

Przemysław OSIEWICZ

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

The Middle East Peace Process: Towards Another Stalemate?

Abstract: The Middle East conflict has remained one of the core issues of contemporary international relations since World War II. One of the most important matters is to define whether the Middle East peace process is related to the Middle East conflict or, more precisely, to the Arab-Israeli conflict. With respect to land, there are two possible scenarios. Firstly, Palestinians living under Israeli administration. Secondly, a two-state solution, namely an official recognition of the state of Israel by all Arab states and the foundation of a Palestinian state. So far, there have been dozens of peace plans, for example, the Oslo Peace Process, the Taba talks of 2001, the Road Map of 2003, and the Annapolis Conference of 2007. None of them resulted in a comprehensive solution. The question is, if the international community will face another stalemate in case of the Middle East peace process. Might the so-called Arab awakening, namely all the ongoing political and social processes in the Arab states, change the situation in the region?

Key words: Israel, Palestine, peace process, the Arab-Israeli conflict, negotiations

Introduction

The Middle East conflict has remained one of the core issues of contemporary international relations since World War II. Some scholars seek its roots in the foundation of Zionism in the 21st century or in the Balfour Declaration of 1917 (Balfour, 2011, pp. 107–112). Others claim that the problem appeared when Israel was declared an independent state in 1948. Whatever and whenever the cause, relations between Palestinians and Israelis directly affect the political situation in the Middle East and indirectly affect the worldwide political situation.

One of the most important matters is to define whether the Middle East peace process is related to the Middle East conflict or, more precisely, to the Arab-Israeli conflict. In general, it is an international conflict between Israel and Arab states, especially those located close to Israel, like Lebanon or Syria, but this term is also used to describe the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.

According to Joseph S. Nye “the Arab-Israeli conflict has produced six wars between two groups of people asserting different national identities, but claiming the same postage-stamp-size piece of land” (Nye, 2007, p. 189). With respect to the land, there are two possible scenarios. Firstly, of Palestinians living under Israeli administration. There are already many Palestinians who are Israeli citizens. Yet even in their case, there are many daily problems. They claim they are not treated in a just manner by Jews. Ilan Peleg and Dov Waxman claim that “the conflation of Israeli with Jew is constantly repeated in the media and by politicians and activists, pro-Israel and anti-Israel alike” (Peleg, Waxman,

2011, p. 19). As a result, Israel's Palestinians do not exist in public opinion worldwide. Secondly, a two-state solution, namely an official recognition of the state of Israel by all Arab states and foundation of a Palestinian state (Witkin, 2011, pp. 47–48). The United Nations General Assembly has supported a two-state solution since 1947. In resolution 181 of 29 November, 1947 the Assembly also suggested establishment of a Special International Regime for the City of Jerusalem (Resolution 181). Yet both sides of the conflict had other visions for the future of Palestine, which resulted in political instability, regional terrorism, displacement of millions of Palestinians and military clashes.

Between 1948–2011 there were six wars between Israel and Arab states, namely in 1948–1949, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982 and 2006 (Hirst, 2010; Khalidi, 2009; Morris, 2009; Rabinovich, 2005; Segev, 2007; Varble, 2003). Arab states that have fought against Israel so far are Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. However, Palestinians remain the main opponents of Israelis.

In the opinion of Alan Dershowitz, “there seems to be more agreement among Palestinian and Israeli negotiators about what a final resolution will look like than about the steps that must be taken to get to that point. An absence of trust – the result of years of missteps, missed opportunities, and domestic posturing – has created a chicken egg problem: each side wants the other side to show good faith before it is prepared to give up too many chips without getting at least an equal number from the other side, lest it lose credibility among skeptical members of its own constituencies” (Dershowitz, 2005, p. 12). Is this still true? It seems that both sides have realised that a two-state solution could be mutually beneficial. Palestinians would have their own state and would enjoy a freer hand in international relations (Nusseibeh, 2011). At the same time, Israel would guarantee security to its citizens. Yet at the moment, any such compromise seems unachievable. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is not only about land or territorial supremacy. The main differences between the two sides are related to:

- territorial claims, especially the city of Jerusalem and Israeli settlements on the West Bank;
- attitudes towards the foundation of the Palestinian state;
- Arab refusal to accept Jewish self-determination with the exception of Egypt and Jordan;
- the economic gap between Palestinians and Israelis;
- ethnic differences, namely Israelis versus Arabs;
- religious differences, namely Jews versus Muslims.

So far there have been dozens of peace plans, for example, the Oslo Peace Process, the Taba talks of 2001, the Road Map of 2003, and the Annapolis Conference of 2007.¹ A few times there were indications of a comprehensive and lasting solution (Ross, 2005). The

¹ For more on the Oslo Peace Process as well as the Road Map see: E. W. Said (2004), *From Oslo to Iraq and the Road Map*, New York; O. Seliktar (2009), *Doomed to Failure? The Politics and Intelligence of the Oslo Peace Process*, Santa Barbara–Denver. See also: *Secret Oslo Signing Ceremony: Speeches at the Conclusion of the Declaration of Principles, Oslo, 20 August 1993 (excerpts)*, in: *Documents on Palestine*, vol. IV: 1987–1994; M. A. Hadi et al. (2007), *Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs PASSIA*, Jerusalem, p. 272–274.

European Union has also engaged in the process, in the new format called 'the Middle East Quartet'. The Quartet consists of four entities: the EU, the UN, the United States and Russia (Tocci, 2013, p. 29). Nevertheless, none of those proposals was successful and none of them resulted in a mutually advantageous action plan. In the opinion of Mahdi Abdul Hadi, "also the international community had proven unable to bring about a settlement consistent with international law and UN resolutions, an increasing number of voices claim that the two-state solution – a viable Palestinian state alongside Israel, as pursued in various forms over the last five decades – had been effectively pre-empted by the deliberate policies and strategies of recent Israeli governments" (Hadi, 2005, p. 1).

The question is if the international community will face another stalemate in case of the Middle East peace process. Might the so-called Arab awakening, namely all the ongoing political and social processes in the Arab states, change the situation in the region?

Israel and Arabs: from Israel's Disengagement Plan to the 2009 Israeli Operation in Gaza

The first full-scale crisis between Arabs and Israelis in the 21st century took place in 2006, when Israel attacked Hezbollah positions in South Lebanon and bombed several cities, including Beirut.² The attack was the Israeli response to rocket attacks from Lebanese territory and the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers.³ As regards its results, the war seriously damaged Israel's image, not only in the Middle East, but also worldwide. The main reason for this was the high number of civilians killed in Lebanon (*Lebanon*, 2006). Also, the general impression in the Arab world was that Hezbollah had won the war. As a matter of fact Israel was defeated for the first time, although the Israelis did not intend to admit the defeat officially (Mackey, 2008).

The summit in Annapolis of 2007 brought hope to both Israelis and Palestinians. This conference in the United States was organised by the George Bush administration. During his speech, the President of the Palestinian National Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, presented the Palestinian position. He declared that the Palestinian side would support an agreement with Israel if certain requirements were met. Abbas stated that in order "to achieve this does not depend on the Arab and Islamic position by itself, but requires meeting this position by a reciprocal strategic willingness that would basically lead to ending the occupation of all Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, as well as the Syrian Golan Heights and what remains of occupied Lebanese territories, and to resolve all other issues related to the conflict, especially the Palestinian refugees question, in all its political, humanitarian, individual and common aspects, consistent with Resolution 194, as emphasized by the Arab peace initiative and the participation of sister states that host refugees and carry huge burdens in this regard" (*President*, 2007). Israel's, Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, affirmed that his government would do its best to reach a comprehensive and lasting agreement: "We will address all the issues which have thus

² It is called the 2006 Lebanon War or the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War.

³ One of them was Gilad Shalit who was later exchanged for over 1,000 Palestinian prisoners on 18 October, 2011.

far been evaded. We will do it directly, openly and courageously. We will not avoid any subject, we will deal with all the core issues. I have no doubt that the reality created in our region in 1967 will change significantly. While this will be an extremely difficult process for many of us, it is nevertheless inevitable. I know it. Many of my people know it. We are ready for it. The negotiations will be based on previous agreements between us, UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, the Roadmap and the April 14th 2004 letter of President Bush to the Prime Minister of Israel. On conclusion of the negotiations, I believe that we will be able to reach an agreement which will fulfill the vision of President Bush: two states for two peoples. A peace-seeking, viable, strong, democratic and terror-free Palestinian state for the Palestinian people. A Jewish, democratic State of Israel, living in security and free from the threat of terror – the national home of the Jewish people” (*Address*, 2007). Now, four years after the Annapolis conference, the question is what happened to the spirit of Annapolis and why the brave political declarations have remained only declarations.

The political shift in Israel in 2009 did not help to foster the peace dialogue. The comeback of Benjamin Netanyahu after the 2009 elections was bad news for Palestinians, as the Likud leader was generally perceived as a hard-liner. It was also bad news for all moderate Israelis. Ruth Dayan, the widow of legendary chief of staff of the Israeli Defense Forces, Moshe Dayan, criticised the present government publicly, saying: “For Netanyahu, peace is just a word... and I call that foreign minister Liberman ‘Doberman’: how can a man like that represent our country? The way he speaks about our Arabs, our Israeli Arabs, is unacceptable!” (Jebreal, 2011). Yet it was not Benjamin Netanyahu who was responsible for the war in the Gaza Strip at the very beginning of 2009. Undoubtedly, this event crushed Palestinian and Israeli hopes for peace, at least in the short run.

The Israeli operation in Gaza between 28 December, 2008–18 January, 2009, known as Operation Cast Lead, became a turning point in the history of bilateral relations between Israelis and Palestinians. Moreover, it fuelled resentment towards Israel among Muslims, and in the West. Yet according to the Israeli authorities, “Israel had both a right and an obligation to take military action against Hamas in Gaza to stop Hamas’ almost incessant rocket and mortar attacks upon thousands of Israeli civilians and its other acts of terrorism. Israel was bombarded by some 12,000 rockets and mortar shells between 2000 and 2008, including nearly 3,000 rockets and mortar shells in 2008 alone. These deliberate attacks caused deaths, injuries, and extensive property damage; forced businesses to close; and terrorized tens of thousands of residents into abandoning their homes” (*The Operation*, 2009, p. 1).

Israel was widely criticised during and after the operation by neighbouring Arab states as well as the Arab states in the Persian Gulf. For example, “Qatar actively and persistently attempted to spearhead a unified Arab response to the Israeli operation in Gaza. On January 13, 2009, in response to stagnating talks in Cairo to end the conflict, Qatar reiterated its call for an Arab summit, this time in blunt and uncompromising language” (Rabi, 2009, p. 458).

Relations between Israelis and Palestinians seemed to be endangered again, after Israel announced its disengagement plan in 2003. With this proposal the Israeli government offered to disengage from the Gaza Strip and to evacuate four other settlements located in

the northern part of the West Bank.⁴ The then Prime Minister Sharon declared in December 2003: “The Disengagement plan will include the redeployment of IDF forces along new security lines and a change in the deployment of settlements, which will reduce as much as possible the number of Israelis located in the heart of the Palestinian population. We will draw provisional security lines and the IDF will be deployed along them. Security will be provided by IDF deployment, the security fence and other physical obstacles. The Disengagement Plan will reduce friction between us and the Palestinians. [...] Israel will greatly accelerate the construction of the security fence. Today we can already see it taking shape. The rapid completion of the security fence will enable the IDF to remove roadblocks and ease the daily lives of the Palestinian population not involved in terror” (Israel’s, 2005, p. 23). In practice the plan resulted in a physical separation of the two national groups and isolation of Palestinians in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The security fence has become a very controversial project.⁵ What is more, many analysts claim that it actually undermined negotiations and severely restricted Palestinians.⁶ Yet the Israeli side argues that “the value of the fence in saving lives is evident from the data: In 2002, the year before construction started, 457 Israelis were murdered; in 2009, 8 Israelis were killed” (Bard, 2011).

Unfortunately, the above process did not help to find a comprehensive solution and did not bring peace to this part of the Middle East. Some scholars claim that the problems began when Hamas won the parliamentary elections in the Palestinian National Authority in January 2006 (Caridi, 2010). Nonetheless, the situation became critical after Hamas retained control over Gaza in 2007. Hamas’ leaders eliminated more moderate counterparts representing al-Fatah and sharpened their rhetoric against the state of Israel. In response, Israel blocked the whole Gaza Strip. Officially, the Israeli authorities did it in order to combat terrorism and protect its citizens who were suffering from almost daily rocket attacks from Gaza. Unofficially, it was a part of the anti-Hamas strategy. Israelis preferred al-Fatah representatives, because they were much more flexible during peace talks. Moreover, Prime Minister Netanyahu angered Palestinians in January 2010 when he declared publicly that several Jewish settlement blocs in the West Bank would always remain part of Israel. During a visit to the Etzion settlement south of Jerusalem he said: “We

⁴ The evacuated settlements in the Gaza Strip were, among others, Merom Atzmona, Morag, Ganei Tal, Bnei Atzmona, Pe’atSadeh, Neve Dekalim, Tel Katifa and Netzer Chazani. The four settlements located in the northern part of the West Bank were Homesh, Sa-Nur, Kadim and Ganim.

⁵ The Fence between Israel and the West Bank is being constructed by the State of Israel along and within the West Bank. Upon completion, the barrier’s total length will be approximately 760 kilometres (twice the length of the 1949 Armistice Line, the ‘Green Line’ between the West Bank and Israel). The barrier is a fence with vehicle-barrier trenches surrounded by an on average 60 metres wide exclusion area (90% of its length) and an 8 metres tall concrete wall (10% of its length). Source: *The Separation Barrier – Statistics*, http://www.btselem.org/separation_barrier/statistics, 1.01.2012.

⁶ This fence is also called ‘the Israeli West Bank barrier’ or ‘the anti-terrorist fence’. Some scholars and commentators also call it the wall. For more about the security fence see: E. Balslev, S. Segal (2003), *Security or Segregation? The Humanitarian Consequences of Israel’s Wall of Separation*, Geneva; J. Jarzabek (2012), *Palestyńczycy na drodze do niepodległości. Rozwój, przemiany i kryzys ruchu narodowego*, Warszawa, pp. 225–229; I. Kershner (2005), *Barrier: The Seam of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, Basingstoke; M. Sorkin (2005), *Against The Wall: Israel’s Barrier to Peace*, New York.

are planting here, we will stay here, we will build here. This place will be an inseparable part of the State of Israel for eternity” (Kershner, 2010, p. 4). It sounded like the final ‘no’ to the peace negotiations. The King of Jordan, Abdullah II, made this point when he stated in his recent book that the further construction of the West Bank settlements has become the main obstacle to the peace process (Abdullah II, 2011, p. 405).

There are still many critical voices with regard to the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. According to the Israel Supreme Court, “regrettably, the end of Israeli military rule in the Gaza Strip did not result in a decrease in attacks launched against Israel from the Gaza Strip, but in an increase of these attacks, both in the number of the attacks and the range of the areas affected. Following years of rocket and mortar attacks fired from the Gaza Strip into the territory of the State of Israel, the Israeli government decided in 2007 to limit the supply of fuel and electricity into the Gaza Strip” (*Al-Bassiouni*, 2009, p. 227). In this way the Israeli authorities justify the current blockade of the Gaza Strip. The same explanation applied to Operation Cast Lead in 2009. All in all, since 2007, the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip have lived in very poor conditions. Their situation has been presented and described in many reports and books (Chomsky, Pappé, 2010; Jasiewicz, 2011; Hermes, 2011; Roy, 2011). But is there any chance that this situation will change in the short run? Is there still any hope for a lasting peace?

The Middle Eastern Peace Process during the Arab Awakening: A New Opening?

Christopher Dickey claims that there are grave misgivings about the Arab awakening, “about this new dynamic in the West. There’s the sudden and unsettling realization that the old deals cut with Arab despots may not sit so well with the despots’ former subjects. And yes, those despots’ peace treaties and tacit understandings with Israel could be examples. But the hoary enmity toward the Zionists is, like most other history, not especially relevant at the moment to the Arab kids who are taking over the Arab world (unless the Israelis give them reason to care anew)” (Dickey, 2012, p. 11). Nonetheless, Jörg Lau points out that the Arab awakening has already resulted in a deepening of Israel’s isolation in the Middle East (Lau, 2011, p. 5). Egypt is probably the best example. Former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak supported good relations with Israel, but at the same time he ignored the mainly anti-Israeli state of opinion. Anti-zionist protests also took place in Jordan. This way Israel may lose not only its chance to improve its geopolitical position during the Arab awakening but also lose its previous gains, e.g. friendly relations either with Egypt or with Jordan.

In the opinion of Daniel Barenboim, “after a year of extraordinary events in the Arab world, it is time to change perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, too. Over the past 70 years it has been approached from many different angles, and yet all involved have failed to grasp the nature of the conflict: it isn’t political but fundamentally human, a conflict between two peoples who unequivocally assert their respective right to the same piece of land” (Barenboim, 2012, p. 88). Barenboim also suggested that “while the Palestinians have a right to resent the idea of the Israeli’s claim to what they consider their homeland, they must now recognize the reality of Israel’s existence. The Israelis must not

only stop the occupation and dismantle the settlements, they must also accept responsibility for all that happened – and all that did not happen – while it lasted” (Barenboim, 2012, p. 88). What about Palestinians? According to Gideon Levi, there are three options available to them, namely:

- unconditional surrender and further life under Israeli occupation;
- a third intifada;
- mobilisation and worldwide promotion of Palestinian statehood (2011, p. 4).

So far, the Palestinian authorities have chosen the third option. Representatives of the Palestinian National Authority have tried to take advantage of the Arab Spring and promote the idea of Palestinian statehood. An application for UN membership, submitted in September 2011, was the best indication of such an approach. If Palestine was accepted as a full UN member, it would equate to its formal recognition as a sovereign state. Shir Hever claims that such a scenario would even be profitable for Israel, because it spends more than \$6 billion on control of the occupied territories. Moreover, total settlement subsidies reached \$34 billion in 2010 (Hever, 2011, p. 13). Nevertheless, the Israeli government condemned the Palestinian decision and criticised the Palestinian National Authority for this unilateral action. Fortunately, the Palestinians did not decide to begin another intifada after the diplomatic failure in September 2011, although some journalists, for example Edmund Sanders, had predicted such a scenario during the summer (Sanders, 2011, pp. 4–5).

Although the two-state solution should be, at least theoretically, the best for both sides, it is not. As far as Israel’s position is concerned, money spent on control over the occupied territories does not seem to be a problem. Why? Because security is priceless and any Palestinian state founded without direct negotiations would pose a threat to the Israeli state. This time, however, the Israeli government did not have to worry about the final outcome as it was clear that the United States would block the Palestinian initiative. What is more, some politicians suggested taking even more radical steps. Tzipi Hotovely, a member of Prime Minister Netanyahu’s Likud party, stated that it was “a chance for Israel to take unilateral action of its own.” In response to the Palestinians’ bid for full UN membership, she urged the Israeli government “to start formally annexing Jewish settlements in the West Bank”. She added that “it was a mistake not to extend Israeli sovereignty over the settlements long ago” (Ephron, 2011, p. 14).

Although the Palestinians were not able to create their own state and become a United Nations member in September 2011, they achieved another *éclat* one month later. On 31 October the Palestinians got a seat at UNESCO. “Of 173 countries voting, 107 were in favour, 14 opposed and 52 abstained. In response, Washington announced it was cutting funding to UNESCO. Its membership dues provide around a fifth of the organisation’s budget” (*Palestinians*, 2011). Israel was against the Palestinian membership, because its government was afraid that such decision would set a precedent. A statement issued by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared, “This decision will not turn the Palestinian Authority into an actual state, yet places unnecessary burdens on the route to renewing negotiations. Israel believes that the correct and only way to make progress in the diplomatic process with the Palestinians is through direct negotiations without preconditions. The Palestinian move at UNESCO, as with similar such steps with other UN bodies, is tantamount to a rejection of the international community’s efforts to advance the peace process” (*Unesco*, 2011).

Surprisingly, Israel's government is losing support in the United States. Although Americans are still its most important allies, the American administration is afraid of the extreme-right rhetoric of Netanyahu. Democrats called for a reassessment of the relationship between Israel and the United States. On 19 May, 2011 Barack Obama delivered a speech dedicated to the situation in the Middle East and North Africa which angered both Israelis and Palestinians. Among other things the US President stated that: "For the Palestinians, efforts to delegitimize Israel will end in failure. Symbolic actions to isolate Israel at the United Nations in September won't create an independent state. Palestinian leaders will not achieve peace or prosperity if Hamas insists on a path of terror and rejection. And Palestinians will never realize their independence by denying the right of Israel to exist. [...] As for Israel, our friendship is rooted deeply in a shared history and shared values. Our commitment to Israel's security is unshakeable. And we will stand against attempts to single it out for criticism in international forums. But precisely because of our friendship, it's important that we tell the truth: The status quo is unsustainable, and Israel too must act boldly to advance a lasting peace. [...] What America and the international community can do is to state frankly what everyone knows – a lasting peace will involve two states for two peoples: Israel as a Jewish state and the homeland for the Jewish people, and the state of Palestine as the homeland for the Palestinian people, each state enjoying self-determination, mutual recognition, and peace" (2011). This speech was heavily criticized, because Barack Obama put pressure on both sides and blamed both for the continuing stalemate. Moreover, he suggested the best solution, namely the best one according to the American administration and the international community.

No doubt one of the reasons for Obama's impatience was the approach of the Israeli government. Some of Benjamin Netanyahu's ideas could be devastating not only for the Middle East, but also for the United States, especially if the Israeli Prime Minister decided to attack selected targets in Iran without Washington's permission. Yet Benjamin Netanyahu can count on Republicans. No doubt the present Israeli government would like to see a Republican candidate replacing Barack Obama after the US presidential elections in 2016. According to Fania Oz-Salzberger, "the new generation of pro-Israeli Republican hopefuls is dwarfing its predecessors with a pungent mix of messianic Christianity and a misplaced love of Zion. It feels like Rick Perry and Michele Bachmann are competing to win the prize for more-Israeli-than-thou" (Oz-Salzberger, 2011, p. 11). Rick Perry was said to say that "a Republican Christian is better than the Moslem currently inhabiting the White House" (Oz-Salzberger, 2011, p. 11).

Besides, Israel should take into consideration its relations with Turkey, which is not an Arab state, but one with steadily growing economic, as well as political influence in the Arab world. It should be emphasised that Turkey tried to mediate indirect talks between Syria and Israel. The United States supported Turkish-Israeli cooperation as it safeguarded its influence in the Middle East. Nevertheless, everything changed after the operation in Gaza. "Already at the Davos Summit in 2009, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stunned the international community by standing up and expressing his vocal and direct criticism of Israel's unilateral Palestine policy before the world public opinion" (Özhan, 2010, p. 10).⁷ Undoubtedly, the

⁷ For more about relations between Israel and Turkey see: O. Bengio (2010), *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship: Changing Ties of Middle Eastern Outsiders*, New York.

Gaza Flotilla Crisis of May 2010 became another turning point in the history of Turkish-Israeli relations (Bayoumi, 2010; Copeland et al, 2011). The Turkish Prime Minister also became a national hero in the Gaza Strip. Moreover, during the Arab awakening “Erdoğan portrayed himself as a neo-Ottoman savior. [...] Many Israelis view him as a mortal enemy of their country” (Matthews, 2011, pp. 8–9). Obviously, the Turkish Prime Minister realised that Turkey could gain more by moving closer to the Palestinians and the Arab states at the expense of Israel. The more anti-Israeli it is, the more popular it becomes in the Middle East. Of course, Turkey cannot cut its ties with Israel completely, due to the political pressure from the United States, as well as their bilateral military cooperation; however, the Israeli authorities should be prepared for even that scenario which would undermine the Middle East peace process completely.

Another question is whether Israelis and Arabs can find a solution themselves or whether they need help or mediation of a third party, like the United Nations. On the one hand, the Palestinians opt for mediation, because their political position is weak in comparison with the Israelis. On the other hand, if the UN were to take control of the whole peace process, any solution would not be favourable to Israel, as many UN member states support the Palestinian side officially or unofficially. The 2011 voting in UNESCO, or the upgrade of Palestinian status in the UN General Assembly of 2012, are probably the best examples.

Finally, growing tensions between Israel and Iran do not create a good atmosphere for any peace dialogue. Israel opposes the Iranian nuclear program and has threatened to bomb its nuclear installations, unless Iran puts an end to further scientific research. It would be an enormous military effort for Israel, to say nothing of creating potential political and economic costs. Besides, such a scenario would have very serious regional and global implications, as Iran could block the Strait of Hormuz, contributing to further increases in oil prices, or attack selected targets in Israel.⁸ At the same time, Iran is said to support Hamas in the Gaza Strip as well as Hezbollah in South Lebanon. Obviously, such declarations as well as actions will constitute obstacles to the Middle East peace process.

Conclusions

The Arab-Israeli conflict, especially as far as relations between Israelis and Palestinians are concerned, seems to be a never-ending story. All the available options have been on the table for years, but so far it has not resulted in any comprehensive and lasting agreement. Undoubtedly, neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians are satisfied with status quo. Both sides claim that the two-state solution would suit them best, however the main difference between them lies in the possible ways of achieving this goal. The Israeli settlements in the West Bank seem to be the main obstacle to the current peace process. Yet this case is hopeless. On the one hand, the Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu is

⁸ Iran has already threatened to block maritime transport in the Strait of Hormuz in case there are any new economic sanctions imposed on it. One can imagine that Iran would also do this if attacked by Israel or the United States. See: *US and Iran continue war of words over Hormuz*, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/12/2011123045151578686.html>, 30.12.2011.

not going to make any concessions. On the other hand, the Palestinians will not make any serious territorial concessions to the Israeli side. Moreover, the Israeli side is demanding direct talks without preconditions, a demand that was repeated during the Israeli-Palestinian meeting in Jordan in January 2012 (Bronner, 2012, p. 5).

The Arab-Israeli conflict has its own dynamism. Undoubtedly, the Arab-Israeli conflict is still being analysed by numerous politicians and scholars, but only a few of them can predict what may happen there next year or even next month. The longer the conflict lasts, the more difficult it will be to find a mutually advantageous solution. The Arab awakening might give a new boost to the peace process in the Middle East, but at the same time it might contribute to its complete failure. The future policies of Egypt and Syria seem to be a key issue. Yet it is hard to predict what will happen in those states.

Finally, it is becoming noticeable that Israel is getting more and more isolated. The Israeli government is losing support in the United States and its good relations with Turkey. It is not even clear if Israel is managing to maintain its hitherto prevailing friendly relations with Egypt or Jordan. Soon, Israelis may not have any other option but to accept a disadvantageous agreement. All in all, 2012 may become a turning point in the Middle East peace process.

Literature

- Address by Prime Minister of Israel Ehud Olmert at the Annapolis Conference, November 27, 2007.*
- Al-Bassiouni v. Prime Minister*, in: *Judgments of the Israel Supreme Court: Fighting Terrorism Within the Law*, vol. 3, 2006–2009 (2009), the Supreme Court of Israel/the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem.
- Balslev E., Segal S. (2003), *Security or Segregation? The Humanitarian Consequences of Israel's Wall of Separation*, Geneva.
- Bayoumi M. (2010), *Midnight on the Mavi Marmara: The Attack on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla and How It Changed the Course of the Israeli/Palestine Conflict*, Chicago.
- Bengio O. (2010), *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship: Changing Ties of Middle Eastern Outsiders*, New York.
- Caridi P. (2010), *Hamas: From Resistance to Government?*, Jerusalem.
- Chomsky N., Pappe I. (2010), *Gaza in Crisis: Reflections on Israel's War Against the Palestinians*, Chicago.
- Copeland T. E. et al. (2011), *Drawing a Line in the Sea: The 2010 Gaza Flotilla Incident and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, Lanham.
- Dershowitz A. (2005), *The Case for Peace: How the Arab-Israeli Conflict Can Be Resolved*, Hoboken.
- Full text of President Abbas Speech at Annapolis Conference Annapolis, November 27, 2007.
- Hadi M. A. (2005), *Introduction*, in: M. A. Hadi et al, *Palestinian – Israeli Impasse: Exploring Alternative Solutions to the Palestine – Israel Conflict*, Jerusalem.
- Hirst D. (2010), *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East*, London.
- Israel's Disengagement Plan: Renewing the Peace Process* (2005), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Israel, Jerusalem.
- Jarząbek J. (2012), *Palestyńczycy na drodze do niepodległości. Rozwój, przemiany i kryzys ruchu narodowego*, Warszawa.
- Jasiewicz E. (2011), *Podpalić Gazę*, Warszawa.

- Kershner I. (2005), *Barrier: The Seam of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, Basingstoke.
- Khalidi R. (2009), *Sowing Crisis: the Cold War and American Dominance in the Middle East*, Boston.
- König Abdullah II. von Jordanien (2011), *Die letzte Chance: Mein Kampf für Frieden im Nahen Osten*, München.
- Lebanon Fatal Strikes: Israel's Indiscriminate Attacks Against Civilians in Lebanon* (2006), "Human Rights Watch", vol. 18, no. 3.
- Mackey S. (2008), *Mirror of the Arab World: Lebanon in Conflict*, New York.
- Morris B. (2009), *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War*, Haven.
- Nusseibeh S. (2011), *What Is A Palestinian State Worth?*, Cambridge.
- Nye J. S. (2007), *Understanding International Conflicts: An Introduction to Theory and History*, New York.
- Özhan T. (2010), *Turkey, Israel and the US in the Wake of the Gaza Flotilla Crisis*, "Insight Turkey", vol. 12, no. 3.
- Peleg I., Waxman D. (2011), *Israel's Palestinians: the Conflict Within*, Cambridge.
- Rabi U. (2009), *Qatar's Relations with Israel: Challenging Arab and Gulf Norms*, "The Middle East Journal", vol. 63, no. 3.
- Rabinovich A. (2005), *The Yom Kippur War: The Epic Encounter That Transformed the Middle East*, New York.
- Ross D. (2005), *The Missing Peace: The Inside Story of the Fight for the Middle East Peace*, New York.
- Roy S. (2011), *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza: Engaging the Islamist Social Sector*, Princeton.
- Said E. W. (2004), *From Oslo to Iraq and the Road Map*, New York.
- Secret Oslo Signing Ceremony: Speeches at the Conclusion of the Declaration of Principles, Oslo, 20 August 1993 (excerpts)*, in: *Documents on Palestine*, ed. M. A. Hadi, vol. IV: 1987–1994, Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs PASSIA, Jerusalem 2007.
- Segev T. (2007), *1967: Israel, the War and the Year that Transformed the Middle East*, London.
- Seliktar O. (2009), *Doomed to Failure? The Politics and Intelligence of the Oslo Peace Process*, Santa Barbara–Denver.
- Sorkin M. (2005), *Against The Wall: Israel's Barrier to Peace*, New York.
- The Balfour Declaration, Stating the British Government's Support for a Jewish Homeland in Palestine, and Discussions Leading to Issuing It in 1917* (2011), in: A. F. Khater, *Sources in the History of the Modern Middle East*, Boston.
- The Operation in Gaza 27 December 2008–18 January 2009: Factual and Legal Aspects* (2009), The State of Israel.
- Tocci N. (2013), *The Middle East Quartet and (In)effective Multilateralism*, "The Middle East Journal", vol. 67, no. 1.
- Witkin N. (2011), *The Interspersed Nation-State System: A Two-State/One-Land Solution for the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, "The Middle East Journal", vol. 65, no. 1.
- Varble D. (2003), *The Suez Crisis 1956*, Oxford.

Streszczenie

Bliskowschodni proces pokojowy. W stronę kolejnego impasu?

Konflikt bliskowschodni pozostaje jedną z najważniejszych kwestii w stosunkach międzynarodowych po II wojnie światowej. Jedną z najważniejszych wyzwań jest określenie czy bliskowschodni proces pokojowy jest związany z szeroko pojmowanym konfliktem bliskowschodnim czy też, ujmując

rzecz precyzyjniej, z konfliktem arabsko-izraelskim. W kontekście kontroli nad terytorium można wyróżnić dwa możliwe scenariusze. Po pierwsze, Palestyńczycy żyjący pod zarządem izraelskim. Po drugie, rozwiązanie na bazie utworzenia dwóch niepodległych państw, czyli uznanie państwa Izrael przez wszystkie państwa arabskie w zamian za zgodę na utworzenie państwa palestyńskiego. Dotychczas przedstawiono wiele planów uregulowania tego problemu, na przykład, podczas negocjacji pokojowych w Oslo, spotkania w Tabie w 2001 roku czy też konferencji w Annapolis w 2007. Jednak żaden z nich nie doprowadził do przyjęcia całościowego rozwiązania konfliktu. Pojawia się pytanie czy społeczność międzynarodowa będzie musiała pogodzić się z kolejnym impasem w ramach bliskowschodniego procesu pokojowego. A może tak zwane arabskie przebudzenie, czyli trwające procesy zmian społeczno-politycznych w państwach arabskich, doprowadzą do zmiany sytuacji w regionie i umożliwią zawarcie porozumienia?

Słowa kluczowe: Izrael, Palestyna, proces pokojowy, konflikt arabsko-izraelski, negocjacje