Il processo di pace israelo-palestinese: vecchi ostacoli e nuove opportunità.

Intervista al Prof. Moshe Ma’oz

a cura di Maria Teresa Mammì* e Silvia Mascii**

un anno di distanza dalla Crisi di Gaza, la situazione nei Territori Occupati è ancora drammatica, e la divisione interpalestinese tra il Fatahland della Cisgiordania e l’Hamastan di Gaza, non fa altro che accrescere la preoccupazione di quanti, in Medio Oriente, sognano di porre fine ad un conflitto che si trascina da oltre 60 anni.

Molti cambiamenti sono occorsi nell’arco di quest’ultimo anno. Primo fra tutti l’avvicendamento elettorale, che in Israele e negli Stati Uniti ha visto l’affermarsi di nuove leadership. La vittoria del democratico Barak Obama alla Casa Bianca, ha suscitato enormi speranze, in parte disattese. L’interessamento della nuova Amministrazione statunitense verso la questione palestinese e la soluzione dei due Stati è stato esplicitato sin dall’inizio del mandato presidenziale. Dopo otto anni di Presidenza Bush, tutta incentrata sulla lotta al terrorismo e caratterizzata da un interventismo eccessivo e tuttavia infruttuoso nelle vicende mediorientali, l’Era Obama è stata inaugurata sotto i più alti auspici di ri conciliazione con il mondo arabo e di collaborazione con l’Islam moderato. Ciononostante, a parte la premessa ideologica postulata nello storico discorso del Cairo del giugno scorso, i risultati dell’operato statunitense stentano ad arrivare. Il congelamento immediato di tutti gli insediamenti israeliani, posto come condizione preliminare per la ripresa del dialogo, si è rivelato controproducente, causando un repentino irrididimento dei rapporti tra Washington e Tel Aviv.

Dall’altra parte, il nuovo esecutivo israeliano deve fare i conti con il fragile assetto della maggioranza di governo, che proprio sulle questioni fondamentali, come quella dei colloqui di pace, fatica a trovare un accordo al proprio interno. La coalizione di governo guidata da Benjamin Netanyahu, vede infatti al proprio interno, oltre agli esponenti del Likud, elementi diversissimi tra loro, che vanno dai laburisti ai nazionalisti di Israel Beiteneu.

Ad aggravare la precarietà di uno scenario politico già notevolmente complicato, concorre la drammatica frammentazione del popolo palestinese. Nonostante i numerosi tentativi di sanare la spaccatura tra le due anime palestinesi, la lotta tra Fatah

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ed Hamas sembra non conoscere tregua, e a tutt’oggi le due fazioni sembrano più lontane che mai. Da una parte il Presidente dell’ANP Abu Mazen, che pur denun-\c\i\ci\anto senza sosta la politica di occupazione israeliana e il continuo proliferare di insediamenti nei Territori, non abbandona la via del dialogo e della collaborazione. Dall’altra l’intransigenza di Hamas, che cieca a tutti i richiami della Comunità Internazionale, continua a lanciare missili verso le città israeliane e a vessare la stessa popolazione di Gaza.

Il problema della leadership, molto sentito sia da parte israeliana che da parte palestinese, è uno dei temi toccati nel corso di questa intervista dal Professor Moshe Ma’oz, studioso di Storia del Medio Oriente, professore emerito dell’Università Ebraica di Gerusalemme, già direttore del “Harry S. Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace” e consigliere di alcuni Primi Ministi israeliani, tra cui David Ben-Gurion, Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres e Ehud Barak.

A tal riguardo la posizione del Professor Ma’oz è estremamente realista: senza immaginare il candidato ideale alla guida del proprio Paese e dell’Autorità Palestinese (AP), il Professor Ma’oz invita a dare una possibilità sia a Netanyahu che ad Abu Mazen. Come ricordato dallo studioso, infatti, nel corso della recente storia di Israele, anche i governi di destra, tacciati di intransigenza hanno dato prova di grande audacia, portando addirittura ad accordi di pace insperati. È questo il caso di Menachem Begin, indicato da Ma’oz quale esempio di vero leader, che oltre a godere di un certo carisma personale, ebbe il coraggio di imporsi e di lottare per il trattato di pace con l’Egitto. L’esigenza di una leadership forte è costantemente ribadita lungo tutta l’intervista, che spazia dalle questioni interne israeliane, alle iniziative di pace informali come quella di Ginevra, di cui lo stesso Ma’oz è firmatario e promotore.

Il centro dell’intervista è tuttavia costituito dalla soluzione della questione palestinese e dai possibili sviluppi del conflitto israelo-palestinese. A tal riguardo, lo studioso israeliano sembra non avere dubbi: l’unica formula attuabile e realmente efficace è quella dei due Stati per due popoli. La creazione di uno Stato palestinese dai confini certi ed inviolabili con capitale Gerusalemme est, un’equa soluzione del problema dei profughi, l’abbandono della politica degli insediamenti israeliani, e una giusta condivisione delle risorse naturali, sono le premesse essenziali per un futuro di pace in Medio Oriente.

Bisognerà dunque ripartire dal punto in cui si è interrotto il dialogo, da Taba e dai Parametri Clinton\(^1\). Come sottolinea il Professor Ma’oz, ciò che ora sembra un’ovvietà, non lo era nove anni fa: infatti, se oggi la proposta dell’ex Presidente Clinton ci sembra l’unica via praticabile e di buon senso, allora ebbe una portata di-

\(^1\) Il “pacchetto Clinton”, presentato dall’ex Presidente e discusso nel gennaio 2001 a Taba, assegnava ai palestinesi il 97% dei Territori Occupati, la sovranità sui quartieri arabi di Gerusalemme e sulla Spianata delle Moschee, la costruzione di un collegamento tra Gaza e la Cisgiordania, e lo stanziamento di ingenti fondi (30 miliardi di dollari circa) da destinare ai profughi che decidevano di non tornare nel futuro Stato palestinese. La proposta affidava inoltre la sicurezza del nuovo Stato ad una forza internazionale, che avrebbe anche monitorato l’effettiva attuazione dell’Accordo. Per il testo completo della proposta Clinton, si veda: http://www.ipcri.org/files/clinton-parameters.html.
rompente, e forse proprio per questo non venne accolta come si sperava.

Per quanto riguarda poi l’aspetto regionale del conflitto, il professor Ma’oz, profondo conoscitore del mondo arabo ed islamico, porta l’attenzione sulla questione siriana e sulla necessità di una convergenza di Tel Aviv e Damasco su posizioni condivise. Un avvicinamento tanto più opportuno ed auspicato, soprattutto per l’effetto benefico di cui si gioverebbe l’intero contesto regionale: l’Iran risulterebbe infatti notevolmente indebolito da un’eventuale intesa tra Israele e la Siria, riducendo il proprio potenziale nocivo. Nel contesto mediorientale gli interessi strategici riescono a prevalere su qualsiasi tipo d’ideologia, e Ma’oz, sfatando il mito delle guerre di religione e della presunta “congenita” ostilità araba nei confronti di Israele, mostra come nella realtà siano sempre gli interessi politici ed economici, a muovere i fili dell’alta politica. Un ragionamento che il professore applica agevolmente anche alla realtà del proprio Paese: la nascita di uno Stato Palestinese, oltre a soddisfare la legittima istanza di una popolazione vessata da un regime di occupazione illegale, sarebbe l’unico modo per salvare Israele dalla rovina. L’integrità dello Stato ebraico, infatti, dipenderebbe dalla capacità di mettere fine ad un conflitto che ormai si trascina da troppo tempo, e al protrarsi di uno status quo, che con il passare del tempo sta diventando sempre più pericoloso. La creazione di uno Stato palestinese, sarebbe quindi l’unico modo per Israele di diventare uno Stato “normale”, di uscire da un’anomalia che ne mina la vita politica, e affrontare, finalmente, un futuro di pace.

1. Professor Ma’oz, your strong commitment to the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process is well known; in your opinion, is the Peace Process deadlocked or dead?

I was and I am still involved in the Peace Process because I believe it is in the interest of both sides. I do not think it is dead, but it is in very serious troubles. Nevertheless, I am hopeful. There is a paradox: the majority of Israelis and Palestinians wants the Two-State solution but does not believe it is going to work. In Israel, a great number of people, including the Government, believe that it is difficult getting the solution and making it work and they consider more convenient to manage the status quo. In my opinion, the “status quo” policy does not work and gets Israel into international isolation; what is more, it is highly risky because it could bring to another intifada. The interest of Israel is to settle this issue. Nevertheless, the Israeli Government is regrettably not strong enough to have such a vision; hence, it is necessary it to be promoted from outside, mainly from the U.S. Administration and from the European Union.

2. Following the wasted eight years of the Bush Administration, Barak Obama announced a more worthwhile involvement of the U.S. Administration in the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process. The starting approach was encouraging in terms of determination and impartiality. Nevertheless, up to now, the strategy seems toothless and the U.S. President overwhelmed by the complexity of the issue. In your opinion, what are the major steps the U.S. Administration needs to take in order to achieve any important outcome?
The declarations are very good, but the implementation is lacking. In the inauguration speech he spoke about a new approach to the Muslim world based on respect; then, he declared the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to be the most important issue and to be settled “actively and aggressively”. I will never forget it. Nevertheless, I think that in the speech of Cairo, he picked up the wrong issue: freezing settlements. This is what he requested from Israel as a beginning of the negotiation. But the settlements issue is just a symptom of the problem while, after 42 years, we need to approach the final status issues. Speaking about establishing borders instead of freezing settlements would have engendered a different attitude. The “borders” issue encompasses the “settlements” impasse: by marking out the borders of the State of Israel, it will be decided which settlements must be included. By contrast, asking for freezing settlements created a great deal of resentment in Israel; as result, President Obama is not popular. Unlike President Bush who was very popular in Israel because he did not support the Palestinian issue and was against negotiation between Syria and Israel. President Obama is indeed committed to do something because it is also in the interests of the United States. Unlike the attitude of Israel, that promotes the status quo, the Israeli-Palestinian question cannot be dragged further. Now, it is time to put a deadline: in two years the establishment of the Palestinian State. Until then, all the final status issues have to be settled with a strong American inducement.

3.- Recently, EU High Representative for the CFSP, Javier Solana, has called for a sharp solution backed by the international community: being the parameters for peace defined and well known, the time table is to be set. If the parties are not able to stick to it, then, after a fixed deadline, a UN Security Council Resolution should proclaim the adoption of the two-State solution. It would accept the Palestinian State as a full member of the UN, and set a calendar for implementation. Although it is not an official EU position, the “Solana plan” seems not to be very consistent with the US policy. In your opinion, to what extent is such a solution convincing?

I would prefer negotiations between the two parties. If it does not work, this solution could be used as a warning for Israel not to drag more and more the problem. Also, because maintaining the status quo is at the expense of the Israeli society, its economy and its education. Therefore, if Israel is not able to settle the problem, let’s have somebody who helps Israel to do it. I am deeply convinced that it is very important to have a timetable and, maybe, a UN Security Council resolution. The White House Chief of Staff, Rahm Emanuel, mentioned it. Maybe President Obama might adopt it, also because it is in the interest of Israel. However, he must take into account the strong pressure of the Jewish-American advocacy groups, namely AIPAC. The Jewish community in America is very relevant but, in my opinion, AIPAC does not represent the whole community; in particular, it does not represent the intellectuals who 78% voted for Obama. On the contrary, the other advocacy group, J-STREET, can be a helpful voice. At any case, less and less Jews identify with Israel in America; I am not
sure about Europe.
4. *The solution of the Palestinian issue cannot disregard the relationship between Israel and its Arab neighbours. Have the Arab countries, through the “Arab Peace Initiative”, got actively engaged?*

The “Arab Peace Initiative” offers Israel, for the first time, recognition, peace, security, normal relations in return for a Palestinian State on the pre-1967 war lines, a fair settlement for East Jerusalem and the Refugees issues. Israel did not accept it. For the Arabs, the “Initiative” is a strategic decision. The Sunni Arab countries need to deal with a bigger threat: Shi’ism of Iran. Israel is an ally to the Sunni Arab countries against Iran (Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia supported Israel during the war against Hezbollah in Lebanon in 2006). Therefore, there is a potential of a strategic alliance which is very important for peace. The peace in the Middle East is built on vested interests. The Arab leadership is very serious about this strategy. Although leaders are aware that common people are more motivated by emotions, they also know that people will change their mind if the Palestinian issue is settled. For sure, extremists (Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, Hamas) will keep on planning the destruction of Israel; but they are not regimes and could be weakened by peace. While Iran, which also wants to destroy Israel, is indeed a real threat. Therefore, it is in the interest of the State of Israel to take the advantage of the Arabs’ initiative.

5. *If any agreement between Syria and Israel was foreseeable, could it be achieved without a solution of the Israeli-Palestinian issue?*

It is very difficult for them to do it. Syria has always kept sense that the Palestinian issue is more important than the Golan Heights. Even Egypt, making peace with Israel, had an autonomy plan for the Palestinians. I think that they indeed want the Palestinian issue to be settled, because it is in the interest of all including Israel. Nevertheless, Syria might do it without the Palestinians. President Assad was ready to do it. Here exists the dichotomy between strategy and ideology. Syria has always professed a pan-Arab ideology, but its strategic interests are different: Syria betrayed the ideology of pan-Arabism for strategic interests namely: negotiating with Israel, having an alliance with Iran against Iraq which is an Arab country, supporting Maronites against the PLO. Everything goes by strategic, politic, economic interests rather than ideology. Even Iran, in the conflict between Christian Armenia and Shi’i Azerbaijan, supported Armenia because of the energy issue.

6. *Which interactions do you see between the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process and the Iranian nuclear question? Do you think that the Iranian threat negatively affects the Peace Process, as suggested by Prime Minister Netanyahu, or is the opposite, as believed by President Obama?*

Iran is anti-Israel also because of the Palestinian issue. The major motive for Iran to
hate Israel is the Palestinian issue, especially Jerusalem. If the Palestinian issue is settled, Iran would change its position. For sure, it will not become friend of Israel, but it will no longer have pretext to struggle. Even President Ahmadinejad said: “Once Israeli and Palestinian settle their problems, how can we intervene?” Prime Minister Netanyahu tries to link the Iranian threat to the Palestinian issue, declaring that it needs to avoid the nuclear threat before dealing with the Palestinian issue. But it sounds as tactic aiming at delaying more than settling the Palestinian issue.

On the contrary, the Iranian threat should facilitate the decision Israel has to make about Syria. At present, Syria and Iran are allies; if Syria made peace with Israel, Iran is likely to cool off its relations with Syria. The Israeli army - the Chief of General Staff, the Chief of Military Intelligence, believe that Israel has to make peace with Syria, giving back territories, because of the Iranian threat. They understand that it is very important to take out Syria from the axis. The link between Syria and Iran is strategic not ideological. Unlike Iran, Syria is a secular country. Although Syria pretends to be a Shi'ite country, it is not; the majority is Sunni. Syria needs Iran in order to resist Israel if war breaks out in the region; Israel is so powerful that can destroy Syria. On the contrary, if peace with Israel is achieved, Syria will not need Iran any longer. Also, the peaceful choice would enable Syria get financial aid from United States and European Union to rebuild its economy. Again, it is in the interest of both Israel and Syria to make peace.

7.- The Israeli settlement issue: none of Israeli governments has never stopped building up in the West Bank; why?

It is a very complex issue. The first pioneers of Israel built kibbutzim and after 1967 more settled in the West Bank (Judea and Samaria). The settlers have been considered by many people, including Israeli leaders, as the new pioneers of Israel. All Israeli governments, including those run by the Labour Party, preferred sending settlers to the West Bank instead of keeping military troops. Now, three generations of settlers have been grown up there and it is too difficult to move them away. Many people believe it cannot be done. Among Israeli leaders there is a great deal of hesitation: on one hand, they publicly endorse the settlers’ status; on the other, they understand very well that the settlements policy undermines the Peace Process. A compromise is necessary. A satisfactory option might be for Israel to include in its borders the big settlements blocks, giving in return to Palestinians land from other parts of the country. This idea was in the President Clinton’s peace proposal. Nevertheless, even if it happened, it should take into consideration that many settlers are ready to fight. While people living in the big settlements blocks decided to move there for financial reasons, because the life is cheaper, those living in the other settlements spread all over the West Bank are very militant. They believe that the law of God is superior to the law of the State. Such a belief allows them to destroy fields, olive trees, and shoot Palestinians. It is not Judaism, it is paganism. Israeli governments never behaved towards them severely, and have lost control on them. These settlers are very organised as ideological groups, it is difficult to penetrate them also
for the intelligence services. Some of them represent a big threat. For example, it is known they would like to blow the Al Aqsa Mosque, in the Haram Al Sharif (the Temple Mount); it would result in a religious war with 1.5 billion Muslims rising all over the world. In conclusion, the Israeli leadership has no strategic thinking about the settlements issue: on one hand, they speak about a Jewish democratic State; on the other hand, they build settlements leading to a South Africa syndrome.

8. - The Palestinian “Right of Return” issue and the State of Israel “Jewishness” issue are linked with each other: is a compromise attainable?

Yes, it is. First of all, Israel has the right of self determination; if it decides to be a Jewish State, no one can intervene in it. Secondly, we need to make some clarifications about the “Right of Return”. For many years a main principle of the PLO was that all the Palestinian refugees should return collectively to their land. Such a project would mean the destruction of the State of Israel. Therefore, it is easily understandable that in Israel there is an absolute consensus on the issue: the Palestinian “Right of Return” cannot be fully accomplished. Today, this “Right of Return” is no longer in the agenda, even Palestinians gave it up.

A common misunderstanding links the “Right of return” with the UN Resolution 194 of 1948. This Resolution does not mention the “Right of Return”. It resolves that “the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live in peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return”. In the sentence, the word “Right” is not written. The return of refugees needs a permission (“should be permitted”) by somebody, which is Israel. And an alternative (“compensation”) is included. Moreover, even the “Arab Peace Initiative” speaks about an “agreed” solution according to the UN Resolution 194 (1948), which means an “agreement” by Israel. Therefore, it can mean that the Palestinian refugees are not going to go back to the State of Israel, except for certain number.

I was involved in the negotiations with Palestinians and I think that a fair agreement could be reached on the family reunification say for fifty/hundred thousands to return while others settled elsewhere (namely, in other Arab countries) with compensation. Although everybody knows it, Israeli leaders and also intellectuals go on making use of the refugees issue to frighten the Israeli people and influence public opinion. It is likely that the majority of the Palestinian refugees would select the compensation option if they have a real and fair opportunity.

Eventually, I want to underline that the “Right of Return” issue is not the main threat to the “Jewishness” of the State of Israel. The annexation policy is more dangerous. Israel declares to be a Jewish State and a democracy. Nevertheless, pursuing an annexation policy would make it impossible to be, at the same time, a Jewish State and a democracy. If the occupied territories were annexed, Arabs would be the majority; in order to be a democracy, Israel should recognise Palestinians as full Israeli citizens; it would mean for Israel to loose its uniqueness and to be no longer a Jewish State. However, in my opinion, it is hard to imagine that Palestinians will get
full Israeli citizenship; Israel’s priority is keeping its uniqueness as a Jewish State; it would mean Israel will not be a democracy any longer, becoming a Bantustan or an apartheid State. But Israel must not do it. An alternative exists: a Palestinian State. There are obstacles and dangers, but this is the only solution we have. Israel cannot have a good solution: it is between bad (a Palestinian State next to Israel, source of potential dangers) and worst (the status quo). Although some Israelis think differently, I deeply believe the only realistic solution is “Two States for Two Peoples”.

9. You are one of the signatory of the Geneva Accord, one of the most remarkable initiatives of the so-called “informal diplomacy”. Do you think is there any chance of implementation for this kind of informal initiatives?

The contribution of the second track diplomacy is an essential addition to official (first track) diplomacy and can be a good start. Nevertheless, only the leaders can do the job. The Oslo Accords came about from a second track, but the leaders had to decide. When Prime Minister Menachem Begin, leader of the Likud Party, negotiated peace with Egypt in 1978, 85% of people in Israel were against giving back Sinai even for peace; nevertheless, he did it and got 85% -90% of public support. This is leadership, he was a leader. Also Yitzhak Rabin was a leader, who was unpopular with the settlers. Ariel Sharon was a leader in the wrong sense. Today, there is no leadership with a vision and courage.

10. Given the importance of the leadership, in your opinion does President Mahmoud Abbas fit to represent all the Palestinians?

President Mahmoud Abbas is a democratically elected leader. Israel has to strengthen him, because he is its only partner. Moreover, he really did something, not just talking, to maintain security, to improve economy, to reform society more democratically. He was very disappointed by the U.S. Administration about the “freezing settlements” issue. Nevertheless, the next Palestinian elections are a very risky opportunity: if President Mahmoud Abbas is not confirmed, it means that his strategy failed, and this would strengthen Hamas. On the contrary, if President Mahmoud Abbas wins elections, the model for Israeli and Palestinian coexistence would be strengthened, and Hamas, which stands for militancy, would be weakened. Such a result, thus, is also in the interest of Israel; the alternative would engender a Bantustan or Apartheid State, as any open-minded person can imagine. Yet, President Mahmoud Abbas ignored initially the publication of the Goldstone Report on the Gaza war and experienced a large wave of unpopularity. Indeed, President Mahmoud Abbas secretly supported the Israeli war against Hamas. Then, the events were so dreadful that he could not reject the Goldstone Report because it is a Palest-

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2 Second track diplomacy is negotiation between unofficial representatives, as intellectuals.
tinian issue.

In terms of Palestinian leadership, however, I would prefer Marwan Barghouti because he is more charismatic, more popular and stronger. He is peacenik. I knew him before he was arrested. I am aware of the importance of his leadership and hope for his release to have a real chance.

11. *What is your opinion about the Goldstone Report?*

I did not read the whole report, but from what I read I can affirm that there are some elements of truth, basically anti-Israel. Nevertheless, I think it is not totally balanced, because it did not take into account what Hamas did. Israel over-did, over-killed in Gaza, there were many casualties unnecessary. However, blaming Israel of crime against humanity means to use a double standard. The same charge was not directed against the Russian Federation about its behaviour in Chechnya or to the U.S.A. about Afghanistan and Iraq. Definitely, Israel was wrong to do it, but I think that Richard J. Goldstone went too far. He, who is Jewish, has credits but for Israel is very difficult to accept his position. We need to understand also the Israeli point of view: lots of Israelis supported the war in Gaza. In Sderot, south of Israel near Gaza, people suffer because of Qassam rockets by Hamas. An independent sovereign State cannot tolerate to be shot all the time. It is a matter of national prestige. Israel decided to deal with such a problem mightily: the strongest army in the Middle East was facing Hamas, which has neither airplanes nor tanks. The consequences could not have been other than negative. Israel needs to change its dealing with Hamas. In my opinion, it is very important to try and settle it diplomatically, politically, before shooting. Because it can happen again.

12. *A question about Israeli’s domestic policy. Ehud Olmert, the former Israeli Prime Minister indicted on numerous corruption charges, told that the mudslinging campaign against him is related to the strong commitment of his government to the Peace Process. In your view, does this suspect have any foundation?*

It is a very interesting question. Not everybody knows it, but Prime Minister Ehud Olmert made the best offer ever to Palestinians: 97% of the West Bank, including putting the holy places in Jerusalem under an international regime with the participation of the U.S.A., Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel. It is indeed very far-reaching. Thus, it is very interesting to understand which motivations engendered such a position. It is told that, being indicted, he wanted to appeal to the public opinion. It sounds bizarre because most Israelis are against giving back Jerusalem. It can appeal to the left, and the left is very small in Israel. Moreover, Olmert submitted the proposal neither to the Government nor the Knesset for approval. Also Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, who knew the proposal, was against it. President Mahmoud Abbas did not accept the offer and, now, Palestinians want negotiations to go on from this point. But the offer has been denied by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. It is
very hard to say whether Ehud Olmert was courageous or wanted to please the public opinion. Generally speaking, it is very hard to understand what some Israeli leaders really aim at. Ehud Barak, a “dove”, lost his chance for peace, in spite of his declarations for a Palestinian State. Ariel Sharon, a “hawk” who fought against a Palestinian State, looked on and discovered the demographic problem; it took him 36 years to reach this conclusion. He became conscious that the occupation does not work, because it is not a matter of land, it a matter of people.

13.- In your opinion, what is the formula for a lasting peace in the Middle East?

The Clinton’s parameters and the Arab Peace Initiative. It does not mean that Israel has to accept the Arab Peace Initiative as it is, but as the basis for negotiation. Most Israeli people are still for a Palestinian State. According to the speech of Prime Minister Netanyahu at Bar Ilan University, Israeli Government agrees to a Palestinian State. Nevertheless, in order not to undermine such a position, Netanyahu has to remove his preconditions. First, Palestinians are requested by him to recognise Israel as a Jewish State. This is simply a misleading request. In order to make peace, neither Egypt nor Jordan had to recognise Israel as a Jewish State. Because it is for Israel to define its nationality, not for others. Moreover, the PLO accepted in 1988 the UN General Assembly Resolution 181 (1947), which recommends the creation of two States, one Arab and one Jewish, thus in a way the PLO recognised the State of Israel as a Jewish State. Second, having Jerusalem united under Israeli control is a precondition simply unacceptable by Palestinians.

It is time to deal with the main issues: firstly, a Palestinian State and, secondly, the Golan Highs. Demilitarisation and supervision have to be agreed with Palestinians and Syria. I think that Israel is strong enough to take risks. If Israel misses this opportunity, more and more Palestinians would press for one-State solution. The international community might, in the end, embrace such a position and, shortly, the United Nations might release a new resolution forcing down Israel with one-State solution. In my opinion, this is the last chance for Israel to coexist, with Palestine.