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## Failed compromise at Camp David

by **FEISAL HUSSEINI \***

In spite of the popular uprising in the occupied Palestinian territories, the Israeli government continues to claim that it went very far in its concessions to the Palestinians at the Camp David summit. These proposals did not, however, guarantee the minimal conditions for creating a viable Palestinian state, nor did they concede our rights over Jerusalem or adequately address the plight of the Palestinian refugees.

Instead, the Israelis played on the balance of forces, claiming that their (illegal) settlements in the occupied territories allowed them to modify the borders of 4 June 1967, laid down in UN security council resolutions 242 and 338. This miscalculation was the downfall of the accord worked out in Oslo in 1993.

The Palestinians have not benefited from the Oslo peace process. Rather, the reverse is true. Since 1993 they have had even more of their land taken away for Israeli settlements and their economy has been devastated by military closures. The maps showing the Israeli proposals at Camp David confirm that there was no solution to these problems on offer.

The territories under complete Palestinian control (zon A) are a collection of disconnected islands with no control over occupied East Jerusalem or borders with the rest of the Arab world. Israel did not attempt to resolve these problems at Camp David but rather to reinforce its control. As the maps show, the West Bank was to be divided into three cantons, with the settlements left in place. In East Jerusalem there was to be an impossible jigsaw of Palestinian-controlled zones and Israeli settlements. Such an agreement would have offered neither economic viability nor the minimal requirement for a politically independent state.

Yet during these last years the basis for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had been defined. In 1988 the Palestinian National Council (PNC) met in Algiers and voted in favour of a two-state solution based on security council resolutions 242 and 338, which call for Israel's withdrawal from the lands occupied in the June 1967 war. This historic decision meant recognition, not just of

At the sign of the  
panicked cow \*

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This historic decision meant recognition, not just of Israel's right to exist, but also to exercise that right on 78% of historic Palestine. The PNC agreed to a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, including Jerusalem - that is to say on just 22% of historic Palestine. In agreeing this, the Palestinians - the original inhabitants of Palestine - recognised an Israel living in peace and security within the 4 June 1967 borders.

The PNC decision opened the way to the 1991 Madrid conference and the talks that led to the 1993 Oslo accord. The two sides thus agreed to put into practice the UN resolutions and the principle of land for peace. The Israelis and the Palestinians now had the chance - or so we thought - to change the face of the region, and turn hate and bloodshed into peace and cooperation.

Seven years after Oslo, the Palestinians only partially control 40% of the West Bank and 70% of the Gaza Strip. Israel is still quibbling about the third withdrawal provided for in the Oslo accords. During those years, but especially under Ehud Barak, it has gone on "creating facts" on the ground: it has accelerated settlement building and land confiscation - more than 80,000 settlers have come to live in the West Bank since Oslo. The holy city of Jerusalem remains barred to the majority of Palestinians and their ability to travel between West Bank cities, and from the West Bank to Gaza, is extremely limited.

At Camp David we had a partner far more powerful than us; and the United States, instead of behaving like a real mediator, sided with Israel to put pressure on us and force concessions from us that would not have been acceptable to the Palestinian people - or to the Arab and Muslim world with respect to Jerusalem. Thus the summit failed.

Yet both sides had made a great step forward and crossed numerous hurdles. Unfortunately, Barak was a prisoner to his own internal political problems and, once he returned from Camp David, began to take short-term decisions in order to save his government. The most tragic of these was to allow the visit to the Haram al-Sharif, Islam's third most holy place, by Ariel Sharon - a war criminal with whom Barak hoped to form a coalition government. The protests that followed his visit quickly turned into a popular insurrection, fomented by years of frustrations and humiliations.

At some stage the Palestinians and Israelis will return to the negotiating table, but not to the process put in place by Oslo. Israel's excessive, brutal use of force has proved that the Palestinians need an international force to guarantee their security. There must also be a mechanism of international control to ensure that Israel puts its signed accords into effect. And the world must accept that, if the Israelis can build settlements even as they negotiate, then the Palestinians can demonstrate while they negotiate too.

The new mechanism must recreate that spirit of confidence that began with the Madrid conference and was based on implementing international resolutions. I

we could establish such an approach, we could move forward. The peace process would replace the war process and the logic of reason would replace that of force. The sooner wisdom prevails, the sooner we shall be able to resume the path to a lasting peace.

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\* Member of the PLO Executive Committee, with special responsibility for Jerusalem

**Translated by Wendy Kristianasen**

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