

Israeli-Syrian Negotiation 1991-1996: Missed Opportunities and Elusive Peace

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ABSTRACT

This Study aims to analyse the Israeli-Syrian peace talks of 1991-1996 and why they failed to seize many enticing opportunities that were created in the course of their negotiation. This paper argues that the Israelis and Syrians had missed a number of enticing opportunities to solve their conflict during the peace talks of 1991-1996. Because of their rigged positions towards each other, deep distrust and lack of serious willingness to make necessary concessions and compromise. The Major bulk of this study is a discussion to these talks including parties' motive and Madrid peace conference and their negotiation between 1991 and 1996. To achieve this end, the study has employed a case study approach that would analyze primary and secondary literature on this subject matter so to comprehend different variables and dynamics that influenced these talks and led to its failure. This paper concludes that during these talks many enticing opportunities to solve the parties' conflict had emerged. However, Tel Aviv and Damascus had missed those many enticing opportunities and failed to hammer out a historical agreement that could have ended their long standing conflict.

Keywords: Conflict, Negotiation, Peace, Golan Heights, Enticing Opportunity, Withdrawal, Normalization.

Introduction

The 1991 of the last century witnessed a major change in the Arab-Israeli conflict in which a peace process between Israel and the concerned Arab parties was initiated. Since 1945, the U.S has always played an active role as a mediator in many International conflicts particularly in the Arab-Israeli conflict. However, the peace initiative of 1991 and the subsequent Middle East peace conference that was held in Madrid in October of the same year represented the most serious attempt on the part of Washington D.C to promote comprehensive peaceful settlement between Arabs and Israel

The Israeli-Syrian conflict is one strand of the larger Arab-Israeli Conflict that involved Israel and a number of Arab parties. However, the larger Arab-Israeli peace process that was initiated by Bush administration 1991 and accepted by the all the concerned parties had provided an opportunity for the disputants to set down and negotiate with each other's particularly Syrians and Israelis. The process had generated bilateral negotiation tracks where each concerned Arab party including the Palestinians negotiated with Israel. Chief among these tracks were the Israeli-Syrian peace track.

1.1. Problem of the Study.

The problem of the study is that, Tel Aviv and Damascus had engaged in an intensive negotiation between 1991 and 1996 with an active U.S. involvement as a third party. During these talks, the concerned parties had exchanged many explicit proposals and offers that involved certain mutual concessions so to end their conflict. Yet no historical deal was reached during the aforementioned period of time. The developments on this track had received the attention of scholars, researchers and commentators and generated much analysis that raised many questions. Chief among them; why Israel and Syria had accepted to negotiate directly this time? How the parties had conducted their bilateral negotiation during this period? And most importantly, why the parties had missed enticing opportunities that were created during their talks?

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Received on 20/5/2019 and Accepted for Publication on 20/6/2019.

1.2. Objectives of the Study.

The primary aim of this study is to investigate and analyses different aspects and details of the Israeli-Syrian bilateral negotiations in the period between 1991 and 1996 and why they failed to seize opportunities that were emerged in the course of their talks. . It is widely acknowledged that negotiation particularly in long standing conflicts, does not occur in a controlled context and that is a continuous clusters of activities involving actors, decisions and situations (Lane Tracy, 1995, p41). Moreover, the nature, form and the outcomes of negotiation process are determined by a number of factors related to the parties, the conflict and the interaction of the parties during their bargaining process (Brigid Starky, Mark A. Boyer and Jonathan Wikendfield, 2010, p.6). Therefore, this study argues that the Israelis and Syrians had missed a number of enticing opportunities to solve their conflict during the peace talks of 1991-1996. This can be attributed to a number of factors. Chief among them were; the rigged positions of parties towards each other, deep distrust and lack of serious willingness particularly, from the part of the Israeli side to make concessions and compromise. Both have developed contradicted perceptions over necessary conditions for settling their dispute and had failed to bridge the gap between their different positions. Moreover, the killing of Rabin in 1995 and the formation of a Likud led government under the premiership of Benjamin Netanyahu in 1996 had negatively impacted these talks. The significance of this study stems from the fact that it is a re-visit analysis to one of the most important peace talks in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict that can provide an understanding to what went wrong and shed light on those missing opportunities that the parties failed to seize? To answer the aforementioned questions and deal with the key arguments of this paper, a case study approach will be employed in order to analyze primary and secondary literature on this subject matter. According to Jacob Bercovitch, the case study approach allows for an in-depth understanding of particular cases and builds up a solid understanding of the factors which influence negotiation, and the activities that occur during a specific stage of conflict resolution. (Bercovitch, 1984, pp125-144).

1.3. Literature Review.

The Israeli-Syrian peace talks of 1991-1996, have attracted the attention of scholars as well as commentators. Some argued that former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin initially thought he could negotiate "peace for peace" with Syria without giving up the Golan, but soon after entering into negotiations in earnest, he realized that only the recovery of the Golan matters for the Syrians. Rabin's verbal agreement to give up all of the Golan was not made without grave security concerns on his part. But he had quickly learned the alternative was a continuing cycle of violence, something with which his nation was unwilling to live when peace with security became a realistic alternative (Ben-Mier, 1997). Others claimed that Rabin's calculations were similar to that of Clinton Administration in the sense that there was great opportunity in the quest for peaceful settlement with Syria (Rabinovich, 2009). Syria believed that peace with Israel had become its strategic choice while Israel, particularly Labor-Led government, also viewed peace with Damascus as one of its vital aims that should be achieved (Al-Asad and Seal, 1993, p112). Moreover, the Syrians were firm in their position which did not accepted less than Israeli acceptance to discuss the issue of Golan Highest from "Land for Peace" perspective (Al-Asad and Seal, 1993, pp112-114). However, Ben-Meir argued that "The Syrian position, however, is neither arbitrarily defined nor a matter of fixed principle from which the Syrians simply will not deviate. There are, in President Asad's view, psychological, political, strategic, historical and even personal concerns that bear heavily on the Syrian position. Understanding that position from these perspectives is crucial. Otherwise, those Israelis, including Netanyahu, who believe that Syria, perhaps under different geopolitical conditions, will agree to a peace agreement for anything less than full Israeli withdrawal are dangerously misleading themselves and the Israeli public" (Ben-Mier, 1997).

Although the abovementioned literature have provided a positive contribution to the analysis of the Israeli-Syrian talks, this study is an attempt to cover and fill a possible gap on the existing literature related to this subject matter. Furthermore, this study covers a significant period of time where great changes and challenges have taken place in the larger Arab-Israeli peace process of 1991. In addition to that this study would be an additional contribution to the

field of study which is an integral part of Middle Eastern peace studies.

1.4. Structure of the Study.

This paper is structured under four main sections; introduction, Bush peace initiative and Madrid peace conference, the bilateral Israeli-Syrian negotiation of 1991-1996 as well as conclusion.

2. Bush' Initiative and Madrid Peace Conference, 26 October, 1991.

On 6 March 1991, former US President George Bush addressed the Congress and called for comprehensive peace which must be grounded in UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of territory for peace. This principle must be elaborated to provide for Israel's security and recognition, and at the same time for legitimate Palestinian political rights. Anything else would fail the twin tests of fairness and security. The time has come to put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict (Gerner,1994,p180). Shortly after, the Secretary of State then, James Baker began his shuttling diplomacy from March till October of 1991 where he visited the region many times and met the concerned parties in order to secure the approval of both Arabs and Israel. During these trips, he tried to resolve barriers and generate support to initiating talks between the disputants ((Hudson, 2005, pp318-319). Eventually, Jordan, Syria, Palestinians, Israel and Lebanon had accepted the US peace initiative. Washington D.C move had also received a wide regional and international support including the UN, former Soviet Union and the European community.

On 18 October 1991, the U.S. and former Soviet Union as co-sponsors issued an invitation to the concerned parties to attend the Middle East conference in Madrid (Quandt,2005,p502). The invited parties were Jordan, Israel, Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinians within the Joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation. Egypt, The Gulf Co-operation Council as well as the Arab Maghreb Union were also invited. Moreover, the European Community was also invited and was represented by its presidency. Different motives made Israelis and Arab parties to accept and participate in the Middle East peace process of 1991. Chief among them were those related to their Geopolitical, economic and security issues and interests. Moreover, the regional and international geopolitical developments particularly the collapse of the communist block and the defeat of Iraq in early 1990s of the last century had also influenced the motives of the concerned parties to approve Bush' initiative and subsequently attend Madrid Conference.

On 30 October 1991, the Madrid conference officially opened in the Palacio Real with the presence of all the concerned parties (Satloff,1995,p109) On the first day of the plenary session of the conference, the participating parties made their speeches, in which some were hostile and sharp while others were conciliatory (Banerman,1993,p151). Bush made the opening speech during which he outlined the U.S. position and called the parties to make territorial compromises and peace based on fairness to the Palestinians and security for the Israelis (Eisenberg and Caplan, p75). Mr. Gorbachev presented the Soviet position and called on the parties to solve their long conflict through meaningful negotiations. The heads of the concerned Arab delegations as well as Israel had delivered their speeches. However, the most confrontational and hostile speeches were given by Israeli and Syrian representatives.

Shamir delivered a speech full of rhetoric from the past where he ignored territorial compromise and stated that the main cause of the conflict was not territory, but the Arab refusal to recognize Israel (Shalim,2000,p488). Farouk Al-Shara, Syria's foreign minister made a speech in which he denounced Shamir's description of Syria and spoke of Israel as a terrorist state led by a former terrorist(Shalim,2000,pp485-490).

Although little of significance was achieved during the Madrid deliberations, the conference was considered to be an important step on the road of the Middle East peace process. With the conclusion of Madrid conference deliberations, Israelis and Arab parties moved their bilateral talks to Washington D.C where each Arab party including Palestinians had its peace track with Israel. The format and venue of the Arab-Israeli peace process of 1991 were agreed upon by all concerned parties during Baker shuttling diplomacy prior to Madrid conference. It was suggested that an international conference would be conducted first in Madrid which would be followed by direct and bilateral talks between Israelis and Arabs in Washington D.C. Therefore, the bilateral tracks moved to the American capital

where the negotiation processes were conducted with the help of the US actively engaged in these talks as a mediator.

3. The Israeli-Syrian Negotiation 1991-1996.

During their peace talks, parties had asserted that the issue of achieving bilateral peace was a central theme in their policies (Mandell,1996,pp240-241). Syria believed that peace with Israel had become its strategic choice while Israel, particularly Labor-Led government, also viewed peace with Damascus as one of its vital aims that should be achieved (Al-Asad and Seal,1993,p112). However, both held different perceptions of what peace means in terms of its requirements, such as the nature of their expected relations, solutions to their disputed issues and what concessions should be made by both parties to achieve peace. Due to this contention the bilateral negotiation, which was conducted between both countries during 1991-1996, had witnessed ups and downs and went through different stages.

In the first stage of Syria's peace talks with Israel, the negotiation was conducted with the Likud-led government in which contest over the formula of peace, lack of seriousness and incivility were the main characteristics of this phase of negotiation (Rabinovich,1998,pp40-41). The talks were conducted in severe and formal nature, free of public or personal gestures, such as shaking hands or side talks. Moreover, the parties failed to establish a procedural system that could facilitate and organize the order of their discussions. Therefore, there was a need for an American chairperson of the negotiation sessions. The lack of existence of minimum mutual trust and confidence between the two antagonists could be attributed to the deep mistrust that marked their relation and the fact that both never engaged in direct negotiations. On dealing with the issue of under which formula their talks should be conducted, both parties held different perceptions. Shamir's government advocated the "Peace for Peace" formula also when dealt with the peace talks with Syria (Ben-Meir,1997,p1). Israel at this stage refused to deal with the Syrian demand of conducting the talks on the basis of UN 242 Resolution which called for "Land for peace" formula. The continuous contention in the first five rounds of talks and lack of even a procedural progress could be attributed mainly to the lack of seriousness from Shamir's government in dealing with the peace talks. Moreover, the Syrians were firm in their position which did not accept less than Israeli acceptance to discuss the issue of Golan Heights from "Land for Peace" perspective (Al-Asad and Seal,1993,pp112-114). Shamir admitted that he had no intention in discussing such issue or returning back Syrian occupied land, which is the main, disputed issue (Hartman,1994,p45). In the light of that no body including the parties themselves expected to have any serious breakthrough. Yet they continued their bilateral negotiation with cool enthusiasm. However, this cold conduction of Israeli-Syrian peace talks was substituted by a little bit of optimism with the arrival of the Labor party and its allies to power in June 1992.

It is acknowledged within the literature on negotiation that changing of leadership could create an enticing opportunity for the disputants to push their bargaining forward as new leaders may have new ideas or perception of the conflict (Touval and Zarman,2003 Pp434-435). In Rabin's case this proved to be valid. This was because of Rabin had presented a new approach when dealing with negotiation with Syria. With his security pragmatic vision, Rabin declared that UN 242 Resolution also applicable to the Golan Heights and the talks would be conducted on the basis of land for peace formula (Fisher, 2011,pp943-944). Rabin with his long experience and what happened in the negotiation with Syria during Shamir's government era came to realize that only this formal would bring the Syrians into serious talks. Rabin was enthusiastic to engage in fruitful talks with Syria to strike a deal that would serve Israel's security interests. He was motivated by a security vision towards Syria in the sense that the latter is a serious potential threat (Shlaim,2000,pp533-534). Rabin's approachment was perceived as he was giving priority to the Syrian track than others particularly that with the Palestinian. Therefore, when both parties resumed their peace talks in Washington D.C during the sixth round of talks in 24th of August 1992, Israel submitted to the Syrian formally its new approach (Rabinovich,1998,p57). The Syrian reaction to the Israeli step was a proposal declaration of principles. The Syrians' draft emphasized the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of land for peace (Hinnebusch,1996,p52). Moreover, both parties would form a mechanism to implement these resolutions including full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights in return for termination of the state of war, which would be

incorporated in a peace agreement. Although the Israeli and the Syrian steps could be considered as a form of progress, the gap between them remained wide. Israel believed for peace to occur with Syria, the latter should commit itself for full peace and takes bold steps for full normalization of the relations with Israel (Seal,2002,pp66-67).

Syria believed that to achieve peace with Israel, the latter should declare its commitment to full withdrawal from the Golan Heights and that peace should be comprehensive in all peace tracks (Al-Asad and Seal,1993,p112). Henceforth the dispute between both parties evolved around the extent of withdrawal, the nature of peace, security arrangements and the issue of a comprehensive peace. Israel in its acceptance of the element of territorial compromise with Syria did not elaborate on depth of its proposed withdrawal from the Syrian occupied land. Moreover, Israel believed that this would be occurred gradually with in timetable of five years to check the Syrian seriousness of peace. Furthermore, Syria has to offer Israel full normalization of relations which entail diplomatic and commercial relations. In regard to security issue Israel demanded that the demilitarization of the parts of the Golan Heights which would evacuate and its adjacent areas inside Syria. Moreover, an Israeli early warning station should be installed in these areas coupled with redeployment and reduction of Syrian forces (Rabinovich, 2009,pp6-7). Israel also believed that the agreement with Syria should stand in its own foots without any linkage with other peace tracks particularly that of the Palestinians.

Syria believed that Israel should pull out its force totally from the Golan Heights till the border of the 4th of June lines and the dismantling of all the settlements there(Al-Asad and Seal, 1993,p112). Furthermore, Syria understood that peace with Israel would entail a degree of normalization. However, the Syria's position over this issue was vague like Israel's position from the extent of withdrawal. An analysis to the Syrian position from the issue of normalization suggests that it was different from that of the Israeli perception. Syria believed that UN Security Resolutions didn't talk about warm or cold peace. Therefore, Syria is not compelled to respond to the Israeli perception (Muslih,1994,pp10-11). The actual motive behind this position was that Syria believed that a warm and full peace would be in the interest of Israel and would enable the latter to enhance its hegemony in the region. This would negatively affect Syria's regional role (Al-Asad and Seal,1993, p113). In respect to security arrangements Syria believed that, these steps should be reciprocal and on equal footing. An analysis to the Syrian political discourse towards the Middle East peace process suggests that Syria had officially committed itself to a comprehensive settlement. Damascus believed that progress must be made on all Israel's peace tracks with the Arab parties. This position was a reflection of Syria's pan-Arabism commitment and a move to have say in the any settlement between Israel and the Palestinians. The above-mentioned positions of both parties from their disputed issue were a by-product of different constants and elements (Ben-Meir,1997, pp104-110).

Although Golan heights were never part of historic Palestine, Israel developed vested strategic and settlements interests in the plateau. The strategic importance of Golan to Israel security derived from the fact that it forms an ideal buffer zone between Israel and Syria. Moreover, Golan is rich of water resources and close to Israel's main water storage of Lake Tiberias. Furthermore, after 1967 many Israeli settlers settled in the Golan and established farms there. Those settlers enjoy influence and support from the Israeli body politic. What can be said about the strategic importance of the Golan to Israel would be the same to Syria whose capital Damascus is not far from the plateau. Moreover, Syrian people firmly believed that Golan is an integral part of their country as this sense is motivated by strong Syrian nationalism. Although the type of political regime in Syria is of authoritarian nature, government has to take this public sense into serious consideration, which constrains its actions towards this issue. Apart from his ideological national believe, Asad has a personal motive to regain and insist on full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan (Al-Asad and Seale,1993,pp112-113). The latter was lost when he was a defense minister. Therefore, returning the plateau would relief him from the responsibility of its loss. With the above-mentioned positions both parties conducted their subsequent talks. In the period between June 1992 and December 1992 the parties conducted three rounds of talks (Rabinovich,1998,p70). Apart from the application of territorial compromise from Israeli side and its subsequent Syrian proposal, nothing of specific importance was achieved. The negotiation suffered from US presidential election

and other regional developments particularly volatile situation in West Bank and Lebanon like other peace tracks (Rabinovich,1998,p70).

The Bush administration was actively engaging in the Israel-Syrian peace talks and was keen to help the parties reaching an agreement. The degree of Baker involvement in this track suggests that Bush Administration was giving it a priority over other tracks. Although other disputed issues are of significant importance, the issue of withdrawal and the extent of peace remained the main continuous ones during 1993. Both parties engaged in what be called a competition of finding acceptable formulas to satisfy their positions from these issues. Israel talked this time of significant withdrawal from the Golan in return for full peace and that the extent of withdrawal determined by the extent of peace Syria would offer (Rabinovich,1998,p83). This is off course was not acceptable by Syria who saw it as short of a commitment for full withdrawal. In reaction to that, Syria came up with a formal "Full withdrawal for Full peace"(Seal, 1996,p36). Both parties were prisoners of finding suitable formula in the sense that each one wants to extract from the other a prior commitment that would satisfy his position before committing him self. Although no serious break through was occurred during this period, the nature of the talks were seen by the others as encouraging and were expecting both parties to reach an agreement. Moreover, the new US administration of Clinton's actively engaged in the Syrian Israeli talks (Al-Moualm,1997,p36). The Americans truly played the role of an active mediator in which Secretary of State invested huge efforts that took the form of shuttling between Syria and Israel. This was because of the American interest in helping the parties to reach an agreement. Moreover, the issue of public diplomacy and back channels were absent from Israel's talks with Syria. Therefore, they were in need of a third party who can play the role of active mediator.

The American involvement and the revelation of the news of some progress in the Israeli-Syrian track gave the impression that both parties were close to strike a deal. This was also enforced by the hypothetical proposition, which Rabin offered to Asad through US Secretary of State Warren Christopher in August 1993(Seal,1996, p67). According to Syrian and American sources, Christopher had conveyed a verbal secret message to Asad from Rabin which stated the readiness of Israel for full withdrawal from Golan(Al-Moualem,1997,p82). In return for that, Israel security needs and normalization of relations are to be met. However, the Oslo agreement of 1993 between Israel and PLO had changed this image and negatively affected talks with Syria (Seal,1996, p35). The agreement stalled progress on the Syrian track in the sense that, Rabin government would not be able to sell out two agreements to the Israel people at the same time. It was easy to sell an agreement that entails partial withdrawal from West Bank rather than significant one on the Syrian front. Moreover, Israelis were in need of time to digest the agreement with the Palestinians. Therefore, Syria had to wait till the appropriate time which meant to freeze any serious talk for while. The agreement with the Palestinians had strengthened Rabin's government against Syria (Hinnebusch,1996,p15). Rabin saw in the agreement with the Palestinians as a mean to pressure Syria in the sense that it weakened the latter position and marginalized her role. The Palestinian themselves now reached an agreement with Israel. Therefore, Syrian henceforth had no choice but to stop linking progress in peace track with Israel with that of the Palestinians. Moreover, Oslo agreement had triggered a wave of normalization, to a certain extent, of Israel's relation with some Arab countries, which weakened Syria's call to keep boycotting Israel. This denied Syria of an important leverage. Because, Damascus was using this issue as a means of pressure on Israel in the sense that reaching an agreement with her would enable Israel to normalize its relations with the Arab world.

In the light of the above-mentioned developments, Rabin became less enthusiastic than before to his preference of "Syria first"(Al-Moualem,1997,p85). Instead he advocated the notion that now priority should be given to implement agreement with Palestinians and to strike a deal with Jordan. This was not shared by the Americans at this stage who believed that the momentum to the Syrian track should be maintained and that Rabin's next step is an agreement with Syria (Quandt,1994,pp28-30). To achieve such goal the Clinton Administration moved and took a high profile step when Clinton held a summit meeting with Asad in Geneva in January 1994(Fisher, 2005,p944). At this meeting Syria had adjust her position from certain disputed issues with Israel. Damascus accepted the principle of normal relations

with Israel but conditioned to what will happen in the course of their peace talks. According to Clinton, Asad had made a firm commitment to normalize relations with Israel including open borders, free trade and diplomatic relations (Muslih,1994,p10). Moreover, Syria had submitted a new interpretation to the comprehensive peace in the sense that it does not mean agreements with Israel have to be reached simultaneously with all Arab parties. Moreover, Syria recognized that each of the problems between the Arabs and Israel has its own peculiarities.

It can be argued that the Oslo agreement made it easier for the Syrians to adjust their position over this issue. Henceforth, Syria focused on the Golan question.

The Syrian positive position as a result of Clinton-Asad meeting and the difficulties in the negotiations with the Palestinians made Rabin to revive his interest in the Syrian track (Muslih,1994, p,11³). He announced Israel's readiness for significant withdrawal and dismantling of the settlements conditioned by public Israeli referendum. During that period the atmosphere of the bilateral talks between both Syria and Israel was positive and sense of optimism was created that something tangible was looming over. Many reasons contributed to this chief among them were the active American involvement on a high level in the talks. Moreover, Rabin's new position which the Israeli press claimed that he expressed his readiness to have full withdrawal from the Golan. For instance Rabin publically stated that peace was more important than keeping certain settlements in the Golan (Muslih,1994, p11). Furthermore, a considerable flexibility also occurred in the Syrian position.

In these appropriate circumstances, the Americans intensified their efforts to help the parties reach agreement through fractioning their disputed issues such as solving the core ones and began negotiation over the secondary ones. The parties agreed over this suggestion and began tackling the thorny issue of the extent of withdrawal. Although Syria and Israel at this stage achieved a considerable progress compared with previous talks, both held different positions over to which lines Israel should pull out its forces (Pipes,1999,pp19-20). Syria believed that Israel should pull back to the lines of 4th of June 1967 of the Rhodes Armistice lines as this would enable Syria an access to the Lake Tiberias and headwaters of the Jordan River (Hof,1997,pp137-140). Israel insisted that the boundary lines should be that of the 1923 British mandatory lines between Palestine and Syria and that agreement should be reached over the water resources of the Golan (Hof,1997,p136). In regard to the issue of timing to pull back its forces from Golan, Israel proposed a three-stage withdrawal over a period of eight years after a minor pull back from certain villages (Pipes,1998,p18). The logic behind this was that Israel through having such period would check how far Syria is keen to establish normal relations with Tel Aviv. It is probably true to say that the deep mistrust that existed between both parties also made the Israelis to ask for this period of five years. Syria refused to accept such suggestion and demanded that withdrawal should be taken place within short time of a maximum one year and refused normalization before the evacuation of Golan. In regard to the security issue, Israel in return for the intended significant withdrawal from Golan demanded certain security arrangements that would substitute leaving strategic plateau (Mandell,1996,pp243-245). Israel proposed the dismantling of Syria chemical weapons, radical reduction in the Syrian army and limited forces zone requiring a virtual Syrian pull back up to Damascus.

Although Syria accepted the principle of demilitarization of the Golan and the stationing of an international force, Damascus demanded that equal limited forces zones should be on both sides of border (Seal,2000,p72). The parties failed to cement the gap between their positions in which Syria argued that agreeing on the Israeli demands would demolish her defensive ability. Israel insisted that by leaving the Golan it will risk its national security. Therefore, Tel Aviv was in need of such substituted measures. Moreover, the Israeli-Syrian talks received another blow which affected it negatively when Jordan and Israel concluded their peace treaty in October 1994 (Muslih,1994,p162-163). This probably made Rabin to slow down the negotiation with Syria in the hope that agreements with Jordan and the Palestinians would put pressure on Damascus and therefore, adjust its position over the settlement with Tel Aviv. However, months later, Rabin renewed his interest in peace with Syria as he gave his view of the importance of settling down dispute with Damascus. He argued that peace with Syria is very significant because peace with Cairo and Damascus means an end to war, an end to bloodshed in Lebanon, there can be peace with while keeping all or most of

the Golan and that there is no peace without a territorial price (Courtois, Trusty, 2000, p365). This view also was shared by the US who believed that no quest for a comprehensive peace between Arabs and Israelis without Damascus' participation (Rabinovich, 2009, pp5-6) Therefore, talks were resumed with the help of the US as an active mediator that continued to press both disputants to hammer out a peace agreement.

Actually one of the things that had characterized the Israeli-Syrian negotiation was the fact that these talks were trilateral: Israel, Syria and the US. However, Israelis and Syrians remained reluctant to offer meaningful concessions and compromise that would have enabled them to reach an agreement. Rabin was cautious and had insisted on full security arrangements as well as the idea of a phased pull out from the Golan over five years period and the idea of full peace where Damascus should normalize relations with Israel (Sela, Kumaraswamy, 2001, p18). The Syrians insisted on a full withdrawal namely that nothing less than the 4 June border would be acceptable and they were ambiguous on the idea of warm peace with Israel (Courtois, Trusty, 2000, p365). Despite their failure to move forward, both parties remained engaged in their negotiation. However, on 4 of November 1995 Rabin was killed at a peace rally in Tel Aviv when on the hand of fanatic right wing Jewish (Shlaim, 2010, p552).

The death of Rabin marked an end of a historical stage in the larger Arab-Israeli peace process and was considered as a serious blow to the dream of achieving historical deal between the disputants. Rabin was succeeded by Peres who had become Israeli prime minister. Peres a long time experienced politician who was looked at as a part of the dovish group within the Israeli political elite and unlike his predecessor, he had no military history. Moreover, Peres was known to favor talks with the Palestinians over other tracks (Shlaim, 2000, pp510-516). However, shortly after he had assumed his power as a prime minister, he declared his readiness to resume negotiation with Damascus. This was during a visit to the US in mid-December 1995 where he suggested a plan to end conflict with Syria inspired by his vision of the New Middle East (Courtois and Trusty, 2000, p370). Peres were a strong advocate of a functional and interdependence peace that would lead to economic and scientific cooperation between Israel and the relevant Arab parties which eventually would also result in the integration of Tel Aviv into the region (Peres, 1997, pp119-134). The new element in this proposed plan was Peres' offer to drop down Tel Aviv' demand on ground based early warning stations on the Golan which was part of a set of conditions that were set out by Rabin. However, talks were resumed in December 1995 and continued till January 1996, with help of the US who hosted the talks at Wye Plantation (Courtois and Trusty, 2000, pp369-370). During these two rounds of talks, Israelis and Syrians had tried to overcome their mutual deep suspicion and obstacles that hindered their previous talks regarding the Golan and the extent of peace. The parties had discussed all their disputed issues including borders and the Golan, normalization, water, and security arrangements as well as the economic aspect of proposed peace. Despite the parties' extensive talks during the abovementioned two rounds of negotiation and an active American engagement, they failed to bridge the gap between their conflicted positions particularly over the details of their suggested peace plan.

The inevitable failure of these talks could be attributed to a number of reasons. The Israeli and Syrian negotiators were drowned in the complexity of the details of their peace (as the devil is always in the details) like the extent of withdrawal from the Golan, extent of normalization, security arrangements and the proposed economic aspect of Peres offer. Moreover, Asad had deep suspicions in the actual intentions of Peres regarding these talks as the Syrian president had developed a conviction that Peres had the intention to call for early elections that he might win. In addition to the sympathy Peres had received after Rabins' killing and the progress with the Palestinian and Jordanian tracks, a resumption of peace talks with the Syrian could further boost his popularity. Therefore, Peres was in hurry to achieve this end rather than achieving genuine peace. At the Backdrop of this possible conviction, Asad had decided to deny the Israeli leader this opportunity and exhibited rigged position during Wye Plantations talks. However, some claimed that it was the failure of these talks that made Peres to conclude that there was no prospect of hammering out a deal with Syria and therefore, decided to go for an early elections on 29 May 1996 (Shlaim, 2000, p 554).

In the leading up to the elections a number of major developments had negatively impacted Peres popularity that made him lose these elections. The first was the rise of a charismatic Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu who had managed to

gain popularity particularly among the Israeli right. Moreover, Hamas had conducted a number of suicide attacks against Israeli targets that raised serious concerns among many Israelis over their personal safety and security. Furthermore, the mounted tension with Hezbollah in south Lebanon had triggered a limited military confrontation when Peres government decided to launch operation Grapes of Wrath on 11 of April 1996 that lasted about 15 days (Shalim,2000,p559). The misconduct of this operation by Peres government and its outcomes had made a great shift in the Israeli public in favor of the right wing star Netanyahu who skillfully had took advantage of these failures. Eventually Netanyahu had won the elections as he was perceived by many Israel of being tough on the security of Israel.

The election of Netanyahu marked a turning point in the history of the Arab-Israeli larger process as the new leader made a great change in the Israeli position towards peace with the concerned Arab parties. Netanyahu had presented a new formula for peace based on Peace for Peace instead of the agreed upon Land for Peace which was a key principle in the Arab-Israeli peace process in the period between 1991 and 1996. Moreover, Netanyahu during and after the elections declared that he is determined to lower the expectations of the Arab parties particularly the Palestinians These expectations were raised after the signing of Oslo agreements with the Labor led government. Henceforth, nothing concert were achieved between Israelis and Arabs and deadlock continued to be the order of parties' subsequent negotiations including the Israeli-Syrian talks.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the aforementioned analysis of the different variables and dynamics of the Israeli-Syrian negotiation of 1991-1996 suggest, that during these talks many enticing opportunities to solve he parties' conflict had emerged. The first one was, when the Labor party and its allies had won the Israeli general elections and formed a Labor led government under the premiership of Rabin in June 1992. Rabin had presented a new approach to the negotiation with Syria when he declared that UN 242 Resolution also applicable to the Golan Heights and the talks would be conducted on the bases of land for peace formula. This actually had generated a convenient context to the parties to engage in exchanging mutual peace proposals that reflected their perceptions regarding a framework to peace. The Second enticing opportunity was created in August 1993 when also Rabin presented his hypothetical offer known to the Syrians as "Rabin's Deposit" based on the notion "Full Withdrawal for Full Peace". That also had triggered serious and in depth bargaining over the details of what full withdrawal for full peace means including the extent of Israeli pull-out, security arrangements, normalization of relations and demilitarization of the Golan. The Third enticing opportunity was in late 1994 and much of 1995. Rabin had renewed his interest in peace with Syria as settling down conflict with Damascus is very significant and that there is no peace without a territorial price. This view also was shared by the US who believed that no quest for a comprehensive peace between Arabs and Israelis without Damascus' participation Therefore, talks were resumed with the help of the US as an active mediator that continued to press both disputants to hammer out a peace agreement. Actually one of the things that had characterized the Israeli-Syrian negotiation was the fact that these talks were trilateral: Israel, Syria and the US. The Forth enticing opportunity was in late 1995 when Rabin was killed and succeeded by Peres. The latter had declared his readiness to resume negotiation with Damascus during a visit to the US in mid-December 1995 where he suggested a plan to end conflict with Syria inspired by his vision of the New Middle East. However, this study concludes also that although US had played an active role as a third party in the Israeli-Syrian negotiation from 1991til 1996, Tel Aviv and Damascus had missed the abovementioned opportunities and failed to hammer out a historical agreement that could have ended their long standing conflict. This can be attributed to number of factors. Chief among them were; the rigged positions of parties towards each other, deep distrust and lack of serious willingness particularly, from the part of the Israeli side to make necessary concessions and compromise. Both have developed contradicted perceptions over necessary conditions for settling their dispute and had failed to close the gap between their different positions. The parties were stuck and eventually drowned in the details of their mutual offers, like the extent of Israeli withdrawal from Golan, necessary steps for normalization of relations and security arrangements. Moreover, this study suggest that misperceptions and

distrust had influenced the Israeli as well as Syrian leaders who had failed to develop a personal acquaintance “personal chemistry” that could have facilitated their negotiation. It is wildly acknowledged that personal chemistry and mutual confidence measures between disputants are important elements particularly, in complex negotiation like the Israeli-Syrian track. Looking at other peace tracks within the larger Arab-Israeli peace process, this element had played an important role in helping the parties to hammer out agreements particularly in the Jordanian-Israeli peace talks of 1991-1994. It is argued that, the personal chemistry and the strong friendship that were developed between King Hussein of Jordan and Premier Rabin, had played a decisive role in the conclusion of their peace treaty in October 1994 (Shalim, 2010, pp527-528). Moreover, the killing of Rabin in 1995 and the formation of a Likud led government under the premiership of Benjamin Netanyahu in 1996 had negatively impacted these talks. Netanyahu with his revisionist ideology had presented a new formula for peace based on Peace for Peace instead of the agreed upon Land for Peace which was a key principle in the Arab-Israeli peace process in the period between 1991 and 1996. Moreover, Netanyahu had declared that he is determined to lower the expectations of the Arab parties particularly the Palestinians. This rigged and uncompromising position casted by Netanyahu had made it impossible for the Syrians to engage in any meaningful talks with Israel.

This study also has arrived at a conclusion that these talks were a mediated negotiation where Washington particularly during Clinton era had played an active role at all levels that transformed the supposedly bilateral track into trilateral track. Clinton and his administration had invested much effort including summitry meetings with Israeli and Syrian leaders. At the Backdrop of the aforementioned conclusions, this study finally concludes that peace remained elusive between the Israeli and Syrians throughout their talks of 1991-1996.

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المفاوضات الإسرائيلية - السورية 1991 - 1996: فرص ضائعة، وسلام صعب المنال

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ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل المفاوضات السورية الإسرائيلية في المدة من 1991 - 1996، ولماذا فشل الاطراف في استغلال وتطوير الفرص الجاذبة التي توفرت خلال هذه المفاوضات، وقد قامت هذه الدراسة على فرضية مفادها أن الأسرائيليين والسوريين قد ضيعوا كثيراً من الفرص الجاذبة من أجل حل صراعهم خلال تلك المفاوضات، وذلك بسبب عدم مرونة مواقفهم، إضافة إلى حالة عدم الثقة بينهم، كما أنه لم يتوفر رغبة حقيقة لدى الأطراف من أجل التوصل إلى حلول وسط... ولقد وظفت هذه الدراسة منهج الحالة الدراسية، وذلك من أجل تحليل الأدبيات الرئيسية والثانوية المتعلقة بهذه المفاوضات من أجل فهم المتغيرات والديناميكيات التي أثرت على مفاوضات الأطراف المعنية، ولقد توصلت الدراسة إلى عدة نتائج أهمها أنه كان هناك عدة فرص ثمينة، وقد ظهرت خلال هذه المفاوضات إلا أن الأطراف المعنية فشلوا باستغلال هذه الفرص مما سبب فشل محادثاتها السلمية في تلك المدة، وعدم التوصل إلى اتفاق تاريخي ينهي صراعهم.

الكلمات الدالة: الصراع، مفاوضات، سلام، مرتفعات الجولان، فرص جاذبة، انسحاب، تطبيع.

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تاريخ استلام البحث 2019/5/20، وتاريخ قبوله 2019/6/20.