

*Moonis Ahmar*

## **INDO-PAK CONFLICT RESOLUTION: LESSONS FROM THE ARAB-ISRAELI PEACE PROCESS**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

In the post-Second World War period two regional conflicts seemed as complicated as the Cold War itself - the Arab-Israeli conflict and Indo-Pakistan rivalry. Since the decolonization of Middle East and South Asia, both the regions have witnessed the outbreak of wars,<sup>1</sup> proliferation of conventional and nuclear weapons, foreign involvement, successful and aborted peace processes, external mediation for conflict management and resolution, the adoption of military and non-military confidence-building measures (CBMs), terrorism, ethnic and religious discords, the surge of extremist religious elements and encouragement of local conflicts by the regimes in power. Against this tortuous history, the tasks for conflict resolution and peace-

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1. The Arab-Israeli wars were fought in 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973 and 1982 (between Israel and Lebanon). India and Pakistan fought wars with each other in 1948, 1965 and in 1971.



building in Middle East and South Asia have remained vulnerable to repeated setbacks and failures. Despite negative trends the course of peace-making in the two regions has also witnessed breakthroughs in avoiding wars and resolving some of the conflicts.

After years of stalemate following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, peace process in the Middle East has now reached a decisive stage. Breakthrough in the Middle East peace process could be understood in terms of steps taken for the Arab-Israeli normalization like the Camp David accord of September 1978, Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty of 1979, PLO-Israeli accord of September 1993 and Jordanian-Israeli agreement of 1994. A significant breakthrough in the Middle East peace process occurred when on September 24, 1995, Israel and PLO reached an accord to transfer West Bank areas to the Palestinian authority.<sup>2</sup>

2. According to the details of the 400-page document, Israeli troops will withdraw completely from the main Palestinian population centres, beginning in two weeks since the signing of the accord. The total withdrawal period will take six months. Israeli troops will withdraw entirely from populated areas; in rural areas Israelis and Palestinians will share authority. Israel will retain total control of Jewish settlements, military bases and unpopulated areas. Furthermore, Israeli force will remain in the centre of Hebron to protect the 450 Israeli settlers, but the Palestinian police will have overall responsibility for security. As a result, the Palestinian authority will control 30 percent of the West Bank's territory, but will be in-charge of overwhelming majority of its Arab population. The PLO agreed to revoke within two years articles of the Palestinian Covenant calling for the destruction of Israel. Israel also agreed to free all women, as well as men Palestinian prisoners who were sick, young or elderly or had completed two-thirds of their sentences. Elections under an international monitoring will be held to choose an 82-member Palestinian Council from the West Bank and Gaza 22 days after the troops withdraw from populated areas. See editorial, "The West Bank Peace Plan" *The New York Times*, September 26, 1996. Also see news item, "Israel and PLO reach accord to transfer West Bank areas" *The New York Times*, September 25, 1995. Among the front-line states only Syria and Lebanon have not signed peace treaties with Israel.



In the South Asian case such a process has not yet been launched successfully.<sup>3</sup> While the peace process in the Middle East is not free from challenges and contradictions, and the threat of rupture in PLO-Israeli accord still exists, the possibility of a war between Israel and its Arab neighbours had declined substantially. In the post-Rabin period,<sup>4</sup> both Israel and the PLO seem to be determined to continue with the peace process. The accord signed by PLO and Israel on September 24, 1995 provides an opportunity to further strengthen the peace process in the Middle East. On the other hand, the India-Pakistan standoff on the Kashmir dispute could, at the worst, lead to the outbreak of a fifth war in South Asia and even compel New Delhi and Islamabad to use nuclear weapons, and plunge the region into a state of persistent instability and disorder.

The key questions this paper seek to address are : what are the lessons for India and Pakistan to be drawn from the Arab-Israeli peace process? when the Arabs and the Israelis can agree to resolve their conflicts peacefully, can Indians and Pakistanis (particularly the moderates in both societies) follow a non-violent and non-military path to the resolution of their disputes? Since the results of the Arab-Israeli peace process are now apparent, this is

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3. Theoretically speaking, the only positive step which India and Pakistan have taken so far for war avoidance and the peaceful settlement of their disputes is the Simla Pact of July 1972. However, the Simla agreement has failed to pass through the test of New Delhi-Islamabad conflict on the Kashmir dispute. For a comprehensive account of Simla Pact see, "Abdul Sattar, "Simla Pact : Negotiations Under Duress" *Regional Studies* (Islamabad) Vol XII, No. 4. Autumn 1995, pp. 28-57.
  4. The assassination of the Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by an Israeli extremist Yagil Amir on November 4, 1995 proves the risks involved in the Middle East peace process. See news item, "A stunned Israel mourns and honours its fallen leader" *The New York Times*, November 6, 1995. Editorial, "The Rabin Assassination" *The New York Times*, November 6, 1995. Frank Rich, "Jew against Jew" *The New York Times*, November 8, 1995.



the opportune time to analyse the similarities and differences between the two cases. Doing so might provide some insight and guidance to those who wish to bring about *rapprochement* between the two South Asian adversaries.

Today, South Asia is regarded as an area of intractable conflict. The question arises: do the origin, substance, and management of the Middle East peace process (and perhaps similar processes elsewhere) have any relevance for India and Pakistan? Both regions have a history of wars, abortive peace processes and deep-rooted misperceptions entrenched in past animosities, and yet there is also hope for tension and conflict-free environment. Specifically, by comparing the two regions, can one contribute to the emerging dialogue in South Asia?

The purpose of this study is to examine the parallels and differences in the South Asian and Middle East peace processes, and evaluate the relevance of the techniques used by different players in the Middle East peace process to South Asia. This paper also hopes to heighten awareness among the academic and official circles in South Asia of the lessons of the Middle East peace process and the possibility of a similar exercise in South Asia. Nevertheless, the paper also aims to determine the presence of critical and positive feelings among them regarding the possibility of comparable process in South Asia. It intends to shed light on the methodology of conflict management and resolution and the role of CBMS.

Is a comparison of an actual Middle East peace process and a hypothetical South Asia peace process possible? Based on historical facts, there is an analogy between Arab-Israeli and India-Pakistani conflicts. Religious, political, psychological, and security factors transcend the conflictual relationship between Arabs and Israelis, on the one hand, and Indians and Pakistanis, on the other. Some of the comparisons of the India-Pakistan and Arab-Israeli peace processes are as follows:



- \* The UN's involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict and a similar involvement by the UN in case of India and Pakistan on the Kashmir dispute.
- \* The role of third party mediation in resolving Arab-Israeli disputes, especially by the United States after the 1973 Arab-Israeli war gave an impetus to the efforts for de-escalation of Arab-Israeli relations. In the case of South Asia, the third party involvement began with the American efforts for India-Pakistan reconciliation (1960-64) followed by the Soviet mediation in Tashkent in January 1966. The United States has offered to mediate India-Pakistan conflicts centring on the Kashmir and nuclear issues.
- \* The adoption of CBMs in the Middle East and in South Asia provided an opportunity for the strengthening of peace processes in both the regions. However, because of deep-rooted mistrust and suspicion at the governmental and non-governmental levels, CBMs could help less in achieving a breakthrough in the Indo-Pakistan peace process. Despite failures, CBMs are considered promising, especially by the non-governmental circles for future peace initiatives.
- \* The launching of Track-I and Track-II diplomacy is a significant factor in the Middle East and South Asian peace processes. While Track-I diplomacy has produced positive results in the Arab-Israeli context, such an exercise has so far failed in normalizing India-Pakistan relations. However, in both the regions, Track-II diplomacy has helped in removing misperceptions and mistrust at the non-governmental level and despite failures such a process should be sustained for the future of peace and cooperation in the two regions.
- \* The feeling of missing opportunities for peace, the dismissal of war as an option because of the Israeli military



superiority *vis-a-vis* Arabs and the promise of benefits in the event of settlement of disputes contributed to the strengthening of peace process in the Middle East. Such feelings, though absent, may also help initiate a viable peace process between India and Pakistan. Though, on account of nuclear factor, the fourth Indo-Pakistan war is considered as a remote possibility, so far there is no evidence to prove that New Delhi and Islamabad have used the opportunity of war avoidance to resolve substantive issues. On these grounds, unlike the Arab-Israeli peace process, there does not exist a feeling of missed opportunities for peace in South Asia.

- \* There is a growing influence of hawkish elements in Israel and among Palestinians against the Arab-Israeli peace process. Extremist groups from both sides have condemned the PLO-Israeli accord and have demanded its abrogation. The assassination of Rabin is a recent example in this regard. The same problem exists in South Asia where hard-line and hawkish elements on account of their paranoia and negative feelings resist any effort for political reconciliation between India and Pakistan and threaten moderate elements of serious consequences if they continue with their efforts for normalization between the two hostile countries.

Like similarities, there are differences between the Arab-Israeli and Indo-Pakistan peace processes. These differences are:

- \* The question of legitimacy has always remained an obstacle for a peace process between Arabs and Israelis. All the Arab states had refused to accept the existence of Israel and had vowed to dismantle that Jewish state. On the contrary, legitimacy has not been a factor in the India-Pakistan peace process. Both New Delhi and Islamabad recognize each other (despite the feeling of rejection held by some



hawkish elements in the two countries) and excluding a brief period of suspension in diplomatic relations during the 1965 and 1971 wars have maintained their ties.

- \* Unlike Middle East, South Asia is not an area of high priority for the outside powers. Given the US strategic interests in the Middle East like the security of Israel, oil, and commercial interests, Washington has played a high profile role for peace process. Because of strategic reasons the countries of Western Europe and Asia/Pacific consider Middle East as an area of considerable importance. This is not the case with South Asia where the US has marginal interests, thus discouraging it to contribute significantly to the regional peace process.
- \* The "land for peace" formula which became the core of the Middle East peace process is not yet relevant in case of South Asia. Although, some circles are suggesting the withdrawal of India and Pakistan from Kashmir (leading to the establishment of an independent, neutralized and demilitarized Kashmir) as a price for peace in South Asia, this idea has so far not received any serious consideration in New Delhi or in Islamabad.
- \* In the Middle East there is no regional organization which could help dilute tension and enhance cooperation. However, in view of recent developments in the Middle East peace process, Israel and some Arab countries (particularly Egypt and Jordan) are receptive to the idea of viable cooperation in economic and commercial areas. The Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres is an advocate of Middle East Common Market with no restrictions on the free movement of people, goods, services and capital. In South Asia, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), despite its limitations, has provided a forum to



the regional countries for promoting cooperation in economic and other areas and has recently entered into an agreement for establishing preferential trade and eliminate poverty from the region by the year 2005.

- \* In the Arab-Israeli conflicts, all the front-line states, except Syria and Lebanon have entered into peace agreements with Israel. This has led to relaxation in the movement of people. In case of India and Pakistan, there exists a hostile relationship discouraging interaction among the people of the two countries.

## II. THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICTS

The core of the Arab-Israeli conflict is the Palestinian problem and the feeling of mistrust held by the Arabs and the Israelis against each other. Historically, the course of politics in the Middle East was shaped by a series of events over a prolonged period of time - the proclamation of Balfour Declaration in 1917, the demise of Ottoman empire in the aftermath of World War I, granting of Palestine as a mandate by the League of Nations to Britain, the influx of Jews into Palestine in the post-World War I period, massacre of millions of Jews by Nazi Germany during World War II, the UN partition plan of 1947, violence in Palestine between local Palestinians and Jewish settlers, the creation of Israel and its rejection by the Arabs, intensification of the Palestinian refugee problem and the outbreak of first Arab-Israeli war in 1948.

The outbreak of 1967 Arab-Israeli war and the occupation of West Bank, East Jerusalem, Sinai, Gaza strip and Golan Heights by the Israeli forces further deepened hostility between Arabs and Israelis. Non-acceptance of Israel in the Arab world and the Israeli drive to gain maximum security at the expense of the local Palestinian inhabitants and its Arab neighbours created walls of



suspicion and hatred. The Arab-Israeli conflict was then defined in terms of psychological barriers loaded with the feelings of insecurity and mistrust. As compared with the past four decades, in the 1990s, the hostile attitudes and perceptions of Israelis and Arabs about each other have changed, but not significantly. Deep down there still exists the feeling of insecurity, rejection and paranoia. But the urge for peace has gained ground among Arabs and Israelis because of the heavy price of confrontation and the benefits of cooperation. Over the years, the Arab-Israeli conflict has broadened to two levels: Conflict on the state level and a second conflict on the level of people.

In the Middle East, the theoretical mechanism for the peace process included among other elements, the cessation of hostile propaganda, establishment of communication links between the military and political leaders of Israel and the front-line Arab countries and the PLO, external mediation, secret negotiations, and the adoption of various CBMs to create positive environment for a dialogue. In practice, however, the problem existed in deep-rooted mistrust and suspicion between Israelis and Arabs. As long as misperceptions were not reduced and psychological feelings of insecurity remained intact, the gap between theory and practice in the Middle East peace process prevented any major breakthrough in the area of peace-making.

The 1973 Arab-Israeli war is considered as a landmark in the Middle East peace process. The war proved two things : first, Israel was not invincible in terms of its defense and security. Second, Egypt, despite breaking the myth of Israel's invincibility, realized that it could not get back its territories by force unless it seriously negotiate with Tel Aviv. Anwar Sadat's desire for peace with Israel also matched with the U.S. objective to act as a mediator between the two countries and to strike a deal which could neutralize Cairo as a threat to Israel's security. The "land for peace model" was



considered appropriate in case of Egypt and Israel. It served as a breakthrough in the Middle East peace process and received widespread support in the United States policy-making set-up, in the Middle Eastern Arab countries, and later on in Israel.

Peace process in the Middle East has been defined by William B. Quandt, an American writer on Middle Eastern affairs, in the following words:

Sometime in the mid-1970s the term peace process began to be widely used to describe the U.S.-led efforts to bring about a negotiated peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours. The phrase struck, and ever since it has been synonymous with the gradual, step-by-step approach to resolving one of the world's most difficult conflicts. In the years since 1967 the emphasis in Washington has shifted from the spelling out of the ingredients of "peace" to the "process" of getting there. Much of American constitutional theory focuses on how issues should be resolved -- the process, rather than on substance -- what should be done.<sup>5</sup>

There was no short cut to peace between Israel and the Palestinians, on the one hand, and Israel and its Arab neighbours, on the other. For years the peace process remained stagnant and pessimism prevailed in the Arab world and in Israel. Even now, despite the signing of treaties and agreements between Israel and Egypt, Israel and PLO, and Israel and Jordan (a peace treaty between Israel and Syria is also possible), the peace process faces challenges and threats. However, what is remarkable is the commitment to peace made by nearly all the governments (Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Syria and PLO) of the region. Such a commitment may be the result of the U.S. pressure or realistic assumptions of the situation by the Arabs and the Israelis. Yet the resolution to

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5. See William B. Quandt, *Peace Process American Diplomacy And the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967* (Washington D. C : The Brookings Institution, 1993), p. 1.



achieve relative peace, despite historical and psychological feelings of insecurity, is a major asset of the Middle East peace process.

Notwithstanding the launching of the Arab-Israeli peace process, there still exists wide gap in the commitment to peace and the practical results achieved so far. The theory and practice of the peace process in the Middle East has three important features. First, the identification of major issues in the Arab-Israeli conflicts by the parties concerned but difficulties which occurred in implementing the understanding reached for the solution of these problems. Second, the question of political will needed to be exercised by Egypt, Israel and the PLO, and Jordan to settle their conflicts through negotiations but when it came to practice they provided several excuses to prolong the implementation of agreements (examples are the Camp David accord and PLO-Israeli autonomy accord). Third, the removal of obstacles to negotiations by these parties through secret talks but their failure to take people into confidence. In case of Golan Heights and Jewish settlements in the West Bank, anything agreed secretly by the parties concerned lack credibility because it has little popular support. Therefore, theory and practice in the Arab-Israeli peace process has an important element of national interests of the countries involved. Even if the governments express theoretical adherence to the resolution of conflicts, in practical terms popular support to that effect is marginal.

The gap between the ideal of a peaceful negotiated settlement and the bitter reality of a divided region was bridged to some extent because of the keen interest taken by Washington, and the role of moderate elements in the Arab world and in Israel. The U.S. involvement made it possible for Israel and its Arab neighbours to enter and sustain the peace process. Once the stage was set for making a deal based on trade-offs, the practical side of



the Middle East peace process began to produce positive results. According to Harold Saunders, "in the peace efforts since 1967, the peacemakers have moved back and forth between two general approaches. Neither one is inherently better; each may be appropriate at different stages of the peace process. But it is useful to look at each for the opportunities it may offer. One approach is to seek agreement first through mediation or negotiation on the principles that will govern a settlement and then to work out the detailed arrangements for implementing the basic agreement. Resolution 242 itself is a negotiated statement of the broad principles of a settlement. The advantages of this approach are that it can give detailed negotiations, credibility, and break the stalemate that prevents them from beginning. It would also remove the hidden agendas [sic] from negotiation. The disadvantages are that political bodies are sometimes not able to make decisions on large principles unless they know how these can be implemented and that principles implemented without details spelled out are subject to multiple interpretations."<sup>6</sup>

The relative success story of CBMs in the Middle East has much to do with change in the Arab/Palestinian and Israeli perceptions toward their conflicts; their willingness to talk on disputed matters; the foreign, particularly U.S., involvement and a general realization in the region that the adversarial relationship will not benefit any one and that the no-war and no-war situation should be replaced with normal ties. An important lesson which could be learned from the role of CBMs in the Middle East peace process is that the entire mechanism achieved credibility with the signing of Sinai II agreement between Egypt and Israel. It was a major test case and the subsequent CBMs reached between Israel

6. See "The Arab-Israeli Peace Process : Supplying the Missing Ingredients" in *Conversation with Harold H. Saunders, U. S. Policy for the Middle East in the 1980s*. (Washington D. C : American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1982), p. 82.



and Egypt, Israel and PLO and Israel and Jordan expressed the presence of trust and confidence amidst the environment of general suspicion and ill-will. In case of the Arab-Israeli conflicts, CBMs, despite having misconceptions in many circles became a necessity because of two reasons: first urgency and second incentives. The fear of losing time and resources if they (Arabs and Israelis) fail to reach a settlement and the assurance of benefits (by the United States) if they arrive at a settlement helped the process of CBMs in the Middle East. Needless to say, circumstances played a vital role in evolving mutual trust and confidence among the ruling elites of Israel, Egypt, Jordan and Palestine. The success of treaties signed between Israel and PLO, and Israel and its Arab neighbours would require the exercise of substantial confidence and trust. For future Arab-Israeli ties also CBMs are essential.

### III. INDO-PAK CONFLICTS

Like Israel and its Arab neighbours, India and Pakistan have a history of unresolved conflicts, wars, successful and unsuccessful peace processes. But unlike the Middle East, where wars led to talks for the resolution of conflicts and peace-building, wars between India and Pakistan did not create conditions in that direction. On the contrary after each war transient developments toward peace process took place (January 1966 Tashkent agreement and July 1972 Simla accord) but these were short-term and were replaced with renewed tensions.

To some extent the balance-sheet of Indo-Pak relations is not that disappointing. The two countries did manage to settle some of their conflicts, namely, division of assets, evacuation of property, distribution of river water (Indus Water Treaty of 1960), demarcation of the Rann of Kutch Boundary in 1969, Salal Dam agreement in 1978. But such achievements failed to reduce feelings of insecurity, fear and hostility. Other agreements reached



in 1980s and 1990s, like non-attack on each other's nuclear installations, (1988) air and space violation (1991), notifying military exercises, (1991) chemical weapons, (1992) cultural and communication agreements (1989) were aimed to build confidence between the two neighbours but so far have failed to normalize India-Pakistan ties to the level of mutual trust and cordiality. The Kashmir dispute, barring other unresolved conflicts like the nuclear issue, Wuller Barrage and Sir Creek, has derailed the India-Pakistan normalization process. Moreover, the nuclear issue is another irritant in India-Pakistan relations and requires resolution. From the Pakistan point of view, the Kashmir dispute is a major cause of tension in South Asia and the nuclear issue is an effect of that cause. The two wars fought between India and Pakistan (1965 and 1971) produced two accords i.e., Tashkent in January 1966 and Simla in July 1972 and provided opportunities for conflict management and resolution. In both cases the Kashmir dispute was accepted as a major source of tension and both New Delhi and Islamabad had pledged to seek a peaceful resolution of that conflict.

Inasmuch, efforts in the area of conflict resolution and war avoidance could not go beyond offers made by New Delhi and Islamabad for No-War Pact, Non-Aggression Pact, Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. In the Middle East, Arabs and Israelis did not interact so frequently in military and non-military areas as Indians and Pakistanis but did manage to reach agreements on substantive issues. This fact is evident from the history of contacts, initiatives, proposals, agreements and accords reached between India and Pakistan on different issues including the main source of tension i.e., the Kashmir dispute. This difference in the Arab-Israeli and Indo-Pak peace process raises an important question: why India and Pakistan, despite several agreements and accords on resolving some difficult issues, have so far failed to reach an understanding on the Kashmir dispute? As



mentioned earlier, Israel and Arab states, despite deadlock in their peace talks, managed to achieve a breakthrough on substantive issues and unlike New Delhi and Islamabad did not allow mutual mistrust and suspicion to overwhelm their efforts for a settlement.

The longest spell of peace between India and Pakistan from 1971-to date did not bring along cessation of hostilities. In fact, the absence of war in South Asia is like a no-war and no-peace situation in the region. Unlike the Middle East, where tremendous pressure was exerted by the United States on Israel and Arab countries to establish normal ties, no such factor exists in case of India and Pakistan so far. Their strategically fragile position has further encouraged India and Pakistan to carry on escalating their hostility to dangerous proportions. One exception to continuous hostile ties between India and Pakistan in the recent past was the friendly gesture expressed by Islamabad to New Delhi in 1994 when Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto sent mangoes to her Indian counterpart Narasimha Rao and 40 other prominent leaders, ministers and civil servants. Some opposition parties raised a hue and cry when the "mango diplomacy" was reported in the press. The Foreign Office justified that step by calling it a usual affair. The exchange of seasonal fruits and fruit juices between leaders of India and Pakistan is more or less routine. Once in the early 1980s, the then President of Pakistan General Mohammed Zia ul Haq sent mangoes to Indira Gandhi. She responded by sending him bottles of choice Leechi juice. Ms. Bhutto's gesture came at a time when the two countries were making front page news by manhandling and expelling each other's diplomats. More so, Benazir Bhutto in one of her interviews with the *BBC*, had claimed that "when she was in power four years ago (in 1990), she helped the then Indian Government of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in controlling the activities of Sikh separatists in East Punjab. She helped the Indian Government in this regard on the principle of non-interference in each others internal affairs. If



Pakistan had not provided help to Mr. Gandhi then East Punjab would have become a separate land. But we gave them help on the principle that we will not interfere in the affairs of others. We made it clear at that time that Jammu and Kashmir is not an Indian territory and according to international law it is a disputed territory."<sup>7</sup> Notwithstanding the nuclear issue - an area of considerable concern for the United States - there is no other factor comparable with the nuclear issue which could be seen as motivating for external powers to play a mediatory role for the resolution of India-Pakistan conflicts. Therefore, peace initiatives in South Asia have yet to take off.

### **The Kashmir Dispute**

From Islamabad's point of view, breakthrough in India-Pakistan standoff on the Kashmir dispute is considered essential for peace in South Asia. However, the perceptions of New Delhi and Islamabad sharply differ on this matter also. For Pakistan, Kashmir is the core issue and should be settled according to the UN Security Council resolutions passed in 1949. This would require the holding of a plebiscite under the UN supervision and providing the people of Jammu and Kashmir a choice either to join India or Pakistan. Ironically, earlier India had supported the UN Security Council resolution calling for a plebiscite but later on it changed its stand. It now considers the area under its control as its integral part, having given a constitutional basis to its control over parts of Jammu and Kashmir. It disagrees with Islamabad that the settlement of Kashmir dispute and peace in South Asia are interlinked.

Like Kashmir, the Palestinian problem has remained a source of hostility between Arabs and Israelis. It was a cause of wars and

7. See, S. Venkat Narayan, "Mango diplomacy to ease Pak-India tension" *The Muslim*, (Islamabad) August 3, 1994. Also See news item, "I helped control Sikh uprising, says Benazir" *The Nation*, (Lahore) February 14, 1994.



continued animosity in the Middle East. But learning from past mistakes and failures and utilizing opportunities for peace, Israelis and Palestinians were able to break stalemate in the Middle East peace process and reach an autonomy accord in September 1993. This has not happened in case of the Kashmir dispute where both India and Pakistan are bogged down in an endless state of hostility.

There are three schools of thought in the context of discussing the Kashmir dispute. The first is the nationalist, the second is the religious and the third is secular. The Nationalists led by the Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) want an independent status. They are against Indian and Pakistani domination and want to restore the "Kashmiriyat" or the true honour of the people of Kashmir. The religious elements led by the Hurriyat Conference want annexation with Pakistan. They see religion as a common bond between the Muslim majority of Kashmir and Pakistan. Parallel to the Islamic groups are the Hindu Kashmiri supporters of BJP and Shiv Sena who want to end Kashmir's special status as granted in article 370 of the Indian Constitution and want a formal annexation of that territory with India. The secular-minded Kashmiris belong to the Jammu & Kashmir National Congress and other Indian secular parties like Congress and National Front. In a battle for supremacy over Jammu & Kashmir the important players are the nationalists and the Islamists. The alliance between nationalists and secularists may outweigh Islamists.

Day by day, the official position adopted by New Delhi and Islamabad on the Kashmir dispute is losing credibility. Such a state of affair is only prolonging the cold war between the two countries at the expense of their progress and development. Pakistan's insistence on self-determination for the people of Jammu & Kashmir according to the UN Security Council resolutions and Indian's refusal to change *status quo* to its detriment have failed to claim genuine support from the majority



of the concerned people and is increasing frustration at various levels. The continuous diversion of scarce resources on militarization (including their expensive war in Siachen) is also related to their failure to settle the Kashmir dispute. Domestic security problems like the deteriorating law and order situation in Urban Sindh (Pakistan) are also connected with the India-Pakistan standoff on the Kashmir dispute.

For India, the core issue with Pakistan is not Kashmir but economic challenges faced by the two countries. Here India gives importance to the normalization process minus Kashmir. It suggests the enhancement of bilateral trade and relaxation of restrictions on people-to-people interaction. For many Pakistanis and Indians, Kashmir is not a major issue. What is important to them is the worsening of domestic political and economic conditions. A Pakistani living in Sindh and Balochistan is not much concerned with what is going on in Kashmir. To him or her, the main areas of concern are growing ethnic strife between Pakthoons and Baluch in Baluchistan and the worsening of law and order situation in Urban Sindh, particularly in Karachi or ethnic tension between Muhajirs (who migrated from India at the time of partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947 and settled mostly in the Urban areas of Sindh) and native Sindhis. Same is true of Indians living in eastern and southern states. They are not much concerned about the Kashmir dispute but are eager to resolve those issues which directly affect their interests.

Domestic conflicts have highly affected the Indo-Pak peace process but in the Arab-Israeli context one does not see enough linkage between the exploitation of domestic conflicts and their negative implications on the peace process. Ethnic and political tensions in Israel and in some of the front-line Arab countries did not have a direct affect on efforts for the Arab-Israeli normalization and thus could not be used by the vested interest groups.



Politically, Middle East and South Asia are different regions but their unresolved conflicts provide an opportunity for a comparative study of the peace processes in the two areas. Unlike the Middle East, the peace process in the India-Pakistan Sub-continent has not gone beyond theoretical modelling. In recent years for every two steps forward there have been four steps backwards. In the Middle East, the agreements signed between Israel and Egypt were implemented to a large extent. There is some problem in the implementation of the PLO-Israeli accord. The progress on Israeli-Jordanian agreement is satisfactory and an accord between Syria and Israel is expected in the near future. But to a large extent, in the Middle East peace process the gap in theory and practice has not been very wide. This has not been the case with India and Pakistan where not only wide sections of people but also elites of the two countries are so far indifferent to the necessity of a peace process. Ranging from the role of personalities to the holding of Track-II talks, there exists sharp difference in the methodology of peace-building in the two regions.

#### IV. INDO-PAK PERCEPTIONS ON THE ARAB-ISRAELI PEACE PROCESS

What are the attitudes and perceptions of Indians and Pakistanis about the Middle East peace process? Do they see any relevance for that process in the South Asian context?

For a long period of time, India and Pakistan had maintained a consistent pro-Arab policy. In the United Nations, in the Non-aligned movement and in other international fora, both countries supported the Palestinian cause and demanded the Israeli withdrawal from the Arab occupied areas. However, in the post-Gulf war era and in the post-Soviet disunion period the Indian policy *vis-a-vis* Israel began to change. It first led to the launching of low-key contacts with Tel Aviv and then the establishment of



full diplomatic relations. The Indian policy towards Israel thus came close to the United States. Based on the pragmatic assessment of the changing nature of Middle East peace process, New Delhi abandoned its anti-Israeli rhetoric and began to build close rapport with Tel Aviv.

Unlike India, Pakistan has not changed its Israel policy. Despite the PLO-Israeli accord and further breakthrough in the Middle East peace process, Islamabad has maintained *status quo* in its Israel policy. The following table will highlight main aspects of past and present India-Pakistan perceptions on the Middle East peace process.

**Table 1. India-Pakistan Perceptions on the Middle East Peace Process**

<b>Issues</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>Pakistan</b>
Recognition of Israel	Supportive	Opposed
Support to the right of Palestinian Self-determination	Support on decline	Supportive
Support to the PLO-Israeli accord and PLO-Jordanian agreement(official)	Supportive	Partial Support
Support to the PLO-Israeli accord and PLO-Jordanian agreement (popular)	Supportive	Hostile
Launching of the Middle East like peace process in South Asia	Hostile	Less hostile
Support to the methodology of private diplomacy in the Middle East peace process	Agreement	Opposed unless the Kashmir dispute is resolved

Given post-cold war events and the recent developments in the Arab-Israeli scene, India and Pakistan are still in the process of adopting a firm policy on the relevance of the Middle East peace



process in resolving their unsettled conflicts. Pakistanis reluctantly support the PLO-Israeli accord but also point out the unjust aspects of that deal. Indians support the Middle East peace process but are opposed to a third-party (American) involvement in South Asia.

The perceptions of moderate and extremist Indians about the Middle East peace process have two important facts. First, new relations between Israel and Arab countries have proved the relevance of direct talks to settle conflicts. Second, the Kashmir dispute could only be settled on the basis of the autonomy formula envisaged for the Palestinians of West Bank and Gaza. Indians reject the possibility of an American or any other external role to settle the India-Pakistan conflicts. According to a leading Indian strategic analyst, K. Subrahmanyam:

The Americans for the last two years have been singing praises about the merits of the Mideast peace process. And now that an Israeli-PLO accord has emerged, though without much of their effort, they are likely to press on India the same prescription to solve the Kashmir problem. The Pakistanis strain all their nerves to get the Americans involved in sub-continental issues, whether it is Kashmir, the nuclear question or human rights. After the spectacular show staged on the White House lawns, viewed via satellite TV all over the world, it is to be expected that all visiting US policy makers, academicians, public dignitaries and even many of our own people will advertise the proved remedy of an US-sponsored peace process for India-Pakistan problems.<sup>8</sup>

He further asked that: what are the real lessons to be learnt from the Israeli-Palestinian accord? The first lesson which stands out is that direct negotiations between adversaries are more effective than a multilateral process with mediators who have their

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8. K. Subrahmanyam, "Learning from the Israel-PLO accord", *The Economic Times* (New Delhi) September 15, 1993.



own axes to grind. Second, such direct talks undertaken in secret without the glare of publicity are more productive than much publicized sessions where delegates tend to posture for the benefit of their respective constituencies back home. In such private direct talk, both sides are likely to be more pragmatic and accept the ground realities than in structured multilateral conferences. While direct communications between India and Pakistan are not satisfactory, the two countries do not need third parties to bring them together. However, one lesson to be learnt is that a dialogue between the two countries would proceed better if it is conducted away from the glare of publicity, in secret, and continuously by high-powered envoys nominated by the two heads of governments. There is no need to have a venue in a third country. Such meetings could be held alternatively in India and Pakistan on the quiet. In such circumstances, there can be meaningful negotiations with neither side having to indulge in posturing because of domestic constituencies. Just as Israel and PLO recognized that both were stalemated and neither was in a position to win, India and Pakistan have to recognize that neither can go to war with the other because of the nuclear factor. One of the major factors that propelled PLO to come to terms is the cut in financial support from the Arabs for sustaining PLO operations. Similar economic factors also operate in the Subcontinent. If these realities are accepted by both sides in the Subcontinent, then accords similar to the one reached between Israel and PLO are possible. Otherwise, the Middle East process has no relevance to the context in the Subcontinent.<sup>9</sup>

As compared to their Indian counterparts, Pakistani writers are less suspicious about the Middle East peace process and a possible U.S. covert objective to initiate a similar process in South Asia. They like the process, (if not a key participant i.e., Israel) because

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9. *Ibid.*



it may eventually lead to an independent Palestinian homeland. A section of Pakistani policy-makers and intelligentsia consider the Middle East peace process as an opportunity to strike a deal with India on Kashmir. It is India which is under serious pressure from the guerrilla activities of militants and not Pakistan (although it has been pointed out by both Indian and Pakistani writers that Pakistan is paying a heavy price of its support to Kashmiri Mujahideen in Karachi). Therefore, for Pakistan, any sort of formula close to the one reached between Israel and PLO in September 1993 will alter *status quo* to the advantage of Pakistanis/Kashmiris and to the disadvantage of India. Pakistan will thus not lose anything if the Kashmiris are given self-determination.

Examining the pros and cons of the Middle East peace process and its possible linkage with the India-Pakistan case, a Pakistani writer says: "a significant example of the success of the Track Two diplomacy is to be found in the Middle East, where also the known positions of the Arabs and Israelis appeared to be irreconcilable. Though the success of the Camp David Accord had the effect of detaching Egypt from the confrontation with Israel, the terrorism and violence that characterized the relations between the PLO and Israel threatened to keep this area as potential tinder-box. It also fell to a senior US diplomat, Harold Saunders, who served as Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East, to try the Track Two approach, by having small groups of Arabs and Palestinians meet quietly and unobtrusively, over a six to seven year period, to explore ways to end the hostility and violence, by searching for areas of agreement. After the ground work had been prepared, officials from the two sides met in Oslo to hammer out the details of what emerged as the Middle East peace accord in 1993. Ambassador Saunders, who has described the course of these remarkable negotiations in his book *The Other Walls*, has been among those who feel the need to get Track Two diplomacy



started between Pakistan and India.<sup>10</sup> Pakistan's former ambassador to the UN Jamshed Marker in an interview with the Cable Network News (CNN) in the aftermath of the Gulf War called for the resolution of the Middle East and Palestinian questions as well as the Kashmir dispute. He elaborated his argument by saying that "there should be an active political association of the UN and that would include not just Iraq and Kuwait, but certainly the whole issue of the Middle East, Palestine and leading from that to other unimplemented UN resolutions on disputes which are really the cause of conflict all over the world, and by what I include, of course, Kashmir."<sup>11</sup>

Like the Middle East peace process, the methodology of conflict management and resolution between India and Pakistan has important key features like official and non-official dialogue commonly known as track-I and track-II diplomacy, the adoption of CBMs and talk for normalization of relations. The Kashmir dispute has been identified as an important obstacle to the South Asian peace process and a significant challenge for the Track Two diplomacy. Parallel to the Palestine problem, the Kashmir dispute is termed as intricate and complicated for a perpetual state of tension in South Asia. When Egypt under Sadat realized, no matter how belatedly, PLO's ambition to dismantle Israel and establish a Palestinian state unattainable, he embarked on a separate peace process with Israel on the basis of "land for peace formula". In case of South Asia, Pakistan has rejected every suggestion to normalize relations with India while deferring the settlement of the Kashmir dispute. This has not happened in the Middle East where the Palestinian problem, although, considered a

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10. Maqbool A. Bhatti, "Why track two diplomacy?" *Dawn* (Karachi) March 18, 1995. Also see, M. B. Naqvi, "Let the people intervene" *Dawn*, March 15, 1995.

11. See, news item, "Marker stresses solution of Mideast, Kashmir issues", *The Muslim*, March 14, 1991.



core issue in Arab-Israeli conflict did not block efforts for Israel-Egyptian normalization in relations. Even in case of Palestine, PLO's dream to dismantle Israel and establish an independent Palestinian state was considered impracticable by many Arab and Palestinian leaders. As a result, the PLO ended its state of war with Israel, granted recognition to that Jewish state and agreed to accept limited autonomy to Gaza and West Bank as a first step to achieve as a sovereign status.

It is in the context of the Palestinian problem and efforts for peace building between Israel and Arab states that India and Pakistan need to learn lessons. It is another story that unlike the Palestine problem, the Kashmir dispute has not received proper world attention but is considered by some sources as a high-profile conflict between India and Pakistan which if not resolved could lead to another war in the region. Yet the high-profile nature of the Kashmir dispute is not contributing much to draw global attention in preventing a dangerous crisis situation in South Asia.

A major difference in the Middle Eastern and South Asian peace processes is that in case of former, people may not wholeheartedly be receptive to the peace process but there exists a political will for peace among the elites/governments of the region. On the contrary, there is a different situation in South Asia. Neither the people (at least the majority) nor the governments are interested in establishing a conflict and tension-free environment in the region. The priority for the rulers in South Asia is not conflict resolution but the sustenance of intransigent position on disputes. The price of confrontation and non-cooperation is not an issue. What is essential to the regimes in power is the maintenance of *status quo* to their advantage.

What will happen if India and Pakistan have to curtail their defense forces and slash defense budgets? Will it not affect those



people who have thrived since 1947 by promoting mutual hatred as a justification for heavy expenditures on defense and by denying people basic necessities of life? *Status quo* is thus clearly to the advantage of those people who are at the helm of affairs. Change in *status quo* will deprive them of power and privileges. In the Middle East the peace process has not brought down the governments of the countries involved in that process so far. Although, in Israel, the opposition Likud Party says so much against the peace process but if it is voted for power it will be reluctant to roll back that process because of the implications like serious opposition from the outside world, particularly by the United States and the renewal of violence in the West Bank and Gaza. In Jordan, Egypt and in the Palestinian populated areas of West Bank and Gaza there are powerful figures who are opposed to the peace process but they have not been able to cause any serious damage. Therefore, in India and in Pakistan it is widely viewed that if *status quo* is changed to the detriment of any one country it would put the government of that state in trouble. So for safeguarding their interests the elites of India and Pakistan see no reason in replacing confrontation with cooperation.

Interestingly, in the Middle East, only Israel can claim to have a democratic set-up and the front-line Arab countries have authoritarian or semi-authoritarian rule. Yet, political contradictions have not blocked the peace process. In case of India and Pakistan, both are democracies and yet the road to peace seems to be so difficult in this regard. In the Middle East, the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, PLO-Israeli autonomy accord and Israeli-Jordanian agreement have not threatened the regimes in power but have cost the lives of the two architects of peace i.e., Sadat and Rabin.

## V. CONCLUSION

An in-depth study of peace process in the Middle East and between India and Pakistan produced some interesting results. The



two case studies have similarities and differences. The following table will highlight the lessons which Indians and Pakistanis can learn from the Arab-Israeli peace process.

**Table 2. Lessons For South Asia**

<b>Lessons from the Middle East peace process</b>	<b>Lessons for India</b>	<b>Lessons for Pakistan</b>
Role of personalities in peace-making like Sadat, Begin, Arafat and Rabin	Low	Low
Political will for resolving conflicts	Low	Low
American role	Not supportive	Partially supportive
Multilateral diplomacy	Hostile	Supportive
Success of CBMs	Low	Low
Role of media	Adverse	Adverse
Secret diplomacy at the official level	Unsuccessful	Unsuccessful
Track-2 diplomacy	Partial success	Partial success

India and Pakistan can learn five lessons from the Middle East peace process. First, though the substantive issues are important these should not be allowed to derail the peace process. For a long period of time there was no breakthrough in the Middle East peace process on account of rigid positions adopted by Israel and PLO on the question of an independent Palestinian state. The stalemate was only removed when PLO recognized Israel and Tel Aviv agreed to grant not an independent, but autonomous status to the Palestinians living in Gaza and West Bank. Since the Kashmir dispute is a major stumbling block in New Delhi-Islamabad normalization process, both parties must seriously concentrate on its pragmatic solution. Like the Palestine problem in the Middle



East, the Kashmir dispute cannot be bypassed in the normalization process but it should not be allowed to take one billion people of India and Pakistan as a hostage. It is primarily a matter of approach to be followed by India and Pakistan. Kashmir could be taken up immediately for discussion or could be examined with other issues. The Kashmir dispute cannot be resolved in isolation. Like the Palestinians were and are the main player in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Kashmiris have an undeniable role in India-Pakistan standoff. Therefore, the involvement of Kashmiris for the settlement of the Kashmir dispute is essential.

Second, following the example of the Arab-Israeli peace process, New Delhi and Islamabad should not adopt an intransigent position on critical issues. Had the PLO refused to accept Israel and had Tel Aviv declined to give Palestinians of Gaza and West Bank a sovereign status, the Middle East peace process would have been a non-starter. Pakistan's insistence that no breakthrough in India-Pakistan relations could be achieved unless the Kashmir dispute is resolved needs to be considered. Pursuing a step by step approach, Pakistan should understand the merit of discussing less controversial issues first and then moving for the resolution of difficult conflicts. Therefore, learning from the past and present experience of Arab-Israeli peace talks and other similar exercises, India and Pakistan should adopt a flexible approach on all issues, including Kashmir. Third, the success of multi-lateral diplomacy in the Middle East peace process could be another lesson for India and Pakistan. Since long, India is insisting on holding bilateral talks instead of multilateral. Contrary to New Delhi's stand, Pakistan favours the involvement of third party for mediation. India and Pakistan can prefer bilateral discussion or secret talks but given the expertise of an interested third party, the scope of talks could be enlarged to the multilateral level. Fourth, an important lesson which India and Pakistan can learn from the Middle East peace process is the exercise of substantial political



will at least at the official level. The alleviation of mutual mistrust and suspicion must be a top priority in the India-Pakistan normalization process. As long as Israel and Arab countries, including Palestinians were adamant in their official positions, there was a stalemate in the Middle East peace process. Nevertheless, thaw in Egypt-Israeli peace talks provided justification for further similar breakthroughs between Israel and other front-line Arab states, including Palestinians.

Last, considering the Middle East experience, the role played by the leaders of India and Pakistan is very essential. In India or in Pakistan a dynamic leadership should emerge. It has been suggested by some circles that like Sadat or Rabin, if some one from India or from Pakistan is willing to shun his or her ego, take a risk and embark on a peace mission, it will be a great achievement in the area of conflict resolution. As a result, at least, the leaders of both countries can help lower temperature and discourage hostile propaganda. personalities and their perceptions are crucial in the success or failures of a peace process. Z. A. Bhutto and Indira Gandhi were assertive and dominant personalities. Both had adopted extreme positions on the Indo-Pak conflicts but despite their aggressive posture they also took important steps for peace in South Asia (Simla accord of July 1972). Zia-ul-Haq had a fragile popular base and wanted to seek stable relations with India. But the Indians were reluctant to deal with Zia because of his undemocratic rule. Zia did manage to ease off pressure from India by his unilateral initiatives for war avoidance and cooperation but he couldn't go far in resolving substantive issues with New Delhi. Benazir Bhutto and Rajiv Gandhi had a good equation but both leaders were unable to neutralize the resistance of hawkish elements for normalizing relations. With Rajiv's exit from power and the dismissal of Benazir's first government the task of peace-building between India and Pakistan became more and more difficult. Since 1990,



governments in India and Pakistan are weak and exposed to serious domestic challenges. They have been unable to launch any serious initiatives to resolve substantive issues and would require to evolve substantial political will in this regard.

Based on the above discussed facts and analyses, India and Pakistan still provide fertile ground for conflict management and resolution. Yet, the application of the methodology used in the Middle East peace process is not possible in given circumstances. What is possible is the modification of that methodology according to changed conditions before its use in India and Pakistan. The process is difficult but the prospects are nonetheless bright. If the road to peace in the Middle East passes through Washington and Jerusalem, in South Asia it passes through New Delhi, Islamabad and Srinagar.