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What's going on, it seems to me, is that the Oslo agreement, along with Cairo I and Cairo II that have followed, were purposefully designed to make it quite impossible for anyone, including the protagonists themselves, to be sure just where things are going to end up

Peled's conclusions

Meanwhile, throughout the region, from Algeria in the west to Pakistan in the east, the forces of change and instability are considerable and may rock the region at anytime in ways that could considerably alter the region's dynamics.

In this context, I find Peled's observations about Rabin, and his assessment of what lies immediately ahead, more vital and convincing than his more far-reaching hopes that in the end things could work out. So it's to those parts of his overall analysis that I want to turn.

"Rabin is a very suspicious, hesitant, distrusting person," Peled insists. "Therefore he cannot allow the 'process' to proceed quickly.

"The prolonged negotiations made both Israeli and Palestinian publics lose faith in the process and enabled the opponents on both sides to recover from their initial shock and stage a very effective opposition — violent and vocal. This makes Rabin even more hesitant and suspicious which causes the process to slow down even further. He feels bound to fight 'terrorism' as if there is no peace process and go on with the process as if there is no fight against terrorism.

"The result is that the feeling of frustration is spreading among those wishing to see progress, and violence against the process is constantly gaining momentum. His reaction after the massacre of Hebron

was typical: he put 120,000 Palestinians under curfew to protect some 200 Israeli fanatics living in Hebron from the wrath of the Palestinians whereas he should have evacuated the Israelis....

"In short, Rabin has become an enigma which no one can explain any more," Peled adds; even though his explanations of the complexities of both what we euphemistically call "the peace process" and of the current Israeli prime minister have a ring of authenticity.

As for the Palestinians, Peled retains his long-held belief — or is it more lingering hope — that sooner or later some kind of Palestinian state will emerge.

I differ with Peled on this part of his analysis. What I see is another in a long series of broken and duplicitous agreements going back to World War I and the Paris peace conference of 1919. What I see is a badly fractured Palestine, now less than 50 percent of the 22 percent of historic Palestine that was contained in the territories occupied in 1967.

What I see, in fact, is a lot closer to what Peled then goes on to say about the current situation:

"But at this stage, assuming that the 'Gaza-Jericho First' plan would be accomplished, we are approaching the beginning of the second phase of the talks, the search for a permanent solution.

"I don't believe Rabin will allow the es-

tablishment of a Palestinian state," Peled states. "His idea of a permanent solution is based on the Alon Plan, i.e., hand over to Jordan those territories not annexed to Israel — practically the big cities of Hebron, Bethlehem, Ramallah, Nablus, Qalqilya, Tulkarem — while retaining the Jordan Valley and Gush Ezion.

"This plan," Peled continues, "will get the support of the US and Russia and probably that of Egypt and Jordan. But its implementation will not be possible due to the opposition of the Palestinians and the rest of the Arabs and the Muslim countries.

"A severe crisis will ensue and an international effort to control it may result in all kinds of situations none of which would be welcome by all parties. Beyond that I fail to see the consequences...."

Indeed, the future consequences of the social and political forces unleashed by the Coalition War a few years ago and more recently the Labour Party-Fatah arrangement are impossible to predict with any certainty.

And yet it would be foolish, in view of the historic record, not to suspect that considerable chaos and violence are ahead. For contrary to what most of the political leaders are assuring us — many times too often and thus betraying their own doubts — the basic causes of regional instability have probably been exacerbated rather than alleviated in recent years.