving of problems distinct from management or transformation. These authors also observed that by conflict resolution, it is expected that the deep rooted sources of conflict are addressed and resolved, and behaviour is no longer violent, nor attitudes hostile any longer. While the struggle of the conflict has been changed. Obi (2007: 214) opines that conflict resolution "entails series of measures initiated in a conflict situation in order to finally terminate the conflict".

Holding the same view, Best (2006: 94) maintains that conflict resolution connotes a sense of finality where the parties to a conflict are mutually satisfied with the outcome of a settlement and the conflict is resolved in true sense. Best cites Mitchel and Banks in which

they use conflict resolution to refer:

- (i) An outcome in which the issues in an existing conflict are satisfactorily dealt with through a solution that is mutually acceptable to the parties, self-sustaining in the long run and productive of a new and positive relationship between parties that were previously hostile adversaries;
- (ii) Any process or procedure by which such an outcome is achieved. Mitchell (1988: 31) harps that conflicts have interrelated components: conflict situation, conflict behaviour and conflict attitudes.

### **Theoretical Framework**

As a result of the nature of this study, the zero sum two person game theory was adopted. The choice of zero sum two person game theory is in line with number of choices available to the parties involved in the conflict and the UN General Assembly and the Security Council. The zero sum game will aptly explain the strategies Israelis and Palestinians have adopted in the conflict situations of the Palestinian - Israeli conflict which have involved arms struggles, which United Nations has attempted to resolve since 1948 till date. The game theory is associated with the works of Mahajan (2008); Piano and Rugs (1973); Neuman and Morgenstern (1963); Shubik (1967); Varma (1975); Akena (2010). The central theme of the theory is that there are two parties to the game of politics. It is use in political science for the study and understanding of international problems and how the parties involved in them behave. Those parties can be individuals, or institutions. Each party is more interested to win the game. The theory seeks to identify and explain patterns and regularities in the way people confronted with conflict situations behave and actually make decisions. It provides platform or formal model for identifying and understanding the optimum or the most rational strategy which actors in decision or bargain making contexts pursue. The players employ a lot of strategies that would minimize loss while maximizing the possible gains or pay - offs.

The relevance of the theory is anchored on the understanding that the winner takes all syndromes that has characterized the conflict. It has created a situation in which what one player wins is equal to what his opponent losses, making the sum of the outcome for the two players to be zero. Represent thus; pay - off for the winner to be +x, while that of the loser is -x, the two pay - offs added, we shall continued to have in the conflict  $x - f(-x) = 0$ ;  $x - x = 0$ . Palestinians and Israelis have continued to adopt the game theory approach which has created a seemingly uncertain situation.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted explanatory research design. It enabled us to answer the research questions correctly and evaluate the hypotheses appropriately. This research design allowed us to test the game theory that explained the behavioural calculus of the two parties to the conflict as well as the United Nations.

This study which is qualitative in nature used secondary method of data collection. Basically, data collection was through secondary sources. The sources include textbooks, journal articles, government documents, periodicals and internet materials. Data for analysis exist in qualitative form. We carried out the three complementary steps of qualitative data analysis; data processing, data analysis and data interpretation.

### **Discussion And Analysis**

This section discussed and analysed the critical components and variables in the study in tandem with objectives of the study and evaluation of hypotheses in order to provide reliable findings. Therefore, the task here is to analyse the UN peace initiative in the

realization of a two-state solution in the Israeli – Palestinian conflict.

### **The UN Peace Initiative and US Powers and her Allies**

The UN peace initiative represents a bold attempt by Mahmoud Abbas in his capacity as the chairman of the Executive committee of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in which he applied for admission of Palestine for full membership of the United Nations (Eden, 2012: 1; Lavie, 2011: 42). On 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2011 the application for membership was based on the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181 of 29 November, 1947 and the Declaration of independence of the State of Palestine of 15 November, 1988, which was acknowledged by the UNGA in Resolution 43/177 of 15 December, 1988.

The membership criteria of United Nations are outlined by Grant (2009) as follows: (1) Membership of the United Nations is open to all other peace loving nations which accept the obligations contained in the charter of the United Nations, Article 4 and in the judgement of the Organization, are able and willing to carry out these obligations, (2) The admission of any such state to membership in the United Nations will be effected by a decision of the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council. It is clear that the competence of the General Assembly regarding admission to United Nations cannot be obtained in the absence of a recommendation of the Security Council.

On 29 November, 2012, United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) voted by an overwhelmingly majority — 138 in favour to 9 against, with 41 absentions to recognize Palestinian State (Morisson, 2012: 1). It attracted teeth of bitter opposition from Israel and US. Analyzing the voting pattern, it is observed that only 3 significant States namely: Canada, Czech Republic and Panama sided with Israel and US in rejecting the proposition. The other 4 votes against are Marshal Islands, all the tiny South Pacific's Island States that are dependent in the US. Again, only one EU state - Czech Republic backed Israel and US. 14 others (Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Spain and Sweden) voted to recognize Palestine as a State. The outcome of the voting was summarized by Balmer quoted in Morisson (2012: 1) as follows: The margin of Israel's defeat in UN vote that granted de-facto statehood, to Palestine has disappointed Israeli political leaders. Attempts to play down the result could not disguise its significance. Full membership, however, to be successful required a positive recommendation by the Security Council to the General Assembly and a two -thirds majority in the General Assembly (i.e. two — third of the members present and voting, excluding absentions). US announced in advanced that it would veto a positive recommendation in the Security Council.

At last, no vote was taken and US did not cast its veto (Morisson, 2012: 2). In the alternative, Palestinians sought observer rights at the UN as a "non-member state", a status which has in the past been a stepping stone to full membership. For example, West Germany (1952 - 1973) South Korea (1949 -1991) and Switzerland (1952 — 2002) were non-member States within the above stated periods. This step does not require the approval of the Security Council and therefore could not be stopped by US. It merely requires a simple majority in the General Assembly. The resolution A/RES/67/19 (Morisson, 2012: 2) paragraph 1 and 2 states that the General Assembly "1, Reaffirms the right of the Palestinian people to self determination and independence in their state of Palestine on the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967; "2. Decides to accord to Palestine non-member observer state status in the United Nations. President Obama had earlier in 2011 reacted:

*peace will not come through statement and resolutions at the United Nations. If it were that easy, it would have been accomplished by now. Ultimately, it is the Israelis and Palestinian — not US — who must*

*reach agreement on issues that divide them (BBC, 16 June, 2011).*

Contrary to Obama's position, Alpher (September 11, 2011) stated that the Statehood bid was the best alternative to the failed peace negotiations to date. He believes that a viable state could be created, to meet and fulfill both Palestinian and Israeli needs and call for a post - Oslo peace paradigm.

### **The Implications of the Failure of UN Peace Initiative in Resolving the Israeli – Palestinian Conflict**

The UN peace initiative intervened to resolve the conflict since 1948 to date. Despite these decades of interventions in the conflict, it is worrisome that it failed to bring the conflict to an end. This failure to resolve this deadly conflict poses serious negative and devastating implications for the geo-political stability of the Middle East, thereby threaten the world peace. The failure to resolve this most protracted world conflict in recent times is giving as the major reason for the recurrent instability that has bedeviled Middle East geopolitics. It is equally said to be the main cause of international terrorism (Landis, 2010: 10).

He opined that Al-Qaeda was founded because of it and it also gave birth to Hamas and Hezbollah. It is the main brain behind the virulence of Islamic fundamentalism and its rejection of Western cultures (Landis, 2010: 10). It is the root of all the problems and conflicts that have polarized the world into dramatically opposed blocs. The conflict has further widened the divide between the Muslim and Christian faithful, which hampers world peace and integration. The conflict has prevented the enthronement of more democratic governments within Islamic world.

The failure of the UN peace initiative is further exacerbated by the frequent use of veto by United States and her allies against Palestinians in favour of the Israelis in the United Nations. the failure of the UN to overcome this challenge has always portrayed the United Nations in bad light and the Muslim world sees UN as a biased umpire. The implications are that all the efforts of the United Nations peace initiative to resolve the conflict have failed, which have rather created a world of proliferated terrorist groups as well as terrorist related violence and wars.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study analysed UN peace initiative which has been a bold attempt by the UN to resolve Israeli - Palestinian conflict and the Palestinian State question. The study established that the UN peace initiative has the challenge of US veto and her withholding of funds to UN bodies that supported the initiative. The United Nations as a world body charged with the responsibility to maintain world peace and contain conflict in the world should be more involving and decisive in resolving the conflict.

We recommended that there is a need for permanent member states in the Security Council who have the right of veto to cooperate and achieve unanimity in seeing to the end of the conflict as to restore international peace and security, and the United Nations should re-assess all its' peace initiatives it has embarked upon in resolving the conflict and put-up a grand design with adequate implementation strategies and financial provisions in order to address squarely the issues of settlement, status of Jerusalem, border, security and refugee problem in the conflict.

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