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On September 1, 2010 two reluctant Middle East leaders are coming to Washington for a photo-op with the President of the United States of America to begin direct talks for a final settlement of the forty some odd years of the Israeli Palestinian dispute. Both probably wish that their respective flights where forced to be diverted to Las Vegas where high stakes poker is legal and where they are likely to have more fun. Instead, Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel and Mahmud Abbas of the PLO are taking their poker game and do the gambling in Washington D.C.

For those who are not familiar with the conflict and its trials and tribulations reading beyond this point maybe entirely redundant. For those who are up on the ins and outs of the conflict the proverbial Passover question remains: "Why is this night different from all other nights?". On the surface it would appear that the probability of reaching an agreement on a final settlement over (according to Hilary) the next year is infinitesimal at best and so are the prospects for major progress steps. It would appear that the talks are destined to determine who of the two leaders will break the talks first and more importantly who would be in the eyes of the world community and more specifically the United States the one to be blamed for the break-up.

This may at first glance appear to be a completely cynical point of view and a narrow minded vision that characterized this conflict for generations. Irreconcilable differences, prolonged status quo, more bickering possibly followed by more violence in the form of terror or worse yet outright war appears to be a higher probability outcome. This view is consistent with evidence derived from prior attempts by Nobel Peace Prize alumni at direct peace negotiations. The outcome however may not this time come down on the side of history. A permanent solution is eminently possible, except not in the manner and form that is visible to the untrained political eye.

In as much as all aspects of a permanent settlement have been identified, negotiated behind closed doors to the tiniest level of detail with a bridgeable margin for final face-to-face negotiations both leaders are, under their unique circumstances not so much as unwilling but rather unable to arrive at an agreement for the foreseen future. Simply put Abbas cannot commit the Palestinian people to even the most favorable settlement with Israel from his position as the leader of the PLO. At best he controls only the West Bank with half of the Palestinian population while Gaza with the other half of the population is under the control of Hamas. Netanyahu cannot possibly convince his government or any Israeli government let alone a majority of Israeli citizens that an Olmert or Barak or even a slightly more generous offer to the Palestinians will secure Israel's existential requirements for peace. At this juncture it is more logical to assume that it will result in a radical Islamic noose around its neck by an Iranian backed Islamic Republic of Palestine. Netanyahu cannot fathom the consequences of dismantling entire towns and villages that may not, even in his opinion, remain under post

settlement Israel sovereignty. The resulting chaos if not bloodshed that such a mass relocation of tens if not hundreds of thousands of settlers will cause may not be executable and may result in Israel's self destruction.

From whence then does this writer's optimism flow?

I believe that both leaders are sincere in their desire to deliver a historical permanent settlement to their respective people, but for the stated reasons are unable to achieve this goal in a direct face-to-face negotiation. I also think that deep down both of them believe that an imposed solution by a mutually trusted third party, namely the United States of America is their only way out of this predicament. It's an easy sell for both: "we have no choice the status quo is unsustainable and we have solid guarantees from the United States for sustaining a non-violent if not peaceful coexistence as two states for two people side by side". An imposed solution does not even require a mutual recognition pact that is such a hard sell for the Palestinians although this would naturally and most definitely follow shortly thereafter.

Sounds too easy? Not really But how do you possibly orchestrate this sort of a scenario. If I were Netanyahu I would say to Obama: Here are the two things that I need in order to sell a permanent solution to my people: First a mutual defense treaty or better yet membership in NATO to guarantee that an attack on one member will be an attack on all members. Secondly I need a massive amount of resources for a massive re-development and re-settlement project for Israeli settlers to relocate behind the final borders. The rest I'll take care off in my direct negotiations with Abbas. And yes, this includes final borders, Jerusalem, refugees and the rest.

If I were Abbas I would say to Obama: Here are the two things that I need from you in order to sell a permanent solution to my people: First I need you to repudiate Hamas by reinforcing the conditions you, yourself imposed on making them part of the solution: renounce terror, recognize a two state solution and respect prior government agreements. If the refuse to do so back me up through effective military and economic sanctions. Make them part of your Iran doctrine. Secondly, I need you to commit to a massive housing and infrastructure development to substantially and immediately improve the deplorable conditions of the Palestinian refugees. Finally Mr. Obama please do not ask me where you are going to find the money to do all of that for me and for Netanyahu seeing that your government is technically almost bankrupt.

President Obama threw himself into the rink and gambled his entire political capital in making the upcoming direct negotiations result in a historic success. Mr, President, you heard the gentlemen, let them agree to disagree, give them what they need and tell them what to do. They would know exactly how to explain it to their people. And there shall be peace in the Middle East.

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