

Next month it will be twenty five years since Oslo and that famous handshake on the White House lawn by Prime Minister Rabin and Chairman Arafat under the patronage of President Bill Clinton.

And a lot will be written about this anniversary.

The one undeniable truth over this period has been the disenchantment of those who supported Oslo and who had believed that finally the Palestinians were going to reverse the original mantra as expressed in 1921 by the Palestine Arab Executive Committee when they said: *“Either us or the Zionists. There is no room for both.”*

Those in Israel who still support the principals of Oslo and yearn for a Two State solution, understand where the fault lies for it not yet occurring.

AB Yehoshua who was at one time on the Meretz list running for the Knesset, said in an interview in Ha’artez that: *“Yasser Arafat first misled the world when he said he wanted a secular, pluralistic and democratic state and then trampled the Oslo Accords with terror attacks.”* Yehoshua also blamed Arafat’s successor, Mahmoud Abbas, for *“rejecting Israel’s land-for-peace offer in 2008”*.

Einat Wilf a former Labour MK, in a recently published a book says that her party’s assumption in 1993 *“that the Palestinians were ready for peace, has since proven to have been unfounded.”*

It is also thirteen years this month since the Disengagement from Gaza in 2005.

Ten years have passed since in 2008, Prime Minister Olmert pushed ahead with a most detailed map for the Two State solution including minimal retention of West Bank areas (primarily the blocks) with land swaps and a shared vision in Jerusalem.

And with yet another rejection of Two States by the Palestinians as Yehoshua noted.

As in other policy areas, this is another example of the disconnect occurring between Jews in Israel and some Jews in the Diaspora, in not understanding, or refusing to believe, just why a solution has not yet been reached.

The further removed from the reality of life in Israel either by choice or naiveté or personal prejudice, the less the realisation that has been so obvious to the Israeli mainstream – there is no partner.

The left/right divide is not about territory and except at the fringes, it is no longer ideological.

It is about security.

As in Sharon in 2005. As Prime Minister, Sharon argued that Israel gained more security by withdrawing from Gaza than by retaining it. Not because of what might happen in Gaza internally, but because of what he thought Israel gained from the international community.

In effect his aim was to gain national security which unfortunately came at the expense of the personal security of much of the south and some of central Israel.

And the question of security is directly tied in with assessment of whether there is or is not a partner.

The Israeli body politics' hope that there might be a potential partner was finally dashed by some years of outrageous and ongoing pronouncements from Abbas, including racial slurs and pure anti-Semitism.

From his "*the Jews with their filthy feet*" are taking over the Temple Mount, to his comments this year about Jews bringing the Holocaust upon themselves, denying Ashkenazim are Jews at all and stating that Jews have no historical or biblical ties to the Holy Land.

Nor can Israelis see a Palestinian partner emerging in the foreseeable future.

For Israelis therefore, the question is what should Israel do as a result?

Proceed on the basis that this is still ultimately the best way forward and conduct affairs so as to keep this option alive, or to say that after 100 years of no willingness to share by the other side, the time has come to seek other options?

After screaming for decades that Israeli settlements are the barrier to a Palestinian State, one of the biggest ironies is that it is now the Israeli left that demonstrate that settlements are not the obstacle to a Two State solution after all.

Ori Mark not just writing in Ha'aretz, but on *"behalf of a Ha'aretz analysis"* says that all that is required *"to have a contiguous Palestinian State is to remove 33 isolated settlements"*. And that *"those settlements contain 48,000 people, or fewer than 10,000 families"*.

Mark says: *"To scuttle partition, the right must increase the number of settlers who live in the areas between the Palestinian cities, thereby precluding territorial contiguity. But the map shows that the right-wing governments have left whole regions, in both the north and south of the West Bank, almost free of settlers"*.

He continues: *"After the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and northern West Bank in 2005, only four settlements remain in the triangle between Jenin, Nablus and Tul Karm – Shavei Shomron, Hermesh, Einav and Mevo Dotan. One might have expected Netanyahu and Naftali Bennett's Habayit Hayehudi party to want to beef up Israel's hold in this area. But during the past decade these settlements have grown by a minuscule number, just 140 families."*

*A similar situation exists in the southern West Bank. Between the southern approaches of Bethlehem, running east of the settlement of Efrat, and the northern approaches of Hebron, there is only one settlement, Karmeit Tzur. In the past 10 years this strategic settlement has grown by only about 80 families"*.

And Mark from Ha'aretz concludes: *"The maps and numbers leave no room for doubt: When it comes to construction in the settlements, Netanyahu is like an old refrigerator – freezing almost everything and making a lot of noise."*

So the left, understanding that we have no partner and with the desire to attempt to ensure that the lessons from 2005 have been learned, are trying to reconcile how to go for a Two State solution without compromising security.

How to avoid another Hamastan on the West Bank so that the plan would bring both national and personal security this time.

Which brings us to the third of the prime factors.

Demography.

And just as the physical security question is the left's Achilles heel, demography is the right's.

Demography is really just another element to security – the security to maintain a Jewish State and for it to also be a democracy.

And so, after twenty five years, the internal debate still revolves around the questions of partner, security and demography?

These are pragmatic questions, not ideological ones.

The one potential for moving forward, is for Israel to deal with different partners.

Gaza can still go either way, but what is fascinating is to watch Egypt effectively negotiate with both Hamas and Israel about a potential deal between them, be it short or longer term.

It is quite possible to envisage a scenario where for instance, Egypt and Saudi Arabia lead an Arab push to resolve the Palestinian issue as part of a broader deal.

However, it would appear that the most likely near term scenario is for one of two options.

Israel either continues with the status quo or moves forward unilaterally with some partial annexation. Perhaps of some or all of the blocks, whilst announcing a freeze outside of those blocks.

Ironically, once again, it is more likely that a Labour or Zionist Union led government would annex the blocks rather than a Likud government.

Why? Well because they can and the blocks were after all built by them.

And because the price on national security for such an annexation would likely be an official freeze outside of the blocks, something the Likud is keen to avoid having to state as formal policy.

Unofficially, Likud continues to operate the old refrigerator as Mark described - real time mostly freezing outside the settlement blocks, whilst noisily announcing and re announcing the same settlement plans.

And in the background the Trump grand plan is a possible game changer – or not.

Despite protestations from both sides of the debate in Israel, the effective result is most probably, to wait on a partner for the Two State option, whilst still keeping it on life support – for now.

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