

These Papers present a picture of the course of the Palestinian-Israeli-American Summit held at the Presidential Camp David Retreat in the United States from 11-25 July 2000. They were serialized in Arabic in the Palestinian Al-Ayyam daily from 29/7 to 10/8, 2000.

In a seven part series, Akram Hanieh, editor-in-chief of the Al-Ayyam newspaper, an advisor to Yasser Arafat, and a participant at the Summit; tells the story of Camp David.

The series gives readers an insight into the events of the Summit through a mix of detailed information on discussions at the negotiations, the different proposals, and the Palestinian responses. Hanieh places you in the midst of the picturesque Retreat and the intense negotiations. The series also sheds light on the Summit's atmosphere, the attitudes and roles of the different players, and even gives insight into past historical events.

The Papers let you in on the private conversations between Yasser Arafat and Bill Clinton. They make you privvy to the thoughts, fears and triumphs of the Palestinian negotiators. Through them, the reasons for the failure to conclude a deal at Camp David are explained.

The First Paper: The Road to the Summit

The Americans never listened to Palestinian Advice.

In June 2000, Dennis Ross, the United States' Peace Envoy to the Middle East arrived in the region a few days only before the arrival of U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. The two, joined by members of their advisory team on the Middle East peace process, comprised mainly of State Department and White House National Security Council staff, met with Palestinian and Israeli officials. Discussions centered on the possibility of convening a trilateral summit in the United States, for the conclusion of an agreement on permanent status issues between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel.

The Palestinian response was clear and candid. During at least two previous meetings with US envoys, President Yasser Arafat said in effect: "Conditions are not yet ripe for holding a summit, nothing was achieved in the earlier Eilat talks, and no progress was recorded either in the Stockholm Channel talks." He added: "We need several more weeks of intensive negotiations before we are able to move towards convening a trilateral summit."

At the end of a luncheon held in honor of Secretary Albright and her team at his headquarters in Ramallah, President Arafat looked at Albright and said: "Madam Secretary, if you issue an invitation to a summit, and if it gets held and fails, then this will weaken the hope among the [Palestinian] people in the possibility of achieving peace. Let us not weaken this hope."

The Palestinian side came out from that day's meetings with the impression that Albright had been convinced of the need for better preparation prior to convening a summit, mainly through holding two weeks of intensive negotiations in Washington between mandated members from the two parties.

The Americans received further advice and warnings from Palestinian officials: "The Palestinian problem is more complicated than to be simply resolved in a hastily convened summit. A summit is doomed to failure as long as Israel's positions remain as they are. There are Palestinian red lines that cannot be crossed." Some American officials even heard from some who went as far as telling them: "Don't get yourself into a "New Geneva" (The failed Geneva summit between the late Syrian President Hafez Assad and President Clinton, which resulted in a freeze of the Syrian track; and was considered a painful diplomatic blow for President Clinton). But the meeting Secretary Albright held that evening with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, added to her deliberations with her team, were more than enough for making a recommendation to President Clinton to issue invitations to a summit.

Even when President Arafat was called by U.S. President Bill Clinton after Albright's return to Washington, he made sure that Clinton heard the same advice: "Do not convene the Summit yet." He also stressed the need for prior intense preparatory talks. During that call, the American President promised to confer with Ehud Barak before making a final decision.

Still, President Clinton called back on the fourth of July saying that Barak had new offers he would make at a summit, and that he did not agree to hold any preparatory talks; therefore, Clinton had decided to issue invitations to a Middle East Peace Summit. During that telephone conversation, President Arafat tried three times to clarify to Clinton his concerns at the expected consequences, but it seemed the White House had decided to adopt recommendations presented earlier by Albright, Ross, and Sandy Berger (White House National Security Advisor), and issue invitations for a trilateral summit to be held at Camp David on July 11. Quickly, the delegations were being composed, and entry visas to the

United States were quickly getting stamped on passports of delegation members at U.S Consulates. The Middle East was on the verge of witnessing a new adventure in American diplomacy.

The selection of Camp David was not a coincidence. President Clinton, a Democrat, resorted to borrowing a leaf from one of the most distinguished accomplishments in the annals of American diplomacy, achieved by another Democrat, President Jimmy Carter. Carter had brought in 1978 Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menahem Begin to a summit at the Camp David Resort, that led to an agreement bearing the Resort's name, and which became synonymous with an era of changes and unrest, and of a redrawing of regional alliances.

Using Camp David was intended to capitalize on the mystique of the location and its history. In fact Clinton and his aides had studied in detail the events of the 1978 summit, and called on the expertise of US diplomats who had participated in it. Also, the selection was due to the fact that Ehud Barak asked that the summit be held at Camp David. The Israeli Prime Minister who flew to Camp David beleaguered by divisions in his government coalition, and by a strong opposition campaign, also wanted to remind leaders of the opposition Likud party that he was following in the footsteps of Menahem Begin, their most illustrious leader who had signed at Camp David an agreement that led to full Israeli withdrawal from Egyptian territories, and to an evacuation of Israeli settlements in the Sinai peninsula.

Still, every one of the three leaders going to Camp David (Clinton, Barak, and Arafat) had his own assessment and expectations that differed from the two others'. The American President who accepted the recommendation of Albright-Ross-Berger for convening the summit had public and personal interests. The U.S that launched the Middle East peace process through convening the Madrid Conference in 1991, now wanted to conclude the most intractable part of this process (the Palestinian track) with a final treaty. President Clinton, who is expected to leave the White House on January 20, 2001 is interested in securing a place in the history books as the leader capable of solving the longest and most difficult problem of the 20th Century.

Therefore, the time factor played an important role in the attempt to promote and obtain acceptance for convening the summit. In the US, the Republican Party Convention convenes on July 27 to select its candidates for the Presidential elections, followed by the Democratic Party Convention. US Presidents, in accordance with observed tradition, usually refrain from undertaking attention stealing actions during this period. After the Conventions, Presidents maneuvering room reduces further due to the run up to the November elections. According to the American expression, the President becomes a "lame duck".

But Clinton is not just any President trying his luck in an unpredictable political adventure. He had received from his teams at the State Department and the National Security Council assurances that even though achieving results was not easy, it was not impossible. In fact, it was possible only through a closed summit where both Israeli and Palestinian teams are placed under the tremendous pressure generated by the presence of the US President.

It seemed that most of the members of the American peace team who had underestimated and rejected Palestinian advice were in fact tuning to vibrations coming from the Israeli side. Both sides had apparently come to a joint assessment that saw a definite possibility in the conclusion of a permanent agreement that would end the Palestinian - Israeli conflict, the root of the Arab - Israeli conflict. Such an assessment was yet another proof of the short-sighted understanding of the uniqueness of the Palestinian question, which in itself led to another short-sighted view in the attempt to recognize its components, lessons, and also possibilities. It looked like a strange combination of arrogance of power, Orientalist attitudes, and an amateurish handling of politics. Some members of the American team were eager to score an

achievement that could be placed in their empty job résumés prior to the arrival of a new administration. The whole issue in general looked like another standard repetition of American rash diplomacy in the region: A rejection of reality, and an attempt to impose through force and pressure, structures contradicting that reality.

The Israelis, along with some in the American team, built their analysis on the basis that the Palestinian case, as represented by the PLO, was at a very weak stage. Their assumption was that the Palestinian question begged for an achievement represented in Statehood, and for which the Palestinian leadership would most likely be willing to pay a high price. They also assumed that the Palestinian case did not enjoy enough Arab support enabling it to withstand pressure. Consequently, their assumption was that an offer whereby the Palestinians got a State on most of the areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, wide functional authorities in Jerusalem, control of the Haram Al-Sharif ["Temple Mount"], a few privileges in the Old City, allowing hundreds of refugees to return under a "family reunification" clause, coupled with pressure, was guaranteed to attract the Palestinian side and have it sign to end the conflict and the refugee problem. The whole, bound up by heavy Israeli security restrictions in the West Bank.

Every time the Palestinians told American officials they were committing a terrible mistake if they assumed Yasser Arafat was willing to sign an agreement that did not satisfy minimum national Palestinian rights, the answer came in doubtful looks and smiles that claimed knowledge, self-assurance, and a confidence in achieving results. And when they were also told that the army of the current Palestinian revolution brought about by Fatah came from Diaspora refugee camps, and that any agreement that did not include a just solution to the refugee problem would engender an even stronger revolution there, the answer also came in silence, a silence that rejected even listening to anything other than what was built on their logic.

For all the above reasons, Clinton went to the Summit -based on recommendations from his aides- full of confidence in his ability to reach a historic achievement that would crown his political life. Ehud Barak went to the Summit, which he was so keen on having convened after he practically stopped the Stockholm Channel negotiations only after its second session. Then internal security minister Shlomo Ben Ami, head of the Israeli negotiating side there, informed his Palestinian counterpart Abu Ala [Ahmed Qrei, Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council] that Barak had many ideas, and that the only place he would be willing to reveal them was at a trilateral summit in the United States. Since then, the American secret code to promote the convening of a summit became "the expected rabbits" that "Barak the magician" would pull out from his hat.

Barak, who had tried since his election to appease the Right more than the voters who brought him to power, saw that there was a great opportunity to conclude an agreement that was convenient to Israel. An agreement acceptable to the majority in Israel that would allow him to return in triumph from Washington. He would then top it all with a decisive victory at the polls that would relieve him and his Labor party from having to deal with coalition partners whose demands never ceased.

On the other hand, Barak had already set up a safety net to protect him if he returned empty handed: He would portray himself as a hero refusing to compromise with the Palestinians, and to bow to US pressures. That would allow him to establish a base capable of attracting old partners who had deserted his government, or even bring in the Likud. Barak also assumed that convening the Summit, regardless of its results, would guarantee him US and European praise for his willingness to make sacrifices for peace, that in turn would spare him any future pressures, and would give him strong ammunition in the face of a Palestinian Statehood declaration on September 13.

Yasser Arafat, who has tried so hard to postpone the convening of the Summit, went as far as warning in public against its definite failure, and advised Clinton and his aides to postpone its convening for several weeks, in the end had no choice but to accept the invitation when it arrived. His acceptance was due to several factors:

A special relationship had been established between him and President Clinton during the past seven years. President Arafat even became the foreign President who had most visited the White House during Clinton's terms (12 visits). On several occasions, President Clinton listened with interest to the Palestinian narrative, and a feeling prevailed that he had started to understand its different aspects. In addition, the government of Benjamin Netanyahu presented a precious gift to Arafat who had seized the opportunity to enhance Palestinian-American relations. The peak of this relationship was reached when Bill Clinton visited the Palestinian territories in 1998 and addressed the Palestine National Council in Gaza City, which was later seen as the first *de facto* American recognition of the Palestinian State in the making.

Such a relationship -even if it continues to be bound by the ceiling of policies set by the American political establishment- has always been considered a light of hope for the Palestinian side, the hope that Clinton would not attempt to impose what the Palestinians reject. That was exactly the assurance given to Abu Ammar [Yasser Arafat] before the call to the summit. Further, Yasser Arafat had no desire to create a sharp disagreement with the American administration over a procedural issue such as convening a summit. He preferred to save his strength for an expected confrontation over substance.

On the night he accepted to attend the Summit, Yasser Arafat convened members of his negotiations team in an emergency meeting in Ramallah. He presented them with an assessment of the situation and warned them to expect intransigent Israeli positions supported by some parties in the US Administration. Yasser Arafat knew very well that he was entering a tough battle. He also knew that he needed support from any party willing to extend it. He, therefore, refused an American insistence to arrive in Washington on the morning of July 10.

The President had other engagements: He stopped first in Alexandria for a meeting with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, and then he traveled to Togo to participate in the African Summit since Palestine occupies an observer seat in the Organization for African Unity. At that summit, Yasser Arafat gave a speech that went over the entire course of the political process in the region. Speaking in Arabic, as he mentioned the word " Al-Quds " (Jerusalem), there was immediately a burst of loud applause, even before interpreters were able to translate the word to the delegates, most of whom did not speak Arabic, yet who knew very well the meaning of the word, and its meaning to Arafat, Palestinians, Muslims, and Christians.

The echo of the loud applause remained in the heart and mind of Yasser Arafat as he left the Summit hall in the capital of Togo heading to the airport, where his plane was getting ready to take off for Washington.

The Second Paper: Rules of the Game in the Catoctin Hills

President Yasser Arafat and members of the Palestinian delegation arrived by helicopter at Camp David early Tuesday, July 11, from Andrew's Air Force Base where the Palestinian presidential plane coming from Togo had landed.

The darkness of night made it difficult to discern the topography of the place, and some Palestinian delegates would need days before discovering that the Camp David Retreat was in the middle of thick woods atop a 1200 meter high mountain range.

The Presidential Retreat at Camp David is an extension of the White House. The idea of a retreat came months after the United States got involved in World War II. President Franklin Roosevelt instructed his aides to search for a retreat in the rural areas around Washington, and to take into consideration - as the official papers of the Retreat say- that it provide suitable security, ensured communication with the White House, and a fresh and cool climate as an escape from Washington's stifling summer heat and killer humidity.

A site called "Hi-Catoctin" was chosen, one of three leisure camps established by the American Department of Interior in the years 1937-39. Over 40,000 dunums in the region of Catoctin Hills would be transformed into public parks. About 500,000 feet of forest wood, especially oak wood, were used to build guesthouses in the parks, in an area 90 minutes away from Washington by car. Upon Roosevelt's selection of "Hi-Catoctin", two other parks were added for security reasons. There was additional construction for further buildings and facilities before its official inauguration in 1942. Roosevelt named the Retreat "Shangri-La," a name borrowed from Indian legend.

At Shangri-La, Roosevelt held secret meetings with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to coordinate the war effort against the Axis. In 1953, President Eisenhower renamed the Retreat in honor of his grandson David, and it has been known as Camp David since. Eisenhower received there a number of leaders, most prominently, the Soviet Union's Nikita Khrushchev. After this meeting, the expression "the spirit of Camp David" was born, indicating a different approach in dealing with world problems. Since then, American Presidents used the Retreat for unofficial meetings with aides, or to spend time off with family and friends. It was also a place for hosting world officials: Richard Nixon received eleven world leaders there, among them the Soviet Union's Leonid Brezhnev. But the Camp's claim to lasting fame came after President Jimmy Carter invited Egyptian President Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Begin to a trilateral summit in 1978. The summit led to the signing of an accord carrying the Camp's name, and ushered a new beginning in the Middle East.

In Camp David, the Americans created an unreal world, far removed from the chaotic world we live in. Guests staying in the wooden cabins, spread within close proximity in the midst of thick woods, felt like they were living in a beautiful village of extreme tranquility, to the point of boredom. The wooden cabins, which vary in size, are connected by paved trails, and trails covered with fallen tree leaves, ideal for walks. Jumping squirrels and other animals were a familiar sight, and with luck, you could even see a deer leaping from a bush to another.

The cabins at Camp David were named after trees and plants of the surrounding woods. President Arafat stayed at Birch, a two-room cabin with a sitting room and a small balcony. Israel's Begin stayed there during the 1978 Summit, and it was also the cabin where -as President Clinton told President Arafat - Clinton's mother stayed during her visits to the

Retreat. Clinton himself stayed at the largest and grandest of the cabins, Aspen. Barak's cabin, Dogwood, was located between Birch and Aspen. Committee meetings were held at Holly, Sadat's former cabin. There is also Maple, Rosebud and Laurel, to name a few. The distance between the cabins is short, one could get around by walking a few minutes; but the preferred means of transportation were golf carts and bicycles.

The Camp has all the facilities imaginable: A gym, a swimming pool, tennis, basketball and volleyball courts. You can also play ping-pong, video games, or shoot pool. There is even a horseshoe set, set up at the request of George Bush who enjoyed the Texas pastime of throwing a horseshoe around a short wooden stick. Finally, there were also large golf courses near the Camp's helipad.

The Camp is under the direct supervision of U.S Navy personnel, who are heavily deployed at the gates surrounding the Camp. Marines provide the security for the Camp, thus there is no need to lock your cabin door after you leave. At Camp David you can also see the latest Hollywood films in the small movie theater. Actually, Camp David could be a good setting for a romantic movie. One can also borrow a movie and watch it in one's cabin, which is equipped with a VCR and a 70-channel TV set.

In this unrealistic world and ideal village, the Americans wanted to fashion a new reality for the Middle East. In response to the American mindset that often tends to distance itself from traditional patterns of politics, they believed that a place like Camp David created suitable conditions for hosting complicated negotiations.

The Americans laid down the rules of the game. The rules came in various forms to provide what they felt was in the best interest of the task at hand. The first of these was dictated by the nature of the place: There was no place here for suits and ties, which was no problem for Abu Ammar. Casual clothing dominated. It seems that the Americans assumed that distance from formalities could break down barriers between negotiators.

Further, the nature of daily life in the "village" of Camp David, provided negotiators with a great deal of time for meeting. Meals were served at a specific time in a small restaurant. When dinner was an official affair (in the presence of the three leaders), the White House staff arranged the seating around three tables in a small hall. This allowed delegation members to mingle and chat informally. Other activities in the "village" also provided opportunities for unofficial meetings. One may meet Madeleine Albright jogging on one of the trails, you may also find Bill Clinton, or Danny Yatom, Barak's Chief of Staff, working out on the machine next to you in the gym. The American hosts also attempted to build social relations between negotiators: Albright once invited delegates to a movie, and delegates were also invited to play a basketball game. As none of the Palestinian delegates showed up, the Israelis ended up playing with the Marines.

But the American theory of "no ties" at Camp David 2000 would not have the same effect as in Camp David '78. In the first instance, members of the Egyptian and Israeli delegations did not know each other personally. In the second, most members of the Palestinian and Israeli delegations knew each other through long years of negotiations. In addition, the overlapping nature of the Palestinian and Israeli entities imposes relations that are different from relations between any other Arab and Israeli negotiators.

On the other hand, the rules of the game as identified by the Americans, aimed at protecting the negotiations by imposing the utmost degree of media blackout. There was only one telephone for each delegation, and external calls were rarerly transferred to delegation members. The only official source of information was a White House spokesman, and sometimes a State Department spokesman, who both held daily press conferences at a press center 30 minutes away from Camp David where they said nothing. Although the Israeli

delegation was deliberately leaking a lot of news, most of what appeared in the Arab, Israeli, and international press had nothing to do at all with what was in fact happening at the Camp. The two sides attempted to score points through American TV networks by sending their “heavy weights” to Washington. President Arafat sent Dr. Hanan Ashrawi to the American capital, while Barak sent the Speaker of the Kenesset, and his Absorption Minister to take part in numerous TV debates to win over American public opinion. Ashrawi performed very well in them.

Palestinian and Israeli legal advisors and experts stayed at the buildings where press conferences were being held. These buildings belong to the American Federal Emergency Board and are used for training volunteer fire brigades. Two or three of these experts were allowed to travel daily to Camp David to meet with their delegations. But they were banned from touring the Retreat, and had to return to their residence at a certain time. The team of Palestinian experts played an important and vital role in the negotiations. It consisted of maps, land, and settlements experts, and of a group of astute young lawyers who had finally found an opportunity to present the work they had been preparing for two years. They were ready to present in minutes information requested from them, legal opinions, historical quotations, working papers, responses to Israeli arguments, Palestinian supporting documents, and arguments on various issues, and the necessary maps to refute Israeli claims, before the American President in many cases; and in a manner indicating a qualitative jump in the Palestinian negotiating effort.

In addition to these strict rules, the host laid down a work format. There were extended committee meetings or meetings that include two persons from each party, or meetings between Albright and members of each delegation on their own to discuss a specific issue. They also relied on informal, direct contacts among members of the American team and members of the two delegations to explore positions and issues which were close to agreement. The host was confident that the atmosphere generated by the strict rules and the urgent pressure to achieve something, in addition to the decisive element of the strong presence of the American administration with all its prestige and standing, would impose on negotiators speedy progress toward achieving the hoped for agreement.

But the American hosts did not realize that the reality of the conflict in the Middle East was stronger than the unreal world they created at Camp David. Courtesies among delegation members in food halls and in the trails of the Retreat were disappearing quickly during heated debates in the negotiaton rooms. The hot issues at hand overtook the coolness of Camp David.

Before the start of the Summit on Tuesday afternoon July 11, members of the Palestinian delegation had had time to tour the “village” and explore its topography. They did not expect to be “held” there for 15 days. They also had mixed feelings about being there. It was difficult for them to forget that they were against the 1978 Camp David accords. Coming to this Retreat, living in the cabins that recorded the names of their previous guests, was cause for reflection and remembrance of important historical events in the Palestinian journey.

There were those who call for a reevaluation of those accords, and the whole political project they engendered. But no one could argue with the fact that these accords were the start of a period of Arab schisms, chief among them the departure of Egypt -with all its qualitative weight and irreplaceable historical importance- from the Arab corner; until it returned to it under Hossni Mubarak.

When the helicopter carrying President Clinton landed on Tuesday afternoon, July 11, the curtain was about to be raised on a new act in the Palestinian – Israeli conflict.

The Third Paper: The Search for an Honest Broker

President Franklin Roosevelt, one of the most prominent American presidents of the 20th century, once said: “The American President should be the best actor in the United States.”

When an observer has a chance to see Bill Clinton in action, he realizes that the current American President embodies Roosevelt’s phrase, and that he realizes its precise meaning. Here, competent acting skills have nothing to do with what is real and what is fake. It is essentially the ability to convince, communicate, and exert influence, in a society where the individual has a distinguished place, and in an atmosphere in which the image of the politician – packaged by public relations experts targeting customers– plays a decisive role. The ability to deliver the desired message and manipulate this image, is vital for the success of American politicians. In this field, Clinton is an exceptional, innate actor. It is also in this field that his Vice President -Now waging an electoral battle against George Bush Jr.for the White House– is weakest. Gore comes across as a boring actor, lacking charisma. He is too serious, and does not laugh easily, and seems nervous and unnatural in front of TV cameras. Bush seems relaxed, and moves naturally, unlike Gore who has also been compared to a robot... Bush, as one high level US politician put it, convinces the American voter that he can be a President who is self-confident, acts naturally, and without nervousness inside the Oval Office.

Watching Clinton during the summit, the impression one gets is that he is a very intelligent person, a hardworker, someone who does not give up easily, someone with a strong memory, someone who breaks barriers easily, and with overwhelming charisma. Behind all this we can see a wide cultural background, numerous human interests, and a relentless interest in a wide range of issues. Clinton would carry his own tray at the Laurel Restaurant, fill his plate from the buffet, and sit –as he twice did- with some members of the Palestinian delegation having dinner on the restaurant’s balcony. And with ease, the American President would start a conversation, moving from one topic to another. He spoke with great interest about the completion of the human genetic map. He would say: In a few years, every pregnant woman who enters the hospital will take with her when she leaves her child’s genetic map. The map would, for example, show the mother if her daughter is a candidate for breast cancer when she is 35 years-old, and the map would provide a list of medical advice to avoid the illness. Clinton would then discuss -in response to a question- his wife’s Hilary ‘s chances in the New York Senate race. He would use detailed figures to explain her chances. He would then answer with a short laugh, a question about the film in which he acted, shown at a White House’s annual correspondents dinner: Americans love a President who can make them laugh.

Clinton, who breaks barriers with everyone, would cleverly state his clear political markings. He would speak about a trip to the Balkans after its emergence from the wars, and of the impressions he got after meeting people there, and their expectations for peace and development. He spoke about his decision to open the door for trade between the US and Vietnam, so that the chapter haunting many Americans could finally be closed. He also spoke about his relationship with foreign former statesmen and of his vision of the international situation in the new century.

These prominent characteristics of the American President’s personality, which were clearly visible to the Palestinian delegation, connected him with President Arafat, with whom he shared a special relationship. It is a relationship that began on the historic day of September 13, 1993 when Yasser Arafat a “terrorist leader” just days before, entered in his military uniform and famous “Kuffiyah” the White House South Lawn to sign the Oslo Accord. The relationship grew over the next seven years of Oslo, and grew stronger during the tenure of

Benjamin Netanyahu, and in particular during the Wye River talks which went on for 10 consecutive days, giving the two leaders the opportunity to get to know one another.

Perhaps Clinton, the son of the Sixties who avoided military service in Vietnam and visited Moscow, at a time of turmoil in the universities of the world, had met in Yasser Arafat one of the last legends of the 20th Century. Throughout the tens of hours spent together, Clinton listened to President Arafat's explaining of the Palestinian narrative with all its suffering and aspirations. A narrative told by a man who had become its symbol to the eyes of the world.

The Palestinians saw in Clinton, who confronted Netanyahu and effectively contributed to his fall, and who addressed the Palestinian National Council at a rare historical moment; a person who could listen and understand. Perhaps because they suffered, and still suffer as a result of what they see as complete bias towards Israel by members of the US Peace Team. The Palestinians were betting on a pre-supposed objectivity by Clinton, or that is what they were convincing themselves of. A Palestinian delegate turned out to be half joking when he said: "We are all alone, the Americans will do as they please with us now" ..

That night, President Clinton left for the G-8 Summit in Okinawa. The Palestinians were clinging to any sign of hope, a sign of the existence of an honest broker. But, of course, no one was under the illusion that Bill Clinton had become an enthusiastic supporter of the Palestinian cause, or a member of a solidarity committee with the Palestinian people. After all, he is the product of the American establishment and a hostage of its policies and strategies, built on what serves its interests, without taking into consideration justice, or rights. An establishment affected by the strong influence of the Israeli lobby, that provocatively flexes its muscles in the corridors of the American administration.

It was clear from the outset that the American President was determined to succeed, and that he had prepared well for the "exam." He read his lessons and did his homework. The Summit represented an additional "intensive course" for him on the minutiae of the Palestinian – Israeli conflict, making him aware of the difference between Kufr Aqeb and Wadi Al-Jouz, and of the organic relationship between the Al-Musrarah and Sheikh Jarrah Quarters, and between Salah Al Deen Street and Jerusalem's Old City. It was clear that Clinton did not want to waste a minute, and that he wanted to start work immediately. At the inauguration session, Clinton emphasized his determination to work intensively. He tried to propose meetings to discuss water, economy and other issues, that would be held on different levels than that of the Summit, in buildings that hosted the experts. But this proposal was quickly abandoned after a Palestinian objection which saw a necessity to focus first on the major issues of Jerusalem, refugees, land, borders and security. The American President also tried in his speech to create a tempting material link between the Camp David and Okinawa Summits, promising huge financial support from the G-8 for any agreement the Palestinian and Israeli sides reached.

During the Summit, Clinton followed a pattern based on exercising his personal influence on a number of levels. There were daily, separate meetings with Arafat and Barak. Often, in one day, Clinton would meet several times with one or both leaders. Clinton also used to attend part of the meetings of the three Committees: Refugees, borders/land, and Jerusalem. From the start, Clinton made it clear that he preferred that Jerusalem, because of its sensitivity and complexity, be discussed at the leaders' level.

At a later stage in the Summit, Clinton resorted to summoning delegates from each Committee to Aspen to discuss their files. He repeated this tactic intensively during the last two days of the Summit. He once participated in a discussion which lasted from 11 pm until 5 am over the issues of security in the presence of two delegates from each side. Clinton did not seek to hold meetings for the three leaders, except in the first night of the Summit, and to

discuss procedural issues, and also the morning of the last day of the Summit to agree on the content of a statement declaring its failure.

In these meetings, Clinton listened to the views of the two parties, discussed details, and sometimes, tried to direct the discussion. During a meeting of the land and border Committee, Clinton tried to push the Palestinians to discuss a map put forward by the Israelis about their vision for the territories they want to annex and their security concerns. Abu Ala' rejected the map, and Clinton left the meeting angry.

Ultimately, the American President was practicing his role according to the traditions of American political work vis-à-vis the Palestinian – Israeli conflict which can be defined in three points:

- 1- Washington exercises its role according to the needs, requirements and concerns of the current Israeli government. From day one, members of the Palestinian delegation were constantly subjected to the tired refrain of Barak's coalition problems, and that "An agreement should be reached or Barak's government falls". The refrain was changed in the last days of the summit to "An agreement should be reached or Barak will form a national unity government". These statements were repeated in a provocative manner which made a Palestinian delegate ask angrily: "Is this a summit for salvaging the peace process, or to rescue Barak's government?".
- 2- Washington accepts the main Israeli demands as facts that cannot be discussed. Clinton and his team did not refute any major Israeli request in any issue for negotiations, and if Clinton attempts to intervene, it will be to make a secondary amendment which does not change the main principle.
- 3- The American Administration demands from the Palestinian and Israeli sides equal amounts of "flexibility" and "concessions." Any Israeli step should be met by a Palestinian step. By doing so, it ignores the fact that the Palestinians are the victims of aggression by Israel, and that the land the Israelis are offering to give up, is Palestinian land occupied by military force.

These three affirmed rules led to three facts defined as follows:

- 1- The American Administration destroyed at the Summit, the terms of reference of the peace process: UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, and the principle of land for peace. References defined by the US Administration when it launched the peace process in Madrid in 1991. The American broker did not intervene, even once, to caution the Israeli side that what they demanded to keep from the Palestinian territories contradicted the references of the Peace Process. The Americans accepted these demands and considered them a basis, if not a ceiling, for negotiations.
- 2- The American team was committed to Henry Kissinger's infamous pledge which obliges the American Administration not to present or take any positions on the Arab – Israeli conflict without prior coordination with Israel. No proposal was presented to the Palestinian delegation by the American side that was not presented to Israel first. In the two instances in which the American team presented ideas during the summit, they were rejected on the spot by the Palestinians. President Arafat refused to call them American ideas, and said to the Americans: "Excuse me, these are not American ideas, they are Israeli ideas I received unofficially from the Israelis hours before I received them from you."
- 3- From the first day, the American team directed its pressure at the Palestinian delegation. Although the Israeli delegation backed down from positions it presented during the Stockholm negotiations, there was no attempt [by the Americans] to exercise any pressure

on the Israelis. They were treated like a spoiled baby that should be pleased. The Palestinian side had to provide protection to Barak's government, considered by the Americans as a valuable strategic investment.

Regarding the more sensitive issue of the holy places in Jerusalem, the American position adopted the Israeli position. The Americans attempted to find a deceptive legal framework, without giving much attention to Arab, Islamic or Christian sensitivities in this regard, and without realizing the explosive nature of the Israeli arguments.

Very often, members of the Palestinian delegation felt that they were negotiating with a united Israeli - American delegation. In light of the insignificant roles of Madeleine Albright and Sandy Berger (whose only contribution to the summit was his demand that Jews be allowed to pray at the Aqsa Mosque.), the fingerprints of Dennis Ross, were clear on every American document and approach. Some members of the American team even used to sit grim-faced when negotiations fell into a crisis, and stopped returning greetings by members of the Palestinian delegation, in a behavior suited to primary school students, rather than to officials directing the policy of a country that leads the world.

The Palestinians went to Camp David expecting to find an honest broker... But none appeared. The Palestinians then lowered their expectations, and were content to look for a mere broker in the woods of Camp David... But none could be found.

The Fourth Paper: Peace According to the Criteria of the Gallup Institute

“They are not ready for peace. Didn’t I tell you?” This is what President Yasser Arafat told his delegation, more than once, days after the start of the Camp David Summit. The Israeli positions affirmed Palestinian fears expressed by Abu Ammar when he tried to convince Washington not to issue invitations to a summit.

It was difficult for any participant at Camp David to expect for a minute that the Israeli delegation was ready to take the big risk that would lead to the historic reconciliation ending a conflict that has entered its second century. The Israelis came to Camp David with their mythology, arrogance of power, and the mosaic of their internal politics. It was very clear that the minds and attention of the Israeli delegation were somewhere else. Opinion polls from the Gallup Institute, statements by party leaders, and articles by Israeli media commentators were more important to some in the Israeli delegation than reaching a historic peace agreement. Their view of the issues would expand or narrow depending on petty calculations and personal interests. Ballot box considerations overshadowed peace considerations.

In short, there were no peacemakers among the Israeli delegation. There was a group of local politicians looking to protect their seats in the Knesset. That was reflected in the way the Israeli negotiator operated. It became a familiar thing for a Palestinian delegate to listen to his Israeli counterpart complain about Barak’s performance and positions. The word “moderate” became an accusation that every Israeli negotiator tried to avoid so that his popularity would not go down in opinion polls.

After Camp David, some of these negotiators gloated about what they “said, and affirmed, and made clear to Arafat.” While at Camp David they were sitting like freshmen listening to lectures by Yasser Arafat in politics, history, and peacemaking. Another negotiator, unable to hide his glee, attacked the Palestinians for missing the chance to reach an agreement at Camp David. Reading into the Israeli negotiating performance at Camp David one comes with three observations:

- 1- Barak came to Camp David dreaming of reaching a peace that was 100 % Israeli. His positions, proposals and maps did not show the minimum understanding of Palestinian demands and rights. The Israeli proposal affirmed that the Israeli establishment was still steeped in its mythologies and occupation mentality. They proved that they were still unable to deal with the Palestinians as peace partners.
- 2- In their proposals the Israelis failed to refer to any international references. They launched their proposals with Israeli demands without any interest in mentioning any international resolutions, especially the resolutions supposed to be the very basis of the Peace Process.
- 3- The Israeli negotiators excused themselves from real negotiations. True the Palestinian-Israeli negotiating sessions lasted tens of hours and most of the issues were discussed, but every new sentence of the Israel position would come through American lips and papers.

What was strange was that the Israelis thought they could, with the support of the Americans, impose their peace on the Palestinians. It was strange because the Israeli security establishment was presenting the political leadership with a different assessment. Prior to the Summit many of Barak’s envoys heard directly from Yasser Arafat what the Palestinian

positions were. Two weeks prior to the Summit, Barak asked Arafat to meet with Shlomo Ben Ami, who was to present Arafat with the Israeli positions on the issues of the final status. For four hours Arafat listened to Ben Ami, he listened to the details that, according to Arafat, made him unable to sleep that night. Arafat was sure once again that the Israelis were not serious and were not ready. In that meeting which took place in the city of Nablus, Ben Ami proposed that the issue of Jerusalem be postponed for two years at which Arafat interrupted him saying: "Not even for two hours".

Another Israeli envoy visited Arafat in Ramallah during that time. The envoy heard the Palestinian red lines. It was Yossi Sarid, head of the left wing Meretz party who had just resigned from Barak's government. He came to affirm that Barak was serious, and to tell the Palestinians not to expect to get 100 % of their demands. All the Israeli envoys would say that Barak had a surprise but he would reveal it only at the Summit.

Throughout the Camp David sessions, the Palestinians waited for Barak to pull the rabbit out of the hat. What they got was the following:

1- REFUGEES:

The Refugee Committee was the most difficult, strangest, and most unsuccessful. In this Committee the Palestinian vision clashed hard with the Israeli vision.

In the absence of seriousness on the part of Israel, the discussion revolved mostly around the past, not the present or the future. The clash and difference between the two visions goes back to the 1948 Palestinian *Nakba*, or catastrophe, to its very roots.

It was the most difficult Committee because it was the reality Committee, ruled by history, and because it placed Israel at the center of the Palestinian question. It placed Israel in front of her direct victims, in front of the witnesses to its crimes.

It was strange because Israeli continued to deny its crime. There is a complete denial of the *Nakba* and of the Israeli responsibility in causing it. It was the Palestinian negotiator who must be convinced that there were no massacres or campaigns of terror in 1948, expulsions and house demolitions. And that the Arab countries should be blamed for the *Nakba*, who according to Israel convinced the Palestinians to leave their homes and wait for liberation !!.. When the Israelis were presented with the memoirs and the testimonies of their own generals, they rejected them.

It was the most unsuccessful Committee because it did not move one inch forward. Israel refused to take moral and legal responsibility for the *Nakba*. There is only a willingness to express sorrow over what befell the Palestinians as a result of the Arab-Israeli war of 1948. And because talk of the right of return was a taboo for Israel, tantamount to a declaration of a war of destruction on Israel, there was a rejection of any talk of putting a timetable for the implementation of their return. All that Israel would discuss was compensation for the refugees, not from its pocket, but from the pocket of the international community, and part of the funds would be used to compensate Jews who came to Israel from Arab countries. Israel only committed itself to allowing several thousands to return within ten years through "family reunification" and "humanitarian cases."

2- LAND, BORDERS AND SECURITY:

These issues would sometimes be discussed in one Committee and sometimes in two Committees: Borders and Security. In those two Committees, Israel proved that it had not let go of the mentality of occupation and control. Their ridiculous theory of "the danger coming from the East" was the basis for their demand for a strong presence for them. Their presence would be in different forms starting with bases, then patrols, and finally, early warning

stations along the border and in the Jordan Valley. Further, Israel would impose strict restrictions on the military personnel and capabilities of the State of Palestine.

The Israelis conjured up an outside threat to justify the use of means for confronting that threat. Without attempting to deal with the requirements for a peace that would not allow danger to emerge in the first place, from Palestinian towns, villages and camps.

Here, the provocative Israeli maps emerged. The Palestinian side refused to deal with them. One map showed an annexation by Israel of about 10 % of the West Bank, another map showed an annexation of about 13.5 %. The focus was on three huge settlement blocks in the north, center and south of the West Bank. These settlements were fattened, their area expanded, and they were connected to each other and to Israel by large areas of Palestinian land and also controlled Palestinian water resources in the West Bank.

The Israelis were coming to cement their gains of the 1967 War, not to make a peace that would erase the effects of that war. They came to re-structure the occupation and legitimize it, instead of looking for a language of dialogue with the neighbor and partner that addressed life and co-existence.

3- JERUSALEM:

Barak, his ministers and members of his delegation borrowed the hats of the most extreme of the religious Jews, and came wearing them to the Summit.

Suddenly, the secularist began speaking the language of the religious, which even some Israeli rabbis do not use. Suddenly, the Israeli demand to allow Jews to pray in the Haram Al-Sharif became an essential Israeli demand, and Israeli sovereignty over the Haram was an issue that could not be discussed. So this was the “rabbit” that the magician Barak promised to surprise Summit participants with.

What was of the utmost danger was that the American officials, without hesitation or thought to the effects of such a demand, adopted the position. Not for a second did they realize they were toying with explosives that could ignite the Middle East and the Islamic World. Nor did they try to understand that in reality they were adding a religious character to the conflict in a manner that would lead it to an inevitable conflagration

On the Jerusalem issue, as one could assess from the American ideas and Israeli proposals, three factors guide Israel’s future vision on Jerusalem.

- 1- Israel’s insistence on sovereignty over the Haram Al-Sharif is consistent in all-Israeli proposals that took different forms. To face the Palestinian position regarding this issue, American legal experts began revealing their “talents” and presenting their “solutions” which were at times ridiculous, and always drew Palestinian condemnation. After the Palestinian rejected Israel’s control over the Haram, the Americans came up with the idea that an international committee comprised of the Security Council and Morocco (Head of the Jerusalem Committee), would give the State of Palestine custody of the Haram with Israel retaining sovereignty over it. Then the American “legal genius” came up with the “vertical sovereignty” formula. Palestinians would have sovereignty on what is over the land were the Haram stands, and Israel would have sovereignty under it..
- 2- Israel was keen on getting rid of the Arab residents of Jerusalem while keeping Palestinian land. In a best-case scenario, Israel would create harsh living conditions, forcing them to leave.

3- Proposals by Israel and the United States showed a future Jerusalem that was divided while talk revolved around an open city. The proposals featured the implementation of many systems in the neighborhoods of Jerusalem. For example, the rules that would apply to the Christian Quarter would not apply to Wadi Al Jouz. What would be applicable in Suwwaneh, would not be in the Armenian Quarter. What was proposed was a fragmentation of Jerusalem, especially its Old City, that would fall under conflicting systems causing constant tension. The Americans proposed a special system for the Old City that would fragment it between Palestinian sovereignty over the Muslim and Christian Quarters (as they will be defined by Israel and the US) and Israeli sovereignty over the Armenian and Jewish Quarters, and the Western Wall. The position regarding the Haram would remain as is.

A system close to self-rule in the form of duties, was proposed for the neighborhoods (to be defined by Israel) inside Jerusalem. These included Sheikh Jarrah, Suwwaneh, Tur, Salah El-Deen Street, Damascus Gate, Ras Al-Amoud and Silwan. Palestinian sovereignty would extend over neighborhoods outside Jerusalem (again according to Israeli definition) like Issaweyeh, Shu'fat, Beit Hanina, Qalandia, Turi, Um Tuba, West Sawahrah, Kufr Aqab, Semiramis; most of these areas are not part of pre-1967 Jerusalem anyway. There would be special arrangements to keep the city an open city. A special regime (to be named later) would be placed on the Old City, it would include a "sovereign compound" for President Arafat and the State of Palestine near the Haram in the Old City. When you draw a picture of Jerusalem out of these proposals, you get a fragmented city falling under Israeli control, that would expel its Arab residents; and a city ruled by tension.

The Israeli delegation and the American peace team coordinated their steps, step-by-step and word-by-word. The Palestinians would see a comedy routine whereby the Americans would announce they would present a new idea, and they wanted negotiators from both sides to consult with their leaders on. In all instances, the Israeli negotiators would come back with an Israeli acceptance after conducting "consultations."

At times, the Israeli-American goal was very clear. There was an attempt to pass an agreement that would return parts of the occupied territories, not all, and would reserve for Israel security privileges on border areas. An agreement that provided a "solution" to the refugee issue through compensation and naturalization, or emigration to Western countries. And of course, the State of Palestine would have functional responsibilities in Jerusalem, and a "control" of the Haram. A fall back strategy was to propose the same agreement, with a postponement of the Jerusalem clauses.

Israel and the United States wanted to fabricate a "solution", a solution incapable of a minute's survival, and cash in with a "golden signature" from the Palestinians that would put an end to the conflict and give final legitimacy to Israel.

The plan was to close the Palestinian deal at the lowest price. But it was clear that the American and Israeli teams needed several days after the start of the Summit to realize what it meant to face the man named Yasser Arafat.

The Fifth Paper: The Summit According to Jerusalem Time

In going to Camp David, Yasser Arafat was aware that he was entering a difficult battle, an extremely difficult one.

During the long journey from Togo to Washington, Abu Ammar was not able to get enough sleep. He was re-thinking the situation, evaluating the different elements and factors and re-considering his calculations. The final outcome, according to all possible scenarios, led to one conclusion: There would be intransigent Israeli positions at the Summit, coordinated and fully supported by influential circles within the US Administration, especially by the Peace Team. Accordingly, there would be a confrontation.

Yasser Arafat preferred not to clash with the US Administration on a procedural issue such as holding the Summit, saving his strength for the expected clash, brought about by the collusion of American officials with the Israeli position. He realized of course, that in the end, he would enter a battle against the US position on the home turf of the only superpower of a unipolar world. He also realized he was coming from a divided Arab World, unable to even hold a Summit, and from an environment lacking the sufficient immunity to withstand American pressure.

But Yasser Arafat also believed that he was the leader of a nation defending its national rights, and if the battle were imposed upon him, he would not shy from it. He also believed that his pessimistic expectations should not negate the possibility to examine any prospect, no matter how little it was, if it led to progress on the way to achieving an agreement. Therefore, his instructions to his delegation were clear and decisive: "We want a nationalistic and honorable solution in accordance with our positions." "Listen and discuss, and if you see a door ajar, try to open it. If you see a small opening, try to widen it. I am not optimistic at all, but we are not allowed to waste any opportunities that may achieve the objectives of our people."

From the small room at Birch cabin used for receiving guests, and from the inviting balcony on sunny days, Yasser Arafat led his battle... One of the most difficult battles in his whole life.

His morning started at 9 am, after going to bed at 2, or 3, or 4 or 5 am, depending on how negotiations went. At breakfast, he reviewed papers coming from the Presidential Headquarters (Al-Muntada) in Gaza. The papers included official reports about the general situation in Palestine, in addition to urgent papers requiring his signature or recommendation. Then, he would look at a file comprising tens of papers faxed from the Information and Archive Center of Al-Muntada. They were summaries of the most important material published in the Palestinian, Israeli, Arab and international press that day. His review of these papers would be interrupted to receive delegation members who came for the 9:30 am meeting to prepare for the day's negotiation sessions, and sometimes to present reports about late night negotiation sessions.

When all delegation members left to their negotiation sessions, which would often start between 10 and 11 am, Abu Ammar returned to his news file. What attracted his attention most and gave him satisfaction, was the news of the various popular activities in the Palestinian territories during the Summit, such as demonstrations, sit ins, conferences, etc.. held in support of the delegation.

He would be saddened by reading, sometimes while going through a confrontation at the Summit, a statement by a Palestinian political faction leader decrying “The details of the agreements and understandings reached at Camp David”. He would comment bitterly: “They could, at least have postponed their slander until the end of the Summit”. When he was shown articles praising his positions at the Summit by Arab journalists and media, which had accused him days before the Summit of selling out Jerusalem, he did not show interest and would only say :”May God forgive them.”

In the midst of the piles of paper, he always looked for any news indicating a supporting Arab statement and he would underline it. During the hours of the morning, if there were no meetings with Clinton or Albright, Arafat would sit with members of his delegation who were not assigned negotiations that day. The discussions would go back to decades ago, and reached distant horizons.

Yasser Arafat, sitting with his famous Kuffiyah on the balcony of Birch cabin in Camp David, surrounded from two sides by parts of the Retreat’s woods, realized completely the essence of the historical moment he lived, and knew the dimensions and size of the role he was performing. Yasser Arafat knew the huge burden of the mandate he was bearing, and the trust he should preserve and fulfill, as a leader of a people whose destiny and source of glory was to protect and preserve the holy places on their land.

He realized the responsibility of entering a battle in the name of the Palestinian people, Arab nations, Muslims and Christians. In these bad and difficult times, the Palestinians had to enter the battle of defending Jerusalem on behalf of all. He had to defend the Holy City that was linked to eternal names starting with the Islamic Caliph Omar Bin Al-Khattab, and ending with Salah Al-Deen Al-Ayyoubi; and he and his people entered the war on their own.

“War battles are much easier”. That is what Yasser Arafat often said in the past, and that is what he re-affirmed at Camp David. “In wars you can know precisely the size of enemy troops, and to a great extent you can predict his next move, and then lead your soldiers to the battle field... These matters are much easier than political and diplomatic battles in which you do not know from where, and when, stabs come.”

Yasser Arafat was not interested in, nor keen to enter a war with the only world power left. Throughout his life, he tried not to enter unnecessary battles, unless they were imposed on him. He did not want to cause harm to what the Palestinians felt was a readiness by Bill Clinton to listen to, and understand, the Palestinian narrative. But Yasser Arafat seemed to have brought with him the essence of his numerous experiences, mixing the courage of the fighter, the wits of the politician, and the wisdom of the experienced statesman. He did not want a clash, but he did not hesitate for a minute to put up a strong defense, or to enter a difficult battle, a seemingly impossible one, against the American position, on its home turf.

Although the course of the negotiations confirmed every day the accuracy of his analysis, this was a cause for resentment. “We need a solution... And our people need a solution that puts an end to their suffering, but of course not any solution,” he would say.

Members of the delegation would return at midday to present their reports on the morning sessions of the negotiation committees that would resume in the afternoon. The evening and night hours were the most active on Yasser Arafat’s agenda. It included sometimes going to the Laurel Restaurant to attend an official dinner. He had found two colleagues who liked working during the night: Bill Clinton and Ehud Barak. Most of the Arafat – Clinton meetings were held during the night, and the longest and stormiest sessions of the negotiation committees also started late at night and ended in the early hours of the next day.

At Camp David, Yasser Arafat realized that he was confronting a plot which aimed to destroy the essence of Palestinian national rights, and he did not miscalculate. Facts proved that the title of the plot was Jerusalem, whether by attempting to impose a solution that did not make it once again Palestinian and Arab, or by trying to postpone it. To defend Jerusalem and Palestinian rights (land and refugees), Yasser Arafat built three lines of defense:

1- The Palestinian People:

In the face of an American campaign of “conciliation” and “intimidation” to “salvage” Barak’s government, Arafat reminded his American host: “You forget the Palestinian people.”

Yasser Arafat reminded the American officials that there was a Palestinian entity, with a government, a council of ministers, and National, Central, and Legislative Councils, as well as a vicious opposition; and above all, an alert people unanimously agreeing on major principles. This people who “accepted to make many sacrifices for the sake of peace, but were not prepared for more concessions”. He reminded them that to be barricaded behind “the distinction of accountability, democracy and opposition” was not Israel’s monopoly. They said to him “You should be flexible, an agreement should be reached or Barak’s government will fall.” He answered: “But if we accept less than our rights, and if we give up Jerusalem, the entire Palestinian system will collapse.

In a decisive meeting with president Clinton on July 19, Abu Ammar said: “The Palestinian leader who can give up Jerusalem has not been born yet. I will not betray the trust, and I will not betray my people.” Arafat added: “I will not grant occupation the legitimacy to continue... But it will not last forever. It is not possible to continue with the imposition of military force, and South Africa is an example.”

He reminded his American host of the rules of Palestinian policy: “I am an elected President according to a clear platform. Our leadership bodies have laid down our political line. Our people will not accept less than their rights as stated by international resolutions and international legality.” He warned a number of times: “I told you, if the Summit fails, you will make nations lose hope for peace. Do not push our people towards despair.”

2- Rights, history and International legality:

Yasser Arafat’s voice would start quietly, and grow louder when his American hosts raised ideas which demanded Palestinian concessions over Jerusalem and land.

He said in a meeting with Mrs. Albright: “If they, Israelis, use the argument of history, we have our ancient history that refutes their allegations, and confirm our rights.” He often indulged in long explanations with his American host about lessons of religion and history, about the Aqsa and denying Israeli allegations regarding the potential existence of the Temple underneath it. He asked: “After the occupation of Jerusalem in 1967, Moshe Dayan, considered by Israelis a hero, prevented Jews from praying in the Haram, so why are they now demanding to pray there?.” He also said: “Remember, we only speak about 22 % of the land of Palestine. We did what is requested from us to provide the conditions for peace, and now it is Israel’s turn.”

He would always say: “I want a peace based on the implementation of Resolution 242, as it was implemented on the Egyptian, and Jordanian fronts. The Resolution must be implemented in full on the Palestinian territories.” He asked sharply: “Why did you not ask Egypt during Camp David 78 to give up an inch of Sinai, and you now request from us to give up our land?. You, who laid down the reference for the peace process and identified it in

Resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of land for peace. Do you want to abandon it now?”

Arafat used to respond with historical facts and testimonies to the argumentation of Israeli mythology. He resorted to international legality to confront attempts to arrive at malformed settlements and solutions. He gave lessons to some American team members who were infected by a sensitivity to mere mention of principles and rights. They proclaimed a pragmatism that made them in fact understand only the logic of bazaar retailers.

3- The Arab, Islamic and Christian Dimensions:

Throughout the days of the Summit which focused mainly on Jerusalem, Yasser Arafat explained to his American hosts the various dimensions of the issue. He explained to the American Peace Team the overwhelming strategic threats of the recommendations they raised with their President and presented to him.

He stressed: “Jerusalem is not a Palestinian city only, it is an Arab, Islamic and Christian one. If I am going to take a decision on Jerusalem, I have to consult with the Sunnis and the Shiites and all Arab countries. I have to consult with many countries starting with Iran and Pakistan, passing by Indonesia and Bangladesh and ending with Nigeria. Do you expect that anybody would agree on giving legality to the allegations of the Israelis, and giving up Jerusalem and the Aqsa mosque?.” He gave lessons in the history of religions and the history of Palestine to elaborate: “Do you want me to sell the Christians to Israel, and hand over the Armenians to her?”. He once looked at Gamal Hilal, President Clinton’s interpreter, an Egyptian Copt with US citizenship, and said, “What would my friend [the Coptic] Pope Shenoudah say if I did this?”.

In one of the meetings, Arafat warned against the consequences of the American-supported Israeli arguments regarding Al-Aqsa Mosque and Jerusalem. “These arguments are explosives which will set off massive fires in the region and the whole world. Beware, do not repeat these arguments, they are dangerous... Dangerous and destructive. Do you want me to throw the region into an age of new religious conflict?”. At the same meeting, Arafat concluded his long explanation attack with an indicative phrase: “If I cannot liberate Jerusalem and raise the Palestinian flag there, one day someone else will liberate it, and raise his country’s flag there.”

While Yasser Arafat was mounting his defense lines, he was carrying out an aggressive, three-pronged strategy regarding Jerusalem.

1. During the negotiation process, the impossibility of reaching any agreement that did not deal with Jerusalem was affirmed. On a number of occasions, Clinton expressed his understanding of this logic.
2. The idea of Abu Dis as the capital was dropped at an early stage when it was affirmed that the Jerusalem the Palestinian delegation spoke about was mainly the Old City, its gates, the neighborhoods of Musrarah, Sheikh Jarrah, and Salah Al-Deen street, as well as Al-Suwwanah, Wadi Al-Jouz, Al-Tour, Silwan and Ras Al-Amoud. Therefore, at the end of the Summit, talk about concentrating the Presidency of the Palestinian State in Abu Dis stopped, and started to focus on the Old City... That ridiculous idea, written about by journalists and talked about by Israeli politicians for a long time was dropped forever.
3. The Palestinian delegation rejected any fragmentation of the issue of the Holy City, emphasizing the Palestinian position insisting on the restoration of Palestinian sovereignty

over it. There was a concern frequently expressed by Abu Ammar that any solution should not cause further hardship to the citizens of Jerusalem, who had suffered since 1967 and still do, from the miseries of occupation.

With these defense lines and these negotiation tactics, Yasser Arafat was waging the battle for defending Jerusalem.

In effect, the battle started on the third day of the Summit when Mrs. Albright officially notified a number of Palestinian delegates that the American team was about to present a paper stating its vision regarding points of agreement and disagreement between the Palestinian and Israeli positions (this is a classic negotiation exercise Palestinian and Israeli negotiators got used to, although there was a view that it is necessary only when positions become closer). Albright said the paper would deal with all issues. "In regards to Jerusalem, we will deal with it afterwards." When Abu Ammar was informed of this, he had his first explosion of the Summit. His fears were represented in attempts to postpone the issue of Jerusalem, and his reaction was: "We will not accept this, let's pack and leave."

The Palestinian position was quickly conveyed to the American side. "We reject any ideas or papers that do not address the issue of Jerusalem, and the Palestinian delegation will leave Camp David immediately." The American response was quick, Jerusalem would be in the paper.

The second crisis was set off by the promised paper on July 14. It was a bad paper by all standards, indicating a lack of honesty on the part of the American Peace Team, and a deliberate distortion of Palestinian positions to President Clinton. The paper distorted the Palestinian positions on the main issues, while adding titles presented by the American team to bridge gaps in positions between the two sides. The paper was Israeli in full, especially in regards to adopting the municipal solution in Jerusalem, and raising the idea of Abu Dis as capital.

A Palestinian response letter was immediately prepared and presented to Mrs. Albright showing how the proposed American ideas contradicted the terms of reference of the peace process, their distortion of Palestinian positions, and of the official American positions on Jerusalem. The letter was decisive and clear-cut. The American answer was quick: The paper, they said, was no longer standing. And Clinton told Arafat, the paper "is null and void." The Palestinian team won another round in a hard war of attrition.

Following 12 hour marathon negotiations convened at the request of President Clinton in the early morning of July 16, and including negotiators from each side; the picture of the Israeli stance regarding Jerusalem became clear. At that moment, Yasser Arafat felt the necessity for practical negotiations on one hand, and political and historical negotiations on the other hand, to affirm the Palestinian position. He sent a letter to President Clinton re-affirming the principles of the Palestinian position. The most important element in the letter was the affirmation that achieving any final agreement was dependent on the inclusion of a solution to the issues of Jerusalem and refugees, according to international resolutions.

The Palestinian delegation felt that the coordinated and unified American – Israeli negotiation tactics sought to close the files which Israel could gain from, such as the land issue, which Israel demanded to annex large proportions of, and the security issue where Israel demanded numerous exceptions. This tactic also deliberately postponed discussion of issues Israel wants marginalized or delayed, and where it feels it has to deliver, such as the issues of Jerusalem and refugees.

Attempts to reach a partial agreement were falling apart. But the biggest crisis was yet to come. The time of Clinton's departure from Camp David to attend the summit of industrial countries in Okinawa, Japan, was getting closer. A whole week passed without achieving any progress and, therefore, the Americans started to speed up their moves to measure the possibilities of achieving an agreement.

On July 17, in a private meeting, President Clinton presented President Arafat ideas he read from a paper. Abu Ammar wrote them down in his notebook. Most of the ideas were dedicated to Jerusalem, while one line spoke of reaching "A satisfactory solution to the refugee issue", and the annexation of 9% of Palestinian land to Israel. Regarding the Holy City, the paper addressed Palestinian sovereignty on the Islamic and Christian Quarters. The Armenian and Jewish Quarters would be annexed to Israel. As for the Aqsa Mosque, the sovereignty would be Israeli, while the UN Security Council and Morocco granted custody to the Palestinian State to administer it. The ideas included a superficial treatment of the future of the remaining neighborhoods of Jerusalem. The paper talked about Palestinian sovereignty in the suburbs, and "a special regime" in the internal neighborhoods, where Palestinians would have functional jurisdiction. The ideas also contained a paragraph about the necessity to declare an end to the conflict between the two sides.

Abu Ammar's response was decisive: "They are Israeli ideas, I received them unofficially as Israeli ideas from the Israeli delegation two hours ago." The American team headed by Clinton was thus officially announcing their full adoption of the Israeli ideas. The summit was taking another course.

Some of the Israeli delegates believed the American ideas would pass, and that Ehud Barak agreed to them with an American belief that a Palestinian approval could be obtained. But on the other side, that rainy night witnessed an end to the remaining hopes and illusions of a possibility of reaching an agreement. The American and Israeli delegations were melting into one.

That night, Abu Ammar called his delegation for an emergency meeting, and after discussing all the ideas, and asked the Americans about some points, a letter was drafted for President Clinton referring to the contradiction of these ideas with the terms of reference of the peace process, and referring to the Palestinian letter signed on July 16 as a suitable basis for negotiation. The Palestinian letter was handed over to the American side at 2 am, July 18. But a telephone call by the Americans at 3 am demanded a specific Palestinian answer. Did the American ideas form a basis for negotiations?

Members of the delegation were summoned again to Birch, President Arafat's cabin. There was no time for a lengthy discussion. It took 30 minutes to draft the political wording of the letter, that would include a decisive stand: "We consider that these ideas do not form a basis for negotiations."

At that time Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat went to Aspen and stood in a room at the entrance translating the content of the letter to Bruce Rydell, vice president of the American National Security Council. The latter's response was: "So it's all over."

But the "greatest actor in the United States" had a different opinion.

The Sixth Paper: A Long American Movie

On his first day in the Oval Office, an American President starts by thinking of the last day of his presidency, which he normally seeks to extend to the maximum eight years allowed by the American constitution. From day one, the American President starts to think of his legacy, and of the eventual publication of his memoirs. In addition, he also starts planning the selection of the place where his memorial library will be located after he departs the White House, its design, and contents.

Still, regardless of how important and influential a President's accomplishments might have on people's lives (in the economy, health care, social security, and civil rights), an accomplishment in foreign policy (winning a war, achieving peace that touches the lives of Americans) remains more attractive since it guarantees the President a place in world history books.

For an ambitious President like President Clinton, what had been achieved during his presidency in terms of an ideal economic situation, unseen since the end of World War, II is not going to be attributed to him only. In addition, his participation in the war and peace efforts in the Balkans and Ireland remained marginal, and lacks the required glow to make it stand out in history books. Since his election to office in 1992, Clinton also suffered from a merciless relationship with the media, which shed additional lights on his relationships with women. The nadir was reached in the Monica Lewinsky affair, which seriously endangered his Presidency. Still, his drive, stubbornness, excellent communications skills, the support he enjoyed from his wife, and an ideal economic situation, provided him with a safety net that enabled him to come out a winner, though a wounded one, from the scandal.

Because of the above, peace in the Middle East became the golden trophy which Clinton dreamt of winning. It is a very attractive prize, since it is related to one of the most intractable problems of the 20th century, and also because it involves the Jews, who not only make up the largest lobby in the US, but also have an important presence in the American political arena. Such a trophy is very tempting to any leader and international politician. It was and still is capable of attracting many of those who dream of it, or at least who dream of getting close to it among world politicians, diplomats, journalists, businessmen; and even crooks.

In addition, there was a historic moment that linked Clinton to the issue of peace and conflict in the Middle East. The moment that witnessed the historic handshake between Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin, as Bill Clinton stood between them, on the White House lawn on a warm September 13, 1993.

That historic handshake did not come as a coincidence. It was in fact carefully planned as was shown in the White House protocol papers distributed to officials from both delegations 24 hours prior to the Declaration of Principles (DOP) signing ceremony. When the issue has to do with photo-ops, Americans leave nothing to chance. Utmost attention is given to the background, the color of the President's suit and tie; and to the whole photo, which could end up in history books. In the protocol papers, there were a few lines that read: President Clinton will extend his arms to bring both Chairman Arafat and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin closer to each other so they may shake hands. This is exactly what happened, despite the feigned hesitancy and reticence of Yitzhak Rabin.

It should be remembered that Clinton and his administration jumped at the last minute on the saddle of a dark horse, which managed an upset victory: The Oslo Agreement, concluded by negotiators of the PLO and the Israeli government. Although the Israelis of the ongoing contacts informed Washington at an early stage, members of the Peace Team at the State Department made light of the issue. They wanted to build the world according to the occasional papers some of them produced while working for a think-tank considered a pillar of the Israeli lobby in the US. Ideas in these papers were based on ruling out any direct role for the PLO, and establishing a limited self-rule in the West Bank and Gaza through encouragement of the local leadership.

No matter how many times the Palestinian delegation, which was negotiating in Washington for two years, affirmed to the American Administration that it was virtually impossible for its plans to succeed, and no matter how many times that delegation announced (nearly in every meeting) that it was the delegation of the PLO, working under PLO directives. Still, State Department strategists continued to stick to their guns. The truth existed only in their papers and documents. Therefore, there were great disappointment and shock when they learned of the success of the Oslo negotiations.

Until then, they were rejecting with an arrogant, and often rude manner proposals presented by the Palestinian delegation during the spring and summer of 1993, which called for sending in forces from the Palestine Liberation Army into Gaza and Jericho to assume responsibility for security as a prelude to its deployment in the rest of the West Bank. The American team were saying: "Forget it!, there is no role for your people in Tunis." They were in for a rude awakening when they later learned that at the time they were arrogantly dismissing such proposals, the Government of Israel was concluding an agreement in Oslo on more serious issues with the same "people in Tunis"...

The scene was unique and memorable on one of the seventh floor rooms of the State Department building on the afternoon of September 7, 1993 when members of the Palestinian delegation entered to meet with the State Department's Peace team. Many Palestinian delegations had entered the room before, but this time it was different, as it was the first that a delegation officially representing the PLO and including some of its officials, entered the building of the State Department along with other members of the negotiating team.

Members of the American Peace Team gathered in one of the offices trying to draw fake smiles on their faces, failing to hide their feelings of disappointment, and personal failure at having to meet a PLO delegation. They did not know that they were about to hear what they had never dreamt of hearing: "President Arafat will personally come to Washington to attend the DOP's signing ceremony", which Washington called for in an attempt to jump on Oslo's bandwagon at the last minute, and catch the historic moment that it had failed to create in the first place. In fact, some members of the Peace Team had even tried to undermine Oslo in its earlier stages.

From that moment on, Clinton became tied to the cause of peace in the Middle East. In the ensuing years, Washington became a regular place for holding bilateral and trilateral summits, which brought Clinton with Yasser Arafat, and with different Israeli prime ministers, from Rabin, to Netanyahu, to Barak. Since then, members of the American Peace Team made a career out of traveling to the Middle East and being semi-permanent guests at the headquarters of the Israeli government in West Jerusalem, and at the headquarters of the Palestinian Presidency in Gaza and Ramallah.

Therefore, the bond that was created with the issue of peace and the possibility of realizing an accomplishment provided Clinton with an additional motivation to work harder still for a progress in the negotiations. The photo of Clinton hosting Arafat and Rabin while they shook hands has already a distinguished place in history books. In fact, several international

magazines selected the photo as one of the most noted photos of the 20th century; and it soon became the photo associated with the Clinton term.

For all of the above reasons, Clinton thought (based on the advice of Albright-Berger-Ross) that he was capable of accomplishing at Camp David what the whole world failed to accomplish: To solve the unsolvable, and establish peace in the Middle East. Yet, one week after the convening of Camp David, the American President started to feel that earlier assessments presented by his aides had nothing to do with reality. Winds of failure started blowing hard in the Retreat on the seventh day of the summit, which also witnessed heavy showers that made some of the members of the Palestinian delegation feel envious, and say that one day's rain in Washington was good enough for a whole season in Palestine.

A total Palestinian rejection of the American ideas (President Arafat insisted that those ideas were in fact Israeli ideas) narrowed the maneuvering room of the American team, and forced them to go back to playing their expected role, that of the honest broker. Still, the American President -known for his drive and determination -, did not accept the fact that the letter handed over to the American side on the morning of Wednesday July 19th at the entrance of the Aspen cabin, represented the end of the road, a day before he decided to delay his departure to Okinawa. His aides saw that the delay could become an element of pressure, which could push negotiations forward.

On that day, American tactics started getting tense, members of the American team started sweating after their assessments and expectations started proving wrong. At the same time, the President wanted an accomplishment. On the same day, the Americans started to tempt Yasser Arafat with Statehood: "Look to how things would look like if we signed an agreement", they said, "there will be a Palestinian State recognized by the US and Israel, it will join the international community, and..." but Yasser Arafat was quick to interrupt: "Thank you, the State of Palestine exists since the days of the British Mandate, and even if most of its territories were occupied, still, the legitimacy of its existence is present in UN resolutions". He then sharply added: "I will not exchange a State for Jerusalem."

They would then present a financial sweetener: "We want to discuss our bilateral relations, we are preparing a big financial aid package for the Palestinian State which will be put in motion as soon as the agreement is signed, this issue will be even placed on the agenda of the Okinawa Summit..." Yasser Arafat again interrupted: "This is very kind of you, we really need a lot of aid, but let us first concentrate on the main issues, I came here to speak about land first."

The Americans then resorted to another attempt: Clinton spent some of his time on Tuesday and Wednesday speaking over the telephone with some Arab leaders in an attempt to push them to pressure Arafat. His message to them was not really accurate: There is great progress, there are solutions to all of the issues, we presented generous solutions on the issue of Jerusalem, but Arafat has rejected them. We expect that you will advise him to accept them so we can achieve peace, and if he is unable to accept them, he can agree to postpone the discussion on Jerusalem..

Still, the telephone that the American Administration expected to start ringing off the hook at Birch cabin never really rang. On one hand, several of those Arab leaders contacted by Clinton never responded to his request, and those who did respond and called, inquired first about the facts, and when they learned the truth, quickly expressed unlimited support for the Palestinian position.

Since day one, Yasser Arafat had been keen on maintaining contacts with several Arab and international parties, so that they would always be kept abreast of what was actually happening. Every day before noon, Planning and International Cooperation Minister Nabil

Shaath would take out from his pocket a long list of telephone numbers that he had to call, and give a briefing on the situation to each and everyone on the other side of the line. The list included the numbers of foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, in addition to numbers of the Saudi Ambassador; and those of Miguel Moratinos, the European Union Middle East envoy who was present in the American Capital. The list also included several Russian officials in Moscow, or on President Putin's plane heading to Okinawa; and French officials in Paris. Everyday new names would be added to the list, such as Algerian officials, and officials from the United Arab Emirates. President Arafat then added two more names and numbers: The Syrian Chargé d'Affaires and the Lebanese Ambassador in Washington.

Arafat knew exactly from what angle the Americans were trying to twist his arm, therefore, he quickly executed a preventive move aimed at absorbing the American offensive during the Summit, and also after its conclusion. The American moves started to get even tenser. In a meeting that took place on Wednesday at Aspen, President Clinton started exerting pressure on Arafat by threatening to personally wash his hands from the peace effort in the Middle East. He also started indicating that there was a historic opportunity available, and the Palestinians must not waste it. He wanted Arafat to accept the American ideas despite his recognition that those ideas did not provide solutions to all of the issues. Members of the American team were also saying: The solution to the Jerusalem issue will open the doors wide open to solving all of the other issues. It will be possible then to quickly solve the issues of refugees, land, and security.

Arafat would answer with a steadfast and calm voice: "Do not expect me to betray my people, I will not sell Jerusalem, I will not sell the Moslems, and I will not sell the Christians." At some moments, Clinton seemed to recognize the size of the predicament he was led into by his aides, still he was unable to back out, as he had in the end to adopt and defend the positions of the American establishment which expressed unequivocal support for Israel. At the end, he was defending his personal ambition to secure a prominent place in history.

The chairman of the board of the globe was getting ready to depart to Okinawa to attend a meeting of the G-8, which included the leaders of the 7 industrial countries, in addition to Russia. This meeting was very important to him, since it was his last appearance at the G-8. He also did not want to arrive with failure and disappointment behind him. The Geneva Summit which took place earlier had been enough to shake his international image, when he also listened to the bad advice of the same advisors, and went to meet the Hafez El-Assad at the Swiss city only to find out that there was nothing new worth discussing. Bill Clinton definitely did not need another failure, especially in his own country, and a few months before the end of his term.

As the hours passed by on that day, it became more and more obvious that things at the Presidential Retreat were heading towards a definite failure. At 8:30 pm, President Clinton entered Birch and tried his last shot. He repeated the same arguments, and listened to the same answers from Yasser Arafat, who also offered -out of commitment to the peace process- to continue Palestinian - Israeli negotiations either back home, or in Washington for an additional two weeks, after which, President Clinton can assess the situation and call for another summit. Clinton did not accept the offer, and looked like he was taking his leave of Yasser Arafat for the end of the Summit.

Yasser Arafat immediately gave instructions to his staff. They called the PLO office in Washington and requested the start of preparations for the take-off of Arafat's plane, which usually require 4 to 5 hours. This request became quickly the secret code for the rest of the members of the Palestinian negotiating team who started congregating back to their cabins to pack their luggage. One of the members even got dressed in a suit since he was going to fly on President Arafat's plane; as he was seen by the American protocol team, they immediately

called the Birch cabin to verify whether the Palestinians were leaving. The answer came quickly: " We are getting ready for such an option."

The motorcade that carried President Clinton's luggage and communication equipment, was parked in the street between Aspen and Birch cabins. Bad weather conditions prevented the use of helicopters in the Retreat, therefore, President Clinton was to use the motorcade, which would drive him to a location where helicopters could safely take off and fly him to the airport where Air force One would take him to Okinawa. The sight of the motorcade getting its engines ready was yet another sign of pressure being exerted by the American side. The message was clear: Take advantage of the available opportunity, otherwise you lose the opportunity of Clinton doing something for you, and your cause will be frozen for another year or two.

President Arafat's luggage was also gathered and placed in a van, which was to take it to the Retreat's entrance where another van sent by the PLO office in Washington was waiting to take them to the airport. Members of the Palestinian delegation started arriving with their luggage after they were asked to do so by Arafat's office in preparation for departure. The conversation among the Palestinian delegation concentrated on the question of what the next step would be. Members also spoke of the need to activate the Arab and Islamic positions in support of the Palestinian case. Other members also spoke of the expected American response to the failure.

At 9:30 pm, the telephone rang at Birch, President Clinton wanted to speak with President Arafat. Clinton came on the line and said: " I'll be leaving in a few minutes". Arafat answered in French: " Bon Voyage ", and continued reaffirming Palestinian commitment to the peace process.

After this telephone conversation, members of the delegation started talking of the definitive end to the Summit, some of them also called the PLO office in Washington requesting airline reservations on the first plane out of Washington. Yet, Clinton had not said his final word. At 10:30 pm, escorted by his aides, and without prior warning, he was calling on members of the Palestinian delegation congregated at Birch's entrance: " Hi guys!, we'll go your way."

In the small sitting area inside the cabin, Clinton told Arafat: "Fine, let us agree to continue negotiations in the region, and afterwards we will decide on what can be done to resume the summit. " As Clinton left Birch, some of the delegation members were calling their families to say: "We're coming home tomorrow." At 11:00 pm and as the Middle East was sleeping, CNN was broadcasting a statement by the White House Spokesman announcing that the Summit ended without agreement.

But at 11:40 pm, Clinton who met with Barak before and after every meeting he held with Arafat, entered another time the Birch cabin saying: " I have a new deal ". The deal was: " I suggest that you stay here at Camp David until I return from Okinawa. Let a delegate from each side meet with the other and discuss the issues of Jerusalem and the Haram. The rest of the issues can also be discussed. I have spoken to Prime Minister Barak in this regard." A small smile showed on Arafat's face, he got the message: Bill Clinton was not ready to go to Okinawa with a failed Summit behind him. He answered: " Fine Mr. President, we are ready to stay here." Clinton then rose with obvious relief. He shook Arafat's hand and left the room along with all his aides, who were barely fitting in the small room.

Minutes later, Palestinian negotiators were again carrying their luggage onto the golf carts under the rain heading back to their cabins. One of them said bitterly: "The detention just got extended for another few days!. " That night with all of its rapid and strange developments looked like scenes borrowed from a classic American film.

Clinton's motorcade drove off to Emmetsburg where the Summit's Press center was located. Clinton announced that the negotiations would continue. An hour later, the chairman of the board of the globe was on Air Force 1 heading for Okinawa. News agencies, TV screens, and morning headlines of the American newspapers were busy with the news: "Clinton saved the Summit after its collapse." In reality, the Camp David Summit actually ended on that rainy night.

The Seventh Paper: Areas of Failure... Limits of "Accomplishment"

When Madeleine Albright took over at Camp David during the four days President Clinton was in Japan, Palestinian and Israeli negotiators suffered from inactivity.

Those four days were a precious opportunity for making up lost hours of sleep, and for relaxation, sometimes interrupted by cosmetic negotiating sessions. No one wanted to give any "merchandise" to Mrs. Albright, for the simplest rule of politics dictates that one should reach an understanding with the "boss".

Those days were, therefore, an ideal opportunity for the delegations to catch their breath and reflect. The Palestinian delegation, after long discussions, reached the following conclusions:

1- The Summit had in fact been a preparation of sorts for serious negotiations, of the kind Yasser Arafat called for prior to the Summit. Negotiators were seriously and formally immersed in the main issues away from sessions of "brainstorming" and "what ifs", which were a staple of previous negotiation rounds. The two sides had to present their true positions in their semi-definitive stage. True, no agreement came about and no deal was closed, but any future negotiations would have to be based on what was said at Camp David, and would have to pick up where the Summit left off, even if gaps remained wide, and on some issues, gaping wide.

2- The Camp David Summit provided the Palestinians with an unprecedented forum to present the Palestinian narrative in its entirety, and to present the Palestinian position in a definitive, unambiguous manner. At the end, this position had forced respect.

It was very important to hear Bill Clinton tell Yasser Arafat during one of the meetings: "I did not know your needs and requirements as I know them now." Clinton was listening directly from Yasser Arafat to the complete Palestinian position. No one was able to hide any part of the picture from him, or make assumptions on what Palestinians would accept or reject. At that point, the American President would discover that his team's evaluations were not at all precise. He would also realize that the "goods" he was made to believe the Palestinian would be eager to buy, or be forced to buy, did not even attract their attention. They considered them spoiled Israeli goods.

The American "discovery" of the limits of the Palestinian position also dawned on the Israeli delegation, that had to abandon their illusions and presumptions -informed by an occupier's mentality- of the final settlement Palestinians would accept.

3- Camp David revealed to the Palestinians that the Israeli establishment was not yet ready for a true peaceful settlement. The mentality of the occupier, settler, and soldier, was the one still behind their outline of a proposed peace settlement, and was shaping a "peace" and a future tailored to the Israeli worldview. More so, the prominent presence of mythology in the Israeli arguments sets off alarm bells.

4- The adoption by Israel of the most hard-line arguments of Jewish extremists regarding Al-Aqsa -and their American adoption- bode ill for a region which would accordingly be pushed towards continuous religious conflict.

The Israeli position was to reap everything, and at a cheap price: The Palestinian "golden" signature, a final recognition, and the precious "end of conflict" promise. All this, without a

return of all the land, and without acknowledging full sovereignty and, most dangerous of all, without paying any price for the refugee issue.

The Americans, due to the positions they adopted, could not be an “honest broker” or even a “broker.” The unity of position between the Israeli delegation and the US Peace team cast a long shadow over the possibility of moving towards a solution. True, President Clinton often listened with great attention and understanding to the Palestinian viewpoint. Also, on many occasions, and in front of the Palestinian delegation, he opposed the views of his advisors that seemed to provoke the Palestinian side. But in the end, he had his own calculations, limits, institutions, future, and Congress. Therefore, questions will continue to be asked about the US Administration’s continued diplomatic dependency on persons who have lost all credibility with Palestinians and Arabs.

And in the midst of these evaluations and analyses, every one was preoccupied with a nerve-racking question, how would things go after Clinton’s return on Sunday?.

Madeleine Albright tried hard to do something in the absence of her President. But it took her a whole day to merely get the sides to agree to resume committee meetings. She made several shuttle trips between Birch and Dogwood (less than 50 meters apart) to solve the question of how many delegates would participate in these meetings. She also exerted enormous efforts to convince Barak to attend an official dinner at the Laurel Restaurant the day after Clinton’s departure.

But the issue went deeper than formalities. The uproar and turbulence of Israeli politics reflected deeply on the performance of the Israeli delegation. The feeling of “disappointment” among the Israeli delegation was palpable, and it was easy to see that the firm Palestinian rejection of the “American” ideas had blown away US and Israeli calculations. Barak and the American peace team were betting on passing these ideas to the Palestinians whether they wanted to or not, and shape them into a framework agreement, where the end to the conflict clause would be the most important one. Barak seemed to have bet on returning to Israel triumphant with this document, and threaten to go to the ballot box. The failure of these calculations mortified the Israelis.

Barak isolated himself for two days in Dogwood. He only met with Danny Yatom and attorney Gil’ad Sheer. But the Israeli Premier was not wasting time. He was in constant contact with the powers that be in Israeli politics. In addition, as an American source would confirm later, Barak was in touch with influential American Jews. And he also worked to mend rifts within his delegation by denying Israeli press reports that Shlomo Ben Ami and former Chief of Staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak were pressuring him to make concessions on Jerusalem.

In the midst of this, a reality had emerged: Barak was unable to establish an appropriate working relationship with Yasser Arafat. Putting questions of chemistry aside, there are necessities that dictated it. Yasser Arafat was prepared for such a relationship after Barak’s election. After Netanyahu’s unproductive years, Abu Ammar wanted to make up for lost time. And though he was careful not to interfere in the 1999 Israeli general elections, he gave sufficient signals of his desire to see a victory by the peace camp led by Barak.

In their first meeting in September 1999, on the same day Barak entered for the first time the Prime Minister’s offices, after successfully forming a wide governmental coalition, he had the chance to present Palestinians with the needed signal: A readiness to work as partners and to implement agreements. Instead, what happened did not indicate a return to the era of the “unique relationship” that distinguished Rabin’s tenure. Barak showed a desire to evade implementing what Netanyahu had signed, and began to leak to the media his wishes to link the Wye Agreement with a framework agreement on final status issues. The former army

chief of staff had remained loyal to his position when signing the Taba agreements [Oslo 2 in 1995]: No more land should be given to the Palestinians before the signing of a final agreement.

In the months that followed that first meeting, and in spite of the signing of the Sharm El-Sheikh agreement, Barak's hesitation and evasion at implementing agreements he had signed raised concern within Arafat and built up within him a feeling that there was no peace-making partner on the other side. For months, Arafat carefully watched Barak restrict himself politically and in the media, turning the transfer of three Arab villages to the Palestinian National Authority, Abu Dis, Ezariyeh and east Sawahreh into a capital issue, until it was finally settled in the Knesset.

Arafat's opinion, which he relayed to Barak and U.S. envoys, was why make so much noise over something Rabin, Peres and Netanyahu had agreed to? Arafat would say: "They want to skip the third West Bank withdrawal and include it in the final agreement." Time would prove he was correct. Arafat would draw the attention of U.S. envoys to this matter, especially the attention of Madeleine Albright. He used to say to her: "You were a witness to the signing of the Sharm El-Sheikh agreement, why don't you pressure him (Barak) to implement what he signed?"

An opportunity arose last spring for the start of a new "working relationship" between Arafat and Barak during their successive meetings in Ramallah and Tel Aviv. At one point, it seemed that Barak began to realize the simplest requirements of a partnership, but the moment did not last long, and disappeared in the midst of Barak's refusal to carry out a withdrawal from the three villages, and to carry out the third withdrawal from the West Bank. In addition to the extreme positions introduced by his envoys in public and secret final status negotiations.

At Camp David, counting the two meetings in the first and last days of the Summit held with the presence of President Clinton in Aspen Arafat and Barak met – but did not sit next to each other – at official dinner parties hosted by Clinton. On one occasion, Barak initiated a visit to Birch and had tea with Arafat. It was a meeting where specific political issues were not discussed. No other meeting took place between the two men whose cabins, which neighbored each other, formed the base of a triangle which apex was the American Presidential lodge Aspen.

Albright tried to relax the atmosphere when she hosted an official dinner the day after Clinton left, but her attempt failed. The only new thing mentioned at that dinner was Albright's announcement that the "American ideas" were no longer on the table. That is, they were no longer a basis for negotiations. Perhaps the announcement, which brought relief to the Palestinian side who considered it an achievement, also brought a sense of calculated relief to the Israelis. With the withdrawal of the "American" ideas the possibility for some in the Israeli opposition to score points against Barak had disappeared.

On Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, (July 21, 22, and 23) there had been a number of routine negotiating sessions that did not result in anything new. Albright invited President Arafat for lunch with her daughters and grandchildren on a farm she owns near Camp David. The next day, she invited Barak for a tour of Civil War sites in the area.

Time was slowly moving, but it was a tense wait for Clinton's return. At 6:25 Sunday evening, July 23, a helicopter landed at Camp David. Clinton immediately jumped into a golf cart and drove with his daughter Chelsea next to him to Aspen. He was full of energy despite the long flight. He waived to delegates he encountered, saying: "Hi guys!, I am back, let's get back to work."

Clinton immediately did so. After a session with his advisors, who had constantly provided him with progress reports in Okinawa, he called for two meetings, one with Arafat and the other with Barak. He had a specific proposal: We want intensive marathon negotiations. I want negotiators from each side to discuss every file: Security, Land, Refugees and Jerusalem. At 11 o'clock that evening, Clinton along with some advisors took part in a Palestinian-Israeli security session. The session lasted until 6 am.

In that session, the Israelis redefined their position regarding security on the eastern border with Jordan. They kept talking about the "threat from the East", and what it required in terms of an Israeli security presence along the border and in the Ghor [Jordan] Valley. Here they stated their demands for running patrols along the Jordan Valley, the establishment of three early warning stations on West Bank land, the establishment of five Israeli "storage warehouses" in the Ghor area to be used by the Israeli army in emergencies, inspection of goods imported to the Palestinian territories; all this under a demilitarized Palestinian State.

In response to this argument, President Arafat gave clear instructions to his negotiators who consulted with him twice that night, once at 3 am and again at 4:30 am: "We will not allow the presence of any Israeli soldier on the border line along the River, in the Ghor, or at the crossing points. These are sovereign Palestinian areas. The presence of any Israeli soldier there will render security invalid." He further explained that if the Israelis were looking for "security" guarantees, Palestinians were ready, and he called for the presence of US or international troops instead. President Clinton seemed to welcome this position. Israeli restrictions and conditions regarding the degree of militarization of the Palestinian State were rejected.

Clinton insisted on starting intensive marathon negotiations, or a last marathon with the Security committee. He thought it was the committee that could achieve quick accomplishments. Because of this, he responded to the hysterical Israeli security demands. Perhaps he left this session feeling satisfied that he had somehow bridged the gaps between the two sides.

Four and a half hours later, reality hit the American President as he sat with the two sides' negotiators to discuss refugees. Their positions were on a collision course. The Palestinian position was clear and decisive. After a brief presentation of the root of the refugee dilemma, explained through a historical exposé of the Zionist invasion of Palestine, Palestinian negotiators asserted the following points:

- 1- An insistence on the right of every Palestinian refugee to return home in accordance to UN Resolution 194.
- 2- Establishment of a mechanism to implement this right, and starting it with the return of refugees from Lebanon, to be followed by a timetable -including figures- for the return of all those who wished it. Priority would be given to the refugees in Lebanon due to their miserable living conditions, and because they are linked through kinship with Galilee residents, as was obvious at the widely mediatized dramatic "Fatima Gate" reunions in south Lebanon, following the Israeli retreat from the region.
- 3- It was possible, after the recognition of the right of return and the mechanism of implementing that right, to establish a process of compensation.
- 4- A refusal to discuss the issue of Jews who left Arab countries [in the 1950s and 1960s] and their compensation.

In the face of the Palestinian position, there was the classic Israeli argument: "We are not responsible for this (refugee) problem. We do not recognize the right of return. We are

prepared to allow the return of thousands over several years within a “family reunification” program, and for “humanitarian reasons”. “We are ready to discuss an international compensation fund that would also allocate compensation for Jews ‘expelled’ from Arab countries.”

During that meeting, Clinton no doubt felt that the refugee issue was much more complicated than what his advisors had informed him. The advisors insisted that there was a possibility for making progress in the Refugee committee based on compensation, partial resettlement in the Palestinian State, and on opening the door to migration to some Western countries.

This made Clinton decide to hold the meetings of the Land committee on two levels. He met separately with both sides. The American President listened with interest to the Palestinian negotiators who produced maps to support their outline of the dangers of the Israeli demands of land annexation. In addition to being illegal and in contradiction with the references of the peace process, the annexations would destroy the geographic and demographic unity of the Palestinian territory and would control Palestinian aquifers in the West Bank. The annexation would transform the Palestinian State into fragmented islands divided by Jewish settlement blocks. The Palestinian stressed that they rejected the Israeli maps, and that any border amendments should be reciprocal.

Negotiators dealing with Jerusalem were waiting for their turn in Aspen, but after the Land committee finished, the Americans had not yet set a time. At 8 that evening, the telephone at Birch rang. President Clinton would like to meet President Arafat at Aspen.

From the first moment, the meeting was tense and stormy. Clinton’s tone was sharp: America will wash her hands from the peace process and you shall bear the responsibility. We will freeze the bilateral relationship. The Congress will freeze aid allocated to you and you will live in isolation. You did not present anything new regarding Jerusalem. The Israelis took steps forward.

Then it was Arafat’s turn to respond. He spoke softly and after a few minutes his voice rose: “A revolution occurred in these talks, the sides have become more understanding and knowledgeable of each other’s positions. We did not waste time here”.

Arafat added: “If any one imagines that I might sign away Jerusalem, he is mistaken. I am not only the leader of the Palestinian people, I am also the vice president of the Islamic Conference, and I also defend the rights of Christians. I will not sell Jerusalem. And I will not allow for a delay in discussions on Jerusalem, not even for a minute. You say the Israelis moved forward, they are occupiers, they are not being generous: They are not giving from their pockets, they are giving from our land. I am only asking that UN Resolution 242 be implemented. I am only speaking about 22% of Palestine, Mr. President.”

Arafat went on, challenging and contradicting Israeli claims to Al Aqsa and Jerusalem. Clinton continued to pressure Arafat saying: You have what is reasonable, and what you can live with. You can establish a “sovereign presidential compound” for you and the Palestinian State next to the Aqsa Mosque.

“So there will be a small island surrounded by Israeli soldiers who control the entrances. This is not what we ask for. We are asking for full Palestinian sovereignty on Jerusalem occupied in 1967,” Arafat said.

In the middle of the argument, Clinton said: You did not present anything. They (Israelis) took the initiative regarding Jerusalem. Arafat looked at the American President and asked: “Do you want to attend my funeral? I will not relinquish Jerusalem and the holy places.” A deep moment of silence prevailed. Then the exchange resumed more quietly. Clinton

proposed that all negotiators come to him to discuss Jerusalem. The meeting ended with a handshake and Clinton telling Arafat: “I respect your steadfastness, you are a believer.”

When Arafat returned to Birch and members of the Palestinian delegation read the minutes of the meeting, under the weight of the historical moment and the attitude of their President, one after the other, they stood up, and embraced their President.

At 10 pm, Clinton tried for a last time. He sat with his assistants, with Saeb Erekat and Shlomo Ben Ami. Clinton began with the options facing the Summit (announcing its failure, signing an agreement and postponing the issue of Jerusalem, signing an agreement and postponing discussions of parts of Jerusalem, or issuing a statement that speaks in general terms of the continuation of the negotiations).

Erekat said the fourth option was the most suitable. Then Sandy Berger said that that option was not standing. Clinton then directed the discussion towards Jerusalem. The old ideas had returned in new attire. But the truth was very clear. Israel wanted to impose its sovereignty over the Aqsa Mosque because they claimed it as the site of the Second Temple. Israel wanted Jews to be allowed to pray at the Aqsa compound, and rejected Palestinian sovereignty over most parts of Jerusalem. Instead, Israel proposed a series of different systems that would turn the city into a maze of contradictory systems where life would be a never-ending hell.

Close to midnight, Clinton said there was a final proposal regarding Jerusalem:

1. A committee that included the Security Council and Morocco would grant the State of Palestine, “sovereign custody” of the Haram, while Israel would retain “residual sovereignty.”
2. The Muslim and Christian Quarters of the Old City would come under Palestinian sovereignty. The Jewish and Armenian Quarters would fall under Israeli sovereignty.
3. The Palestinians would have functional jurisdiction in what was called the internal neighborhoods: Musrarah, Wadi Al-Joz, Sheikh Jarrah, Ras al-Amoud, Al-Tour, Al-Suwwaneh, and Salah el-Din Street.
4. Palestinian sovereignty would extend to the external neighborhoods of Jerusalem, or Palestinian sovereignty would cover the internal neighborhoods of Jerusalem, and a special regime would be adopted in the Old City, the details of which would have to be agreed upon.

Clinton told Erekat to take the proposal to “his leader” and come back with an answer. “I can give you the answer now,” Erekat said immediately: “President Arafat instructed me not to accept anything less than Palestinian sovereignty on all areas of Jerusalem occupied in 1967, and at the forefront, Al Haram al-Sharif.”

Clinton repeated: “Take the proposal to President Arafat and get back to me”. The proposal did not need much discussion after Erekat returned to Birch and read it to the President and the Palestinian delegation. It became clear that there was a full adoption by the Americans of the Israeli position regarding Jerusalem. It was proposed that a letter be written to the American President stating the Palestinian response to the proposal and the entire Summit.

While the letter was being drafted, some members of the American peace team were frantic, telling the Palestinian delegation: It’s a good proposal, convince the President to accept it!. You can allow a very limited number of Jews to pray at the Mosque. The proposal gives you huge gains. These frantic officials were trying to delay the moment of truth: The fall of their desperate assumptions on the limits of the Palestinian position, and the failure of the Summit they had gotten their President into.

When Erekat and Chief of Preventive Security in Gaza Mohammed Dahlan went to Aspen at 1 am to hand over the letter, President Clinton was standing in the wide hallway of his cabin. He listened to the letter which Erekat began reading in translated English. The letter stated how valued President Clinton's efforts were, and the hope that they would continue, and stressed the Palestinian desire to continue with negotiations. The letter again emphasized international terms of references as the basis for any agreement, and pointed out that the proposals on Jerusalem were in contradiction with these references. The reply came: "I expected this answer."

In the early morning of that day, July 25, the Camp David Summit designed to reach a final status agreement between the PLO and Israel was officially over without the signing of an agreement, or more precisely, it was ending in failure.

At 10:30 am July 25, Clinton received Arafat and Barak for what was to be the final session. He presented them with a draft statement on the conclusion of the Summit. Arafat spoke for a few minutes, giving his evaluation of the Summit, praised the role of President Clinton and expressed the PLO's commitment to the peace process. Barak spoke briefly and in general terms.

Half an hour later, Clinton was aboard his helicopter heading for a press conference at the White House to announce the failure of the Summit. At the same time, Barak's motorcade was headed to the press center at Emmitsburg. At 12:30, Arafat's motorcade descended from the Catoclin Hills. It was the first time that members of the Palestinian delegation saw the Retreat from a distance. Some cabins looked like white dots that quickly disappeared when the cars left the gates.

The negotiators took a deep sigh of relief at leaving the place where they had spent 15 difficult days. As they looked out to the Retreat from the windows of their cars, they left there hours of tension, wait, and exhausting negotiations. They were carrying with them memories of the place, the people, and the events. But in their hearts they had treasured moments. They had said a clear "no" to the United States while on the land of the United States. It was not for the sake of heroics. It was, a "no" that was politically, nationally, and historically positive, and correct.

Within hours, a number of Palestinian delegates were en route from their hotel in Virginia to Reagan Airport in Washington. They were on their way home. They struck up a conversation with their cab driver whose features seemed to indicate he was Pakistani or Indian. When he realized that his passengers were Palestinian and were at Camp David, Niyazi, the Pakistani driver said: "You were excellent, Jerusalem is ours. We should not give up any part of it. Arafat's position is great. Jerusalem is ours!"

When these delegates got off the taxi and began carrying their luggage towards the airport's entrance, Niyazi had closed the cab's trunk and was returning to his seat waving at them and saying: "Brothers!, don't surrender Jerusalem!.. Don't surrender Jerusalem!"