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**THESIS**

**U.S. POLICY IN THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN DISPUTE**

by

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**U.S. POLICY IN THE ISRAELI–PALESTINIAN DISPUTE**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this thesis is to examine why a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority that would result in an independent Palestinian state appears increasingly unlikely. The thesis explores the history of the peace process with particular emphasis on the role played by the United States in attempting to fashion an agreement that guaranteed an independent Palestinian state. The results of the thesis suggest a historical path dependency and the power of spoilers in the peace process. Also important has been the nature of U.S. support for Israel, the lack of a truly representative Palestinian body, and the increased influence of more hard-line political parties within Israel and Palestine in recent decades. All these factors have shaped the process and made the prospect of an independent Palestinian state increasingly unlikely. The conclusions point to the need for a change in the status quo and the likelihood of U.S. involvement in whatever negotiations take place in the future. Recommendations for the path ahead include a range of potential solutions to the issues surrounding the problem and the possible U.S. role.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

Fatah	Palestinian National Liberation Movement
Hamas	The Movement of Islamic Resistance
IDF	Israeli Defense Force
MNNA	Major Non-NATO Ally
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
PM	Prime Minister
SA	Saudi Arabia
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
USD	United States Dollars
WZO	World Zionist Organization

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## **I. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION**

This thesis examines the history and seeming demise of the two-state solution between Israel and Palestine. It seeks to determine why the two-state solution appears increasingly unlikely as a solution to the long-running Arab–Israeli dispute. The thesis will examine the alternative explanations for this phenomenon and assess which of these holds the most merit. Last, the thesis will examine the implications of these findings for U.S. policy in the Arab–Israeli dispute and the wider Middle East. The thesis will use empirical evidence and inductive reasoning to examine the evolving history of search for a two-state solution and find out the reasons why that search has failed so far.

The thesis will also explore the role of the United States in influencing the search for a peaceful resolution and attempt to determine the feasibility of the two-state solution given the ascent of security-centric Israeli political actors, including those represented by the Likud party and other right-wing actors. Combined with the factionalized and disenfranchised Palestinian political entities and the impoverished and disenfranchised population, these realities and other regional considerations create significant barriers to a peaceful solution to the problem. If there is another peace process, the United States—as a major world actor and longtime supporter of Israel—will probably be involved in whatever process takes place, and U.S. foreign policy will be a critical factor in shaping its credibility in facilitating any future attempts at a peace process.

### **A. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

The significance of the Israel–Palestine question and the impact it has on U.S. interests is multifaceted. The first significance is the loss of life, liberty and freedom that has developed in Israel and Palestine, which has been perpetuated by the failure of political compromise and negotiation. This ongoing problem seems to be partly a symptom of limitations placed on political leaders by the need to placate their constituencies. This has led to a lack of transparency between the two parties, as public statements made in this context can be disingenuous, inflammatory, and misleading—leading to violence and the disbelief in, and de-incentivizing of, rapprochement. Even

more damaging to the process is when political actors take advantage of temporary ceasefires to try to undermine the spirit of the accords by dubious means. For example, during the ceasefire agreement that was reached as a result of the Oslo accords, Israel was busy establishing more settlements on the ground that gave them rhetorical room to strengthen their claim to occupied Palestinian land.

This type of behavior damages Israeli credibility in the eyes of the Palestinians and the international community. The United States, for its part, has been a strong supporter of Israel for the entirety of its existence, and has essentially given Israel free reign to do as it sees fit—often in spite of United Nations (UN) resolutions. Israel’s political and rhetorical cart blanche has undermined U.S. credibility in the process, and has served as a source of animus, a recruiting tool, and a political club for Jihadists, anti-U.S. parties, and hostile states like Iran that assert that the United States is a meddling, imperialistic, and ultimately hypocritical power. Taking a term from economics, for Israel this type of protective and favorable treatment by the United States is essentially a moral hazard—whatever statements or actions Israel takes lack any real state-level consequence that might otherwise add more of a sense of gravity to state actions and announcements. In turn, that facilitates the reimagining or reframing of the peace process with the Palestinians. Even the UN is seemingly powerless to apply pressure for change in the situation while the United States is so heavily involved. This serves to somewhat undermine the international weight and standing of the UN as a bastion of diplomacy and avatar of liberalist international relations theory.

If the peace process continues without resolution, it will continue to deteriorate U.S. and Israeli standing within the region and with the international community. For Israel, this could portend more deaths, isolation, terrorism, condemnation and anti-Semitism. For the United States, it could lead to a continued erosion of credibility and influence, problems with international terrorism and regional terrors such as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)—heightening the threat of nuclear development and proliferation, and the weakening of key partners in the region that could be vulnerable to accusations of collusion or submission to Western and Israeli interests. All of these potential effects serve to undermine American strategic interests and strengthen hostile

regimes, which ultimately will result in a more destabilizing situation and a weakened United States.

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this literature review is to explore the issues surrounding the conflict between Israel and Palestine and the arguments and evidence concerning the two-state solution within the context of prevailing policy and attitudes present within the Israeli and U.S. governments. The two-state solution is the most widely proposed method of solving the conflict between Israel and Palestine. This solution commonly calls for the recognition of the state of Palestine, which would consist of the West Bank and Gaza, the right of return for displaced Palestinian refugees, and the cessation and withdrawal of Jewish settlers from Palestinian areas. The literature review shows the common perception of the various problems inherent in the peace process as well as proposed ways ahead.

### **1. Issues Surrounding the Two-State Solution**

There are many issues surrounding the two-state solution. Most modern scholarly works attribute the demise of the peace process as resting mostly in the hands of Israel and the United States. Chas W. Freeman asserts that the peace process over the last five decades has been “fraudulent,” and has institutionalized injustice, damaged Israel’s democracy, and alienated and delegitimized it on the world stage.<sup>1</sup> Freeman states that this injustice and maltreatment of the Palestinians and surrounding countries, coupled with the Israeli’s deceitful negotiations has earned it a lasting reputation for duplicity.<sup>2</sup> Freeman goes on to say that Americans have been hypocritical in our approach to the UN charter and enforcement of international law.<sup>3</sup> Freeman opines that time for the peace-process has passed, that U.S. complicity in Palestinian suffering has empowered the message of Jihadists, that U.S. support for Israel has been an anchor on U.S. diplomacy

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<sup>1</sup> Chas W. Freeman, Jr., “Lessons From America’s Misadventures in the Middle East,” *Middle East Policy* XXII, no. 4 (December 2015), 66, doi: 10.1111/mepo.12158/.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

throughout the region, will ultimately end up harming Israeli and U.S. interests as international condemnation continues, and groups like ISIS adopt and exploit the conflict for legitimacy.<sup>4</sup>

Freeman claims that the current government in Israel is stridently provocative towards Palestine. During 2014 violence with Palestinians in Gaza, the deputy minister of defense “threatened Palestinians there with a ‘Holocaust.’ A senior figure in HaBeyit HaYehudi, which is part of the governing coalition in Israel, called for the destruction of ‘the entire Palestinian people...including its elderly and its women, its cities and its villages, its property and its infrastructure.’ And a deputy speaker of the Knesset called for the forced depopulation of Gaza.”<sup>5</sup> Freeman states that from a U.S. perspective, Israel does not care about American interests, while the United States demonstrably does not really care about democracy in the region. He calls the negotiations with the Palestinian Authority “fraudulent,” as that group did not win the elections in 2006, and representatives from the other Palestinian groups were not involved.<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Jerome Slater shares some of Freeman’s pessimism, and argues that there is little hope at this point for a peace process—as the Israeli position has become entrenched—but does muse that more possibilities could present themselves with a change in Israeli willingness to negotiate with Hamas and a clearer understanding of the facts of the situation among the U.S. Jewish community, which would give U.S. politicians the political capital to support more objective policies. Slater concludes that Israeli terrorism against Palestinian civilians and civilian targets has been quantitatively more violent, more disproportionate, and relatively more unjust than Palestinian terrorism.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Freeman, “Lessons from America’s Misadventures in the Middle East,” 61–2, 65–6.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth Pollack, Paul R. Pillar, Amin Tarzi, Chas W. Freeman Jr., “U.S. Foreign Policy and the Future of the Middle East,” *Middle East Policy* XXI, no. 3 (September 2014), 29–30, doi: 10.1111/mepo.12079/.

<sup>7</sup> Jerome Slater, “Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” *Middle East Policy* XXII, no. 3 (September 2015), 79–97, doi: 10.1111/mepo.12145/.

Former Ambassador to Israel Daniel Kurtzer states that during recent diplomatic processes, there was no real thought from the start about the strategic endgame of the negotiations, that proposals such as freezing settlements were done in the abstract—without consideration for the political price—and that root causes of the cyclical violence do not get addressed which in turn perpetuates the cycle.<sup>8</sup>

Natan Sachs asserts that the United States has failed as an arbiter of the peace process between Israel and Palestine—both of which should be considered to have agency in the process—and are in turn are the biggest losers of the failed negotiation attempts although the two are also ultimately responsible for their failure.<sup>9</sup> Sachs explains that distrust and public and political party opinion is a limiting factor for the leadership on both sides. Though the public of both groups are still in favor of a two-state solution, both sides are skeptical that this solution will ever occur peacefully, and for the Israelis there is a selective blindness to the Palestinian people.<sup>10</sup>

Sachs goes on to say that for the Palestinians the skepticism is reinforced by the continued failures of the negotiations and the perceived duplicity of the Israelis; for the Israelis, the Palestinians will never give away certain claims to the land or right of return, and neither force nor diplomacy has resulted in any resolution.<sup>11</sup> According to Sachs, when Palestinians ask for their own state and the right of return, the Israelis in return interpret this to mean that they will be overwhelmed by Palestinian refugees that will undermine the integrity of their state.<sup>12</sup> Sachs states that these perceptions, combined with continued outside criticism and the Israeli view that their conflict with the Palestinians is hardly the impetus for instability in the Middle East, has resulted in the ascendance of the right wing in Jerusalem and reinforces the idea that the world is against

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<sup>8</sup> Daniel C. Kurtzer, Matthew Duss, Natan B. Sachs, Yousef Munayyer, “The Israeli–Palestinian Conflict: Has the U.S. Failed?” *Middle East Policy* XXI, no. 4 (December 2014), 3–4, doi: 10.1111/mepo.12092/.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 7–8, 24.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 10.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

them.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, for Israel, the dramatic upheaval in the Middle East with the problem in Iraq, Syria, ISIS and a rising Iran serve to deprioritize the Palestinian plight in favor of security concerns, according to Sachs.<sup>14</sup> Sachs also states that one should be careful not to characterize the Palestinians as mere passive victims who are not accountable for the violence.<sup>15</sup> Sachs also points out that if one looks at the problem as conflict between two responsible parties, then the solution becomes peace – not justice, which do not necessarily go hand in hand.<sup>16</sup>

John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt assert that U.S. interests should be of primary importance in its foreign policy, but for the last four-plus decades Israel has been of preeminent concern and has enjoyed unconditional support—which actually puts runs counter to U.S. interests.<sup>17</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt posit that the perceived advantages of having Israel as a close ally against terrorism in the region are incorrect, as this relationship is in fact one of the primary causes of terrorism against the United States, and that Israel’s possession of nuclear weapons acts as a catalyst for other regional states to try and acquire their own.<sup>18</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt also argue that contrary to some views, Israel is not weak, should not be supported simply due to its democratic system of government, cannot be rationally seen to have the moral high ground, and its people should not receive special treatment for the suffering they endured in the past when looking at their actions. They state that an “Israel lobby” exerts undue influence on U.S. domestic politics, and that this explains many of the seemingly dissonant policies of the United States in regards to Israel.<sup>19</sup>

Michael J. Thompson of William Patterson University argues that Israel is not a full Democracy, but is rather a “Jewish Democracy” only, and that identity politics and

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<sup>13</sup> Kurtzer et al., 9–10.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 23–24.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, “The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy,” *Middle East Policy* XIII, no. 3 (October 2006), 30, doi: 10.1111/j.1475-4967.2006.00260.x/.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 34–36, 40.

exclusionary policies will become more entrenched as the country continues its turn to the right.<sup>20</sup> Thompson argues that this, in turn, will have a serious effect as “The Israel *Volkstaat* has slowly emerged as the prominent path for the future, and this can only spell disaster for Israelis and Palestinians alike since it will breed nothing but continued resentment and separation, both distinct and long-term barriers to peace.”<sup>21</sup>

## 2. Managing the Problem

President of the Foundation for Middle East Peace Matthew Duss asserts that Israel, at this point, is more interested in managing the problem with the Palestinians and increasing the settlement numbers to a kind of tipping-point than it is in any permanent resolution, and that the United States perceives the settlements are the primary impediment to peace.<sup>22</sup> Duss also brings up the point that the peace process is hampered by unconditional U.S. support to Israel as this effectively de-incentivizes the issue for Israel—who is better off—and pushes Palestinians to pursue alternative solutions.<sup>23</sup>

Yousef Munayyer, the Executive Director of the Jerusalem Fund and the Palestine Center, states that the United States itself does not have any real interest in peace between Israel and Palestine as long as there is a free flow of resources in the region—due to geostrategic concerns—and, due to the realities of domestic politics in the United States, that Israel is secure.<sup>24</sup> In addition, the United States has displayed inconsistency between what it says and what it does in regards to Israel, and accepts the idea of dealing with Israeli governments that it does not necessarily agree with but has attempted to forcibly change elected Palestinian government like Hamas or individuals like Yasser Arafat.<sup>25</sup> Munayyer states there is a “culture of impunity” in Israel and argues that the Israel public is supportive of “apartheid” policies that will not change unless the United States

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<sup>20</sup> Michael J. Thompson, “Deconstructing Israeli Democracy: On the Cultural Prerequisites of Political Modernity,” in *From Camp David to Cast Lead* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 22–26.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>22</sup> Kurtzer et al., “The Israeli–Palestinian Conflict,” 13–14.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 14–15.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 19, 29.

becomes willing to hold Israel accountable for its actions. He further points out that Israel is by far the stronger party, and that Palestinian consequences come in the form of Israeli military action, while Israelis do not have to deal with consequences of any gravity.<sup>26</sup> Munayyer also asserts that the idea that settlements are non-violent is false.<sup>27</sup>

Thomas R. Mattair, Executive Director of the Middle East Policy Council and others state that the Israel–Palestine issue is a tool that is used by terrorist organizations in the area as a recruiting tool, which lends credence to the importance of resolving the issue sooner rather than later.<sup>28</sup>

Professor Menachem Klein at Bar-Ilan University asserts that since 1967, Israel uses settlements as spearheads for expanding borders, viewed these regions as essential for security, and believes them to be a necessary prerequisite for annexation and for preventing Palestinian Independence.<sup>29</sup> Klein contends that the 1993 and 1995 Oslo Accords actually increased settlement efforts with the intent to undermine peace negotiations with the Palestinians, and that there has been a significant increase in the number of settlements from the start of the Oslo accords and over the next 17 years of peace negotiations.<sup>30</sup> Klein argues that this increased settlement activity is used in conjunction with a policy “of destroying Palestinian homes and other buildings...Israel heavily restricts Palestinian building, planning, and development...in order to preserve as much land as possible for settlement expansion.”<sup>31</sup> According to Klein, international law allows for occupation until security issues are resolved, and Israel in turn uses the excuse of security to hold occupied land indefinitely, and this is a possible reason for the Israeli’s perceived reluctance to credibly commit to a two-state solution and instead merely manage the problem. In addition, any attempt to seriously change the status-quo in the

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<sup>26</sup> Kurtzer et al., “The Israeli–Palestinian Conflict,” 19–20, 23.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 31; Pollack et al., “U.S. Foreign Policy and the Future of the Middle East,” 30.

<sup>29</sup> Menachem Klein, “Settlement Security Complex,” in *From Camp David to Cast Lead* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 15–16.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.



occupied territories would need to use a comprehensive approach that deals with both the security apparatus in Israel and the issue of settlements simultaneously.<sup>32</sup>

Marxist intellectual Henry Pachter states that surrounding countries do not accept Palestinian refugees because they can use the issue as a tool in their local politics, and therefore are not especially interested in a resolution.<sup>33</sup>

Historian Avi Shlaim posits that the spiritual father of the right wing in Israel is Ze'ev Jabotinsky, who argued that the only way that Israel could survive in the face of Arab opposition was to militarily “stack the cards” in Israel’s favor—supposedly resulting in eventual Arab capitulation.<sup>34</sup> Shlaim also argues that the “security barrier” that Israel is building is promoted as a security measure but is actually a settlement shaping and land-grabbing tool.<sup>35</sup> Shlaim also claims that much of the violence committed by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) is purposed towards undermining Palestinian political consolidation and encouraging Palestinians to simply leave.<sup>36</sup>

Political Analyst Marwan Bishara points out that the Israeli settlements have “undermined Palestinian attempts at nation building...the settlement drive and its ideology have become a cornerstone of modern Israeli national identity...the current violence they are breeding have transcended the country’s ethnic and religious divides to create a new Israelism based on new Jewish nationalism.<sup>37</sup> Bishara also states that U.S. aid money is used to lure families into the settlements, and most of the settlers are fundamentalist and have a strong voice in the government.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Klein, “Settlement Security Complex,” 32, 36.

<sup>33</sup> Henry Pachter, “Who Are the Palestinians?” in *From Camp David to Cast Lead* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 15–16.

<sup>34</sup> Avi Shlaim, “Ariel Sharon’s War Against the Palestinians,” in *From Camp David to Cast Lead* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 44.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 47–48.

<sup>37</sup> Marwan Bishara, “West Bank Settlements Obstruct Peace: Israel’s Empire State Building,” in *From Camp David to Cast Lead* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 59.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

General Secretary of the Palestine National Initiative (PNI) Mustapha Barghouti states that the settlements have destroyed “any prospects for peace,” and that Israel’s demands keep increasing while Palestinians are forced to defer and capitulate.<sup>39</sup> Barghouti states that Palestine needs to establish an independent state, mobilize the Palestinian population, and turn to the international forum for help.<sup>40</sup>

Historian Lawrence Davidson reiterates the argument that Israeli incursions are oriented to convince the Palestinian people to give up and give in, preclude any credible attempts at peace, and that the large imbalance of power between the Israelis and the Palestinians leaves little incentive for Israel to compromise.<sup>41</sup> Davidson also claims that Israelis see themselves as eternal victims, and that they “learn history as endless story of persecution, inquisition, and pogroms...whole mentality is shaped by war from earliest childhood,” and that the land of Israel is theirs alone.<sup>42</sup>

Political Philosopher Stephen Eric Bronner posits, “as Israeli power and its settlements increased over time, and as the quality of its offers to the Palestinians concomitantly decreased, the “peace process” became a substitute for peace. Or, to put it another way, ‘crisis management’ became a substitute for resolving the crisis.”<sup>43</sup>

### **3. A Way Ahead**

There are multiple recommendations for the way ahead. For the United States and Israel, Chas W. Freeman asserts that the peace process between Israel and Palestine is essentially over, in part because the United States was more interested in Palestinian concessions than their right of self-determination; the United States should stay out of the issue and stop *carte blanche* support to Israel so that a more honest broker can try to make

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<sup>39</sup> Mustapha Barghouti, “A Place for Our Dream?” in *From Camp David to Cast Lead* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 65.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>41</sup> Lawrence Davidson, “Blitzkrieg in Gaza,” in *From Camp David to Cast Lead* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 103–4.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>43</sup> Stephen Eric Bronner, “Who Are the Palestinians Today?” in *From Camp David to Cast Lead* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 111.

a more credible attempt at peace.<sup>44</sup> Freeman goes on to say that America should return to the practice of “leading by example” and stop intervening based on ideology and that “The biggest contribution that we could make now to Israel’s longevity would be to ration our support for it, so as to rethink and reform its often self-destructive behavior.<sup>45</sup>

Dr. Galia Golan argues that despite the results of peacemaking efforts thus far, peace, and the two-state solution, is still achievable with the right set of conditions: sufficient political will, increased interest of a peace agreement on the part of the Israeli population and other regional and international actors, a clear and end-state for the negotiations, preliminary secrecy and swift implementation of any agreements during and after the negotiations to prevent “spoilers,” mutual recognition of statehood, and approaching the issue of land from a paradigm of utility and interest.<sup>46</sup> Finally, Dr. Golan suggests U.S. involvement of some sort: the United States should take an active role that helps break the status quo—they should either get more involved by applying political pressure or, if deemed necessary, even abstaining in the event of consequences imposed by the international community.<sup>47</sup>

Dr. Kurtzer suggests that a holistic, multilateral approach, which includes a common framing of the negotiation parameters, instituting measures for monitoring negotiated commitments and credible consequences for parties that renege, needs to be adopted before there is any chance of success. This will help provide incentive for honest and committed negotiations and provide diplomats with a clear understanding of the tools that are available to them.<sup>48</sup> Kurtzer also asserts that Palestinians perceive Israeli settlement activity as directly undermining territorial negotiations, and that the Israeli’s argue that settlements are not the same as killing people.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Pollack et al., “U.S. Foreign Policy and the Future of the Middle East,” 12.

<sup>45</sup> Freeman, “Lessons From America’s Misadventures in the Middle East,” 67; Chas W. Freeman, Jr., “Responding to Failure: Reorganizing U.S. Policies in the Middle East,” *Middle East Policy* XXII, no. 2 (June 2015), 37, doi:10.1111/mepo.12126/.

<sup>46</sup> Galia Golan, “The Israeli–Palestinian Conflict: Lessons for a Breakthrough,” *Middle East Policy* XXII, no. 3 (September 2015), 105–108, doi: 10.1111/mepo.12146/.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Kurtzer et al., “The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict” 4–7, 26.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 21, 27.

Mr. Sachs proposes that the unused Arab Peace Initiative is another possible way to help and resolve the conflict, and Munayyer points out that a framework for peace between Israel and Palestine is already in place vis-a-vis international law, and that the United States has decided to move away from that approach and has vetoed UN resolutions multiple times in support of Israel.<sup>50</sup>

For Palestine, Matthew Duss, president of the Foundation for Middle East Peace, points out that Hamas and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) would be better served as an agent of the Palestinian people if they were united, in accordance with the concept of the state's monopolization of violence. He also points out that the Israel–Palestine issue is the most galvanizing issue in the region in regards to regional perception of the United States.<sup>51</sup>

### **C. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESIS**

The failure of the Middle East peace process is probably not due to any one specific factor. Rather, there is an unhappy convergence of mistakes, geopolitical realities coupled with the politics of identity, favoritism, and violence. There is little doubt that the United States could have done a better job at being a more “honest broker” during the process, but on the other hand, from my reading so far, I agree with those who lay the primary responsibility on the Israelis and the Palestinians. For Israel, it appears that there are powerful parties or entities that are intent on undermining the peace process in some way.

This thesis will proceed based on the assumption that the U.S. role and interests in Israel and the rest of the Middle East is not going to go away, and that it would behoove the United States to take an interest in what future peace proceedings come to try to shape those negotiations in accordance with its interests. The crux of the matter for the United States then is determining what interests we should prioritize. Is the United States going to be a principled champion of democracy, human rights, and self-determination? Alternatively, is the United States going to rationally weigh the costs and benefits of

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<sup>50</sup> Kurtzer et al., “The Israeli–Palestinian Conflict,” 27.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 28, 31.

every situation, and essentially make choices based on context and self-interest, rather than principle?

Conversely, it is possible the United States will stay loyal to Israel, “warts and all” for the near future. If this is an appropriate explanation, then it is in some ways a very counter-productive relationship that will continue to cause unrest and bloodshed throughout the Middle East, as U.S. support will enable Israel to act without consequence and hostile actors will continue to point to the relationship and use it as a tool for agitation. My core hypothesis is that unconditional support for Israel severely undermines the feasibility of a successful peace agreement, incentivizes Israeli bad behavior, and hints at a gloomy “shadow of the future.” The rise of Hamas and the decentralization of Palestinian power has undermined efforts on their side and reinforced hardline Israeli narratives. Finally, U.S. favoritism hurts all parties involved.

#### **D. RESEARCH DESIGN**

For my research design, I plan to conduct a single case study to explore the history of the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis, explore the history and possible future of the Peace Process, and attempt to measure the impact it has had and might have on U.S. interests in the region. I will attempt to determine, during specific timeframes of U.S. interaction with Israel and Palestine, whether the United States was approaching the problem from a more principled and objective stance, or if there was a strong interest-based component to the negotiations that weighed heavily in Israel’s favor.

Once I find some evidence on U.S. perspectives and interests during different timeframes of the peace process, I will then assess the relative negotiation progress that was made during those periods and try to draw some conclusions as to which periods were both more productive for the peace process, and which more positively served U.S. strategic interests in the region. This comparison of timeframes and U.S. orientation will provide a general sense as to the best way that the United States can do its part to help negotiate the peace process between Israel and Palestine.

Most of my sources will be secondary scholarly sources for examining the history and chronology of the region. When available, I will use primary sources to attempt to supplement the secondary sources as necessary.

#### **E. THESIS OVERVIEW AND CHAPTER OUTLINE**

The first chapter of the thesis was an introduction that emphasized the basis for and significance of the research, the literature review, the research design, and the thesis overview. Chapter II will primarily focus on providing historical context for the Israel–Palestine conflict, to include U.S. policy. Chapter III will attempt to frame the conflict and assess whether or not the United States has approached the Israel–Palestine conflict as an ally of Israel or if they have tended to take a more neutral stance. Chapter IV will detail the pros and cons for a possible way ahead, and how U.S. policy could help influence the outcome given the possibilities. Chapter V will be the conclusion and discuss the implications of the research in terms of the possible regional impact to U.S. interests based on future activities in the peace process.

## II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### A. EARLY ZIONISM TO WORLD WAR II

The issues that plague the peace process today, as well as those that have allowed for the relationship between the United States and Israel to grow, can be traced back throughout Israel's history. The early British favoritism formed the backdrop for Arab distrust of Western powers and the resentment of Israel, while also allowing for the expression of an early iteration of the two-state solution. During this period, the precedent of settling as a kind of oil spot approach also began as more and more Jews started to move into the area, intending to establish a Jewish state.

#### 1. The Zionist Movement

For hundreds of years prior to the establishment of the state of Israel, the Levant was under the control of the Ottoman Empire. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, a Jewish movement known as Zionism arose in response to an increase in anti-Semitism—especially in Eastern Europe. Charles Smith writes, “underlying modern Zionism was the wish to establish an independent Jewish existence in Palestine, the ancient land of Israel.”<sup>52</sup> Whereas traditionally Jews had desired to travel to Israel for religious reasons, Zionism was primarily a response to a rise in anti-Jewish discrimination and oppression in Europe due to religious differences and perceived economic rivalry.<sup>53</sup>

The first leader of the World Zionist Organization (WZO; est. 1897) was Theodor Herzl (1860–1904), a Jew from Vienna who wanted to help others Jews travel to Palestine and escape persecution, solicit funding from wealthy Jews in support of the movement, and to ultimately persuade European leaders to prescribe to the merits of the idea. Herzl, according to Smith, “saw Jewish migration to Palestine [or possibly

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<sup>52</sup> Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab–Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents*, 9th ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2013), 25.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 25–7.

elsewhere] as a movement of colonization similar to that being undertaken by European countries as the time, and thus something with which they would sympathize.”<sup>54</sup>

## **2. The British: Israel’s Protector**

During World War I (WWI), in 1915, Maurice de Bunsen headed a special committee to discuss Middle Eastern areas of interest for Great Britain. Despite initial British assurances to the Arab countries that Britain had no aspirations for their territories—and would help them gain freedom if they rose up against the Turks—as the war progressed, this view changed due to the need to recognize spheres of interest among the Allies to ensure harmony and cooperation. According to Smith, the de Bunsen committee initially postulated that Palestine should be an international zone to “avoid complications arising from great-power competition and conflicting Christian claims in the area. International status would also block French efforts to incorporate Palestine into its sphere...[the British] saw Palestine as occupying the crucial position of a buffer between potential French held areas and Egypt.”<sup>55</sup>

During a meeting between Sir Mark Sykes of Britain and Francois Georges-Picot of France, they discussed the prospective fates of Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria. Smith explains, “Sykes...determined to create a belt of English-controlled territory from the Med to Iraq and the Persian Gulf. He also wished to block French ambition in Palestine by having it granted international status...but to accomplish this, Sykes decided to cede Mosul to the French sphere of influence to be created in Syria and northern Iraq, contrary to the de Bunsen report.”<sup>56</sup>

British interest in Zionism increased as the war continued. As Russia experienced domestic instability that would soon become revolution, concerns increased that they might withdraw from the war. As Smith writes, such a withdrawal would permit the “Germans to concentrate all their forces against France and Britain in the West, led to efforts to promote Zionism as a means of persuading Russian Jews—believed to be

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<sup>54</sup> Smith, *Palestine and the Arab–Israeli Conflict*, 30.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 53, 55.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.



influential in revolutionary circles—to support Russia’s war effort.”<sup>57</sup> Smith also posits that, in addition, London Zionists also wished for an official, pro-Zionist outlook from Britain, and the British hoped that American Jews would influence President Woodrow Wilson, a known champion of self-determination, to join the War in support of Britain.<sup>58</sup> As Smith writes, this range of motivations led to Britain’s foreign secretary, Sir Arthur Balfour—a Zionist—to send the Balfour Declaration to British magnate Walter Rothschild on 2 November 1917, which “promised the Jews a national home in Palestine.”<sup>59</sup>

Smith explains that at the end of WWI, The British and French tried to allay Arab fears of Western powers by issuing the Armistice of Mudros, signed on 30 October 1918, and the Anglo–French Declaration, signed shortly after. In them, the French and British asserted their future support for elected Arab governments in Syria and Iraq. However, the apparent contradiction of the most recent statements of the Balfour declaration and the Armistice increased Palestinian unease, and, in response, a Zionist delegation, led by Chaim Weizmann, went to Israel to help and assuage fears of Zionist aspirations.<sup>60</sup> However, as Smith points out, Chaim himself—who viewed the Arabs as duplicitous—was uneasy about the British and their principled commitment to democracy when contrasted to the relatively low Jew-to-Arab population in Palestine.<sup>61</sup>

By 1919, the British were aware of their contradictory positions regarding Palestine, but considered Jews and their claims as unique, credible, morally right, and of worldwide importance—though they had not figured out how to satisfy Jewish calls with those of the Arabs, as Smith explains.<sup>62</sup> Smith writes that “in Balfour’s view, these promises could not be reconciled with others: Palestine was a ‘unique situation’ in which ‘we are dealing not with the wishes of an existing community but are consciously seeking

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<sup>57</sup> Smith, *Palestine and the Arab–Israeli Conflict*, 62.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 62–3.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

to re-constitute a new community and definitely building for a numerical majority in the future.’ The opinions of the Palestinian Arabs were irrelevant.”<sup>63</sup> Smith further explains that during the war, the declared promises of self-determination and independence for the Arabs were often used to ensure support or compliance with Western objectives. After the war, such promises were pointed out as indicators of compliance with Wilsonian principles, which could facilitate U.S. support or cooperation.<sup>64</sup> With this in mind, Smith asserts, “the Balfour Declaration...was essentially granted because of its long-term promise of a stable bastion governed by a people friendly to British imperialism and a short-term advantage believed to be the attraction of world Jewry to the side of the Entente.”<sup>65</sup>

Dan Cohn-Sherbok points out that, “In order to ensure that a Jewish National Home would be established in Palestine, a Jewish delegation headed by Chaim Weizmann addressed the Paris Peace Conference on 27 February 1919. The Paris Peace Conference agreed to grant the Palestine Mandate to Great Britain, and accepted the need to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine as outlined by the Balfour Declaration.”<sup>66</sup>

### **3. Israel’s Establishment and the Creation of the Palestinian Refugee Problem**

The British throughout their increasing mandate of Palestine were at first sympathetic to the Jews, but gradually realized the friction the Zionists were causing with the Arabs. Eventually, perceived British concessions to the Arabs and attempts to limit Jewish immigration caused the Jews to revolt and court the United States as a backer. As Cohn-Sherbok points out, following World War II (WWII), although Arab countries were already demanding that the British create an independent Arab State in Palestine, Americans were sympathetic to the Jewish plight, and their influence in Congress—coupled with the leverage gained by potential post-war loans and a British weariness of

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<sup>63</sup> Smith, *Palestine and the Arab–Israeli Conflict*, 77–78.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 80–1.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>66</sup> Dan Cohn-Sherbok and Dawoud El-Alami, *The Palestine–Israel Conflict: A Beginner’s Guide*, (Oxford, UK: One World Publications, 2003), 21.

the problem—eventually caused the British to concede the issue of a Jewish homeland to the UN.<sup>67</sup> Cohn-Sherbok points out that, despite opposition by the Arabs, in 1947, both the Soviet Deputy Foreign minister and United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) suggested a partitioning of the area into a Jewish and Arab state. The United States, however, lobbied for the creation of a Jewish state, instead of a two-state solution. This suggestion was passed by the General Assembly on 29 November 1947.<sup>68</sup>

Following the vote, the British mandate was set to last for another six months, during which British forces in the area were instructed to only act in self-defense. Cohn-Sherbok asserts that Arab attacks during this transition period caused a Jewish retaliation, including the Deir Yassin Massacre in April 1948. Fearful of further attacks, about three-hundred thousand Arabs fled the area and became the first large group of Palestinian refugees.<sup>69</sup> Smith asserts that this large exodus of people allowed Jews to move “into the vacant homes in towns and villages, and where the villages were considered primitive, they were razed so that there would be nothing to return to; new Israeli villages were built over or adjacent to them. In this manner, a much more cohesive Jewish state with a much smaller Arab population could be achieved.”<sup>70</sup>

On the day of Independence, the United States was the first country to recognize Israel as a state; meanwhile the Egyptians had already started to bomb Tel Aviv that same day. Four neighboring Arab countries—Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq—attacked the next day, and were eventually defeated in March of 1949. The war created more Palestinian refugees. Smith writes that by the time it was all over, “470,000 entered camps in Arab Palestine, controlled by Jordan, and in the Gaza Strip, held by Egypt...the Palestinian question became one of the refugees.”<sup>71</sup> Smith also writes that despite calls by Western Powers for Israel to allow the return of at least some of the refugees, “The Israelis resisted this pressure or tied its acceptance to the conclusion of peace agreements with

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<sup>67</sup> Cohn-Sherbok and El-Alami, *The Palestine–Israel Conflict*, 43–5.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 45; Smith, *Palestine and the Arab–Israeli Conflict*, 189–91.

<sup>69</sup> Cohn-Sherbok and El-Alami, *The Palestine–Israel Conflict*, 46.

<sup>70</sup> Smith, *Palestine and the Arab–Israeli Conflict*, 196.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 200, 202.

Arab governments. The latter insisted on the right of all refugees to return, at least in principle, as a preliminary step signifying Israeli good faith before they would consider peace talks,” which established a position that has continued to this day.<sup>72</sup>

## **B. THE COLD WAR ERA AND REGIONAL STRIFE**

### **1. Nasser, the Suez Crisis, the Six-Day War, and the Yom Kippur War**

Following WWII and the rise of the Soviet Union, U.S. interests in the Middle East were in large part focused on containing Soviet influence and retaining access to oil. As Smith asserts, “Arab–Israeli clashes necessarily involved the Western powers, who were eager to draw Arab countries into security pacts in order to ensure opposition to Soviet overtures in the Middle East. Such efforts...seemed to Israel to threaten its security further by aligning the powers with governments hostile to it.”<sup>73</sup> The rise of Gamal Abd al-Nasser, a charismatic Egyptian who became a leader of the Arab world, was also a concern for Israel and Western powers like France and Britain who were attempting to hold on to some sort of control in the region.<sup>74</sup>

Subsequent uprisings and coups occurred in Egypt—which led to Gamal Nasser’s rise to power in 1954—Syria, and Jordan. By this time, the Arabs had instituted a total economic boycott on Israel, which incentivized Israel to pursue self-sufficiency with assistance from the United States and Western Europe.<sup>75</sup> However, despite the U.S. role in the creation of Israel, Cohn-Sherbok writes that “Israel...remained fearful that the United States would not continue to support the growing Jewish state, particularly when, in October 1953, the American Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, decided to suspend American aid to Israel in response to Israeli raids on Arab border villages.”<sup>76</sup>

For Israel, due to the display of hostility by its neighbors, security was paramount. Smith writes that for some Israelis, like Ben-Gurion, the now-familiar tactic of (massive)

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<sup>72</sup> Smith, *Palestine and the Arab–Israeli Conflict*, 218.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Cohn-Sherbok and El-Alami, *The Palestine–Israel Conflict*, 51.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

retaliation in response to provocations was a better method to try to demonstrate the strength and resolve of Israel with the hope of deterring further aggression. In addition, the conflict was a useful means to maintain the resolve of the Israeli population—deemed as important given the situation that Israel was in.<sup>77</sup>

Israel drew further ire from the United States when it allied itself with France and Britain and invaded Egypt in the Suez Crisis of October 1956. This was mostly due to Cold War dynamics—Egypt was supported by the Soviet Union and the United States did not want the situation to escalate. Cohn-Sherbok notes that on 7 November, the Prime Minister (PM) of Israel, David Ben-Gurion, delivered a victory speech in which he declared that the armistice lines no longer mattered and that UN forces were not welcome in Israeli territory. In response, Eisenhower told Ben-Gurion that if Israel did not change its course, the United States would stop sending aid. WZO president Nahum Goldman also “indicated that the pro-Israel lobby in the United States would not support Ben-Gurion’s attitude.”<sup>78</sup> Following these statements, Israel agreed to withdraw after acceptable conditions with the international force in the Canal Zone had been met.

Cold War considerations, and the failure of attempts to create a regional pact against communism, led President Eisenhower to develop the Eisenhower Doctrine, which stated that countries could request military or economic aid from the United States if they were threatened, specifically by communism. This was intended to provide a framework for the United States to prevent Soviet influence in the region as well as counter the Soviet-backed Nasser’s influence, and was part of a wider framework of international relations that could be termed “offshore balancing.” The Eisenhower doctrine had the secondary effects of increasing regional rivalries and the gradual increase of U.S.–Israel relations. Following the Suez crisis, Israel continued to draw the hostility of its neighbors, and in 1964, the PLO formed. Cohn-Sherbok explains, “This body subsequently set up the Palestinian Liberation Army, whose aim was to liquidate Israel. This led to the resumption of Fedayeen raids throughout the country.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Smith, *Palestine and the Arab–Israeli Conflict*, 225–227.

<sup>78</sup> Cohn-Sherbok and El-Alami, *The Palestine–Israel Conflict*, 53.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

Pressured from his local populace, Nasser demanded the withdrawal of UN troops from the Sinai in the late 1960s and sent torpedo boats and submarines into the Gulf of Aqaba and Straits of Tiran to close Israeli shipping. The United States and Britain were vocally supportive of Israel, but with the Vietnam War raging, the U.S. presidency had little political capital to spend that would facilitate rapid aid in the subsequent conflict. Iraq, Kuwait, and Algeria sent troops to Jordan and Egypt to oppose Israel. Cohn-Sherbok asserts that at this point Jordan was pressured by Syria and Egypt to sign a mutual defense agreement with Nasser.<sup>80</sup>

Israel defeated the Arab forces in convincing fashion, and took the Golan Heights on 8 June 1967 after Syrian forces used it as an attack position. Jordan attacks likewise gave Israel an excuse to occupy the West Bank and Jerusalem. Following the end of the war, the Soviet Union called for an Emergency Session of the General Assembly to pass a resolution requiring the Israelis to withdraw back behind the armistice lines. The United States took an opposing stance and all resolutions failed. The issue was then passed on to the UNSC and a compromise was reached with ambiguous wording that allowed Israel to retain the land it had seized in the conflict. The territories Israel gained during the conflict created more Palestinian refugees, which primarily fled to Gaza, Jordan, and Lebanon. Many Palestinians remained in Israeli-controlled territory, however, and Cohn-Sherbok notes that even from the beginning many Israelis viewed Palestinians living outside of Israel with distrust and those within Israel as potential fifth columns for Arab states.<sup>81</sup>

This perception of internal security threats, coupled with the obvious threats surrounding Israel, in some sense help explain the primacy of security throughout much of Israel's history. However, despite the wariness of the Israeli leaders in regards to the Palestinians, Cohn-Sherbok asserts that after the events of the Six-Day War, Israel appeared open to some negotiation. The National Unity government in Israel was open to the idea of giving up portions of the occupied territories and the Golan Heights in exchange for demilitarization of the Heights and freedom of navigation in the Straits of

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<sup>80</sup> Cohn-Sherbok and El-Alami, *The Palestine-Israel Conflict*, 57.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

Tiran and the Suez Canal. The Arab states were unwilling to make these concessions.<sup>82</sup> Smith explains that after the Six-Day War, Israel considered the 1949 borders to be invalid. For its part, the United States expected that Israel would eventually give up the lands it had gained in the conflict and backed a UN resolution that condemned Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem. However, domestic support for Israel in the United States rose substantially, prompting the administration to assume a position of outward unconditional support while trying to moderate in private.<sup>83</sup> This position would change with George W. Bush's Rose Garden address in 2002.

Nasser and other Arab leaders were unhappy with the outcome of the Six-Day War and Egypt began attacks against Israeli positions along the canal, which Israel retaliated against. In response, the U.S. Secretary of State, William Rogers, called for a cease-fire while at the same time the National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, encouraged Israel. Cohn-Sherbok explains that at the same timeframe Israeli PM Golda Meir "established a system of direct communication through Rabin and Kissinger which bypassed both the Israeli Foreign Office and the State Department. On 25 October 1969 Rabin recommended deep penetration of Egyptian targets, advice that appeared to come from President Nixon through Kissinger."<sup>84</sup> Israel, in turn, accepted the advice and struck at targets within Israel, which prompted Nasser to seek aid from the Soviet Union. Cohn-Sherbok writes that the United States, apparently alarmed by the new potential for escalation, pressured Israel to cease its aggression or face delays in arms shipments.<sup>85</sup> Israel acquiesced to U.S. pressure and accepted the application of UN Resolution 242—specifically the termination of belligerency.<sup>86</sup>

Nasser died in 1971 and was succeeded by Anwar el-Sadat. Cohn-Sherbok asserts that Sadat, wanting the Sinai back, decided in 1973 to ally with Syria against Israel and go to war. Israel was supposedly aware of the threat but decided against a preemptive

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<sup>82</sup> Cohn-Sherbok and El-Alami, *The Palestine-Israel Conflict*, 63.

<sup>83</sup> Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 300.

<sup>84</sup> Cohn-Sherbok and El-Alami, *The Palestine-Israel Conflict*, 64.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> "The 1967 and 1973 Wars," UN, last accessed 1 August, 2017, <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpi/palestine/ch3.pdf>.

strike—and the label of belligerent—as it would limit the ability of the United States to provide assistance.<sup>87</sup> The Arab countries were defeated and Israel forces penetrated into Syria and the Sinai Peninsula and surrounded Egypt’s third Army, threatening it with destruction and heightening the tension between the Soviet Union and the United States. The United States, worried about the resumption of hostilities, pressured the Israelis to make a deal with both countries, despite Israeli reluctance. In 1974, Kissinger helped to broker a deal that resulted in Egypt ceding a small strip of land along the Suez canal, and, in Syria, Israeli forces retreated back behind the “purple line,” gave up a small amount of land, and reached an agreement whereby Israel could respond with force in the event of guerrilla attacks that originated from Syrian territory. Despite Israel’s victory, Golda Meir resigned as PM due to the public backlash for her perceived inaction prior to the start of the war, once again highlighting the preeminence with security in Israeli domestic politics.

In 1977, Menachem Begin and his newly formed right-wing Likud party were elected to power. Notable among Likud’s tenets is the “preservation of Jewish tradition and culture,” as well as the “right of the Jewish people to the land of [Eretz] Israel,” which has since become seemingly synonymous with physical and demographic security, and a stubborn refusal to willingly give up land.<sup>88</sup> Despite assuming a more hardline stance than the previous Labour party governments, in 1978 the United States was able to pressure Israel into talks that created a lasting peace treaty between Egypt and Israel at Camp David that resulted in a “framework for peace in the Middle East,” which consisted of Israel giving back the Sinai to Egypt, the creation of the Gaza strip as an semi-autonomous zone, and a recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people and their full autonomy. However, this framework was rejected by the PLO and the UN as neither was represented in the talks and there was no mention of the Palestinian right of return—a principle requirement for the PLO.

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<sup>87</sup> Cohn-Sherbok and El-Alami, *The Palestine–Israel Conflict*, 65.

<sup>88</sup> “History of the Movement,” Likud, last accessed 1 August 2017, <https://www.likud.org.il/en/about-the-likud/history-of-the-movement>; Smith, *Palestine and the Arab–Israeli Conflict*, 384.



In 1981, several weeks prior to governmental elections and in the midst of economic troubles, the Israeli air force bombed a nuclear reactor in Iraq, ostensibly to prevent the development of a nuclear weapon. Following this, the Likud party won in elections despite predictions to the contrary, and subsequently helped to incentivize and expand the settlement activities around the occupied territories by, according to Cohn-Sherbok, offering low mortgages and tax incentives.<sup>89</sup>

## **2. PLO Beginnings 1964–1982**

The plight of the Palestinians helped spur the formation of the PLO—a federation of militant groups—to resist Israel. One important part of the PLO, called Fatah, was formed in Cairo in the 1950s and included Yasser Arafat as one of its members. The group—in part inspired by the Algerian Revolution—turned militant after the Suez Crisis, and, according to Smith, started to spread the idea that the issue of Palestine needed to be resolved before any Arab Unity, and that violence needed to preclude politics. By 1965, their own pamphlets explained that provoking an Israeli overreaction or regional tension would help unite the Arab world against Israel and thereby secure Palestine.<sup>90</sup>

### **a. Jordan**

The PLO, militarized after the Six-Day War, moved their headquarters to Amman, Jordan on 3 November 1969. Roula El-Rifai and Nadim Shehadi explain that the 1969 Cairo Agreement granted autonomy to the PLO, which allowed it to establish a state-within-a-state in southern Lebanon to plan operations or attacks against Israel.<sup>91</sup> In this same year, Yasser Arafat assumed leadership of the PLO.

From 1970–71, the PLO fought against the regime of King Hussein bin Talal of Jordan due to the PLO undermining the state’s monopoly of violence, hijacking

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<sup>89</sup> Cohn-Sherbok and El-Alami, *The Palestine–Israel Conflict*, 68.

<sup>90</sup> Smith, *Palestine and the Arab–Israeli Conflict*, 271.

<sup>91</sup> Roula El-Rifai and Nadim Shehadi, “An Offer They Can Refuse: Host Countries and the Palestinian Refugee Issue,” in *The Palestine Refugee Problem: The Search for a Resolution*, ed. Rex Brynen and Roula El-Rifai (London, UK: Pluto Press, 2014), 123, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=3386748>.

passenger aircraft, taking hostages, and attacking Israel from Jordan, which the King had forbidden as Jordan could not stop Israeli counterattacks. The Israeli counterattacks in turn invited further criticism from Palestinians within Jordan of the King's inability to protect them. This violence and upheaval resulted in the Jordanians driving the PLO leadership to relocate to Lebanon, and served as an impetus and inspiration for the 1972 Olympic assassinations by an offshoot group of the PLO that called themselves Black September.

Smith asserts that by 1973, Arafat was privately in favor of a settlement, but the realities of the Palestinian refugee problem and hardline factions within the PLO deterred him from promoting this stance in public—reflecting the tenuous control that Arafat had over the PLO. Instead, he pushed ideas out via subordinates without committing the PLO to them, with the hope that a third party organization like the UN would adopt the idea and allow him to present it to the PLO for consideration. Arafat wanted the United States to be open to dealing with the PLO with the hope of softening the hard-liners, but the United States instead insisted on the precondition that the PLO recognized Israel and Resolution 242—which focused on refugee resettlement.<sup>92</sup>

Following the conflict with the Jordanian government and the events of the Munich Olympics, Smith writes that in October of 1974, an Arab meeting in Morocco recognized the PLO as the sole representative body with the power to speak for the Palestinian people while at the same time stripping that power from Jordan's King Hussein, whose regional reputation had been damaged by ties with the United States. One month later, Arafat spoke at the UN and the PLO was awarded observer status.<sup>93</sup>

***b. Camp David and Lebanon***

After the Yom Kippur War, the Carter administration was involved in attempting to negotiate peace in the region. Smith writes that Sadat hoped for eventual American economic assistance while the new Israeli PM, Likud founder Menachem Begin, wanted to keep the Golan Heights and the West bank. During his election campaign, Begin

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<sup>92</sup> Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 327–8.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

vowed to never relinquish the West Bank, and to never deal with the PLO, whom he labeled Nazis. Meanwhile, the peace overtures incentivized PLO raids into Israel intended to harden Begin's resolve and prevent third party agreements that could potentially determine the status of the West Bank.<sup>94</sup> These assaults originated from Lebanon, and provoked a massive retaliation from Israel in the form of an invasion force of approximately 20,000 troops. Although the Carter administration had tried to get the PLO involved as potential participants in the Camp David Accords, Begin's inflammatory rhetoric and intransigence regarding the PLO and the West Bank, the rise in settlement activity, and members within Arafat's own organization—who did not trust the United States to counter Israel—rendered the idea impossible. The talks set up a peace agreement between Egypt and Israel a year later, and the idea of an autonomous West Bank and Gaza strip.

Ronald Reagan had assumed the Presidency in 1981, and considered Israel as the core U.S. ally in the region. However, according to Smith, Reagan “proposed a new initiative designed to reinvigorate the Camp David Accords...[which] called for a freeze on Israeli settlements on the West Bank and denied Israeli claims of sovereignty over either that area or Gaza. At the same time Regan rejected the idea of an independent state.”<sup>95</sup> Meanwhile, in Lebanon, the Palestinian refugees became a part of the domestic political scene and were in some ways a catalyst for the Lebanese civil war between the local Muslims and the Maronite Catholics, as the Palestinian refugee population helped to shift the demographics towards the Muslims, and drew in Israel as a supporter of the Maronites. As William Harris points out, the PLO in Lebanon at one time had a budget nearing that of the state government.<sup>96</sup>

The conflict came to a head in 1982 when Israel sent additional soldiers into Lebanon. By mid-June, there were around 80,000 Israeli soldiers that were camped outside of Beirut, which launched an attack that was intended to force the PLO to flee or die. Despite the departure of the PLO leadership from Lebanon, Defense Minister Ariel

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<sup>94</sup> Smith, *Palestine and the Arab–Israeli Conflict*, 344–5, 348.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 370.

<sup>96</sup> William Harris, *Lebanon: A History 600–2011* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 244.

Sharon, convinced that there were more PLO personnel inside of Palestinian refugee camps in Sabra and Shatila, allowed Phalangist forces to conduct violent sweeps of the camps, causing hundreds of deaths and domestic political backlash in Israel—resulting in Begin’s resignation, a temporary decline in Likud’s popularity, and a Labour government assuming power..

### **3. The Intifadas and the Quest for Peace**

In December of 1987, the first Intifada erupted in Gaza after an Israeli vehicle ran over and killed four Palestinians. Widespread protests occurred throughout the occupied territories. The Israelis reacted with force—sometimes with live ammunition—to try to quell the unrest. In response to the uprising, the UNSC met and passed Resolution 605, which condemned Israel’s actions and called for restraint.<sup>97</sup> Cohn-Sherbok writes that the Arab states, emboldened by the international reaction, started a fund to support the Intifada, and the United States sent Assistant Under-Secretary of State Richard Murphy to try to facilitate a peace process addressing possibly autonomy and elections for Palestinians, as well as the withdrawal of Israeli forces. However, upon his departure, the Islamist group Hamas was founded as a rival to the secularist PLO for Palestinian representation, and framed its own approach as anti-Israel.<sup>98</sup> In December of 1988, the PLO declared itself as an independent state and recognized Israel.

According to Cohn-Sherbok, in May of 1989, Yitzhak Rabin proposed Palestinian elections in Gaza and the West Bank, which aimed for peace with external Arab states, and a solution to Palestinian unrest within the settlements. However, Israel had several stipulations, including the exclusion of the PLO as a possible negotiating partner and the rejection of any possibly of a Palestinian state or change in the status of the occupied territories, which made the proposal a non-starter. In December of 1989, the U.S. Secretary of State, James Baker, proposed talks between the Israeli governments and acceptable Palestinians. A split within the Israeli government in response to these

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<sup>97</sup> “Resolution 605,” UN, 22 December 1987, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/524/77/IMG/NR052477.pdf?OpenElement>.

<sup>98</sup> Cohn-Sherbok and El-Alami, *The Palestine–Israel Conflict*, 71–2.

proposals led to a vote of no confidence of PM Shamir—who was against talks with the Palestinians. Despite the seeming shift in Israeli politics, Arafat “called on the Palestinians to renew violence against Jewish immigrants.”<sup>99</sup> Following this development, Likud was able to form a government with Likud’s Shamir once again as PM.

The new government did not want to give the PLO credibility by recognizing it. However, Mark Baker was able to arrange an agreement that allowed for Palestinians from the occupied territories to be represented in a joint Jordanian–Palestinian delegation in Madrid, Spain at the end of October 1991. At the Madrid Conference, President Bush, Mikhail Gorbachev, Israeli PM Shamir, and the foreign ministers of Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, held talks designed to facilitate subsequent meetings and potential agreements. As Smith notes, this was the first time that these participants had engaged in direct negotiations.<sup>100</sup> Further Conferences followed the Madrid conference discussing procedural issues, and in Israel, Yitzhak Rabin was elected in July 1992. Rabin was open to dealing with the Palestinians as partners and potentially self-governors within the West Bank and Gaza. Rabin also ceased building activities in Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza.

Cohn-Sherbok explains that following Rabin’s election, James Baker arrived in the Middle East in July in the pursuit of peace and Rabin went to Cairo, the United States, and London with the same intent. However, the attempt to try again for peace “inflamed members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad who were bitterly opposed to compromise. With the encouragement of Iran, Hamas condemned the Israeli occupation while improving its education, welfare and health care of the Palestinian population.”<sup>101</sup>

*a. The Oslo Accords and Peres*

On 20 January 1993, despite violence in the settlement areas, the PLO and Israel began talks in Oslo, Norway. According to Cohn-Sherbok, the PLO was interested in “the

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<sup>99</sup> Cohn-Sherbok and El-Alami, *The Palestine–Israel Conflict*, 74–5.

<sup>100</sup> Smith, *Palestine and the Arab–Israeli Conflict*, 419.

<sup>101</sup> Cohn-Sherbok and El-Alami, *The Palestine–Israel Conflict*, 77.

Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, a mini Marshall Plan for the West Bank and Gaza, and economic cooperation between Israel and Palestinian authorities.”<sup>102</sup> On 11 February, the Declaration of Principles was issued, which established a framework for Palestinian autonomy vis-à-vis a five-year interim government. The Oslo Accords lasted until September of 1993 and, according to Smith, “The PLO recognized ‘the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security’...Arafat declared that the PLO renounced terrorism and would strive to control elements that might engage in it...in return, Rabin wrote to Arafat that ‘the Government of Israel has decided to recognize the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people.’”<sup>103</sup>

Israel withdrew from Gaza on 13 May 1994, and Rabin was able to sign a peace agreement in Washington with King Hussein. Despite the progress, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and extremist Jews rejected the Accords and continued to condone and conduct violence in an effort to undermine the efforts at peace. Continued terrorist attacks by Hamas began to cause a backlash among the Israeli public and discussions concerning Palestinian autonomy were suspended, Likud’s Benjamin Netanyahu publicly condemned the peace process and grows in popularity. Rabin, in an attempt to retain political capital and stem the violence, sealed off the West Bank and Gaza from Israel.

Rabin and his Foreign Minister, Shimon Peres, were determined to continue the peace process despite the rise and persistence of opposition in Israel and among the Palestinians. On the Palestinian side, Cohn-Sherbok explains, “there was bitter conflict between those who supported efforts to achieve autonomy and those who rejected any form of negotiation with Israel.”<sup>104</sup> Peres met Arafat in Gaza on 4 July 1994 for the finalization for Oslo II, which would eventually extend Palestinian rule to the West Bank, as well as the arranging the transfer of governmental control in the areas of education, healthcare, taxation, tourism, industry, and other functions. In Israel, opposition rhetoric escalated: opposition parties called Rabin a traitor and there were antigovernment protests. Cohn-Sherbok explains that the Likud party was especially vocal, proclaiming

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<sup>102</sup> Cohn-Sherbok and El-Alami, *The Palestine–Israel Conflict*, 78.

<sup>103</sup> Smith, *Palestine and the Arab–Israeli Conflict*, 436.

<sup>104</sup> Cohn-Sherbok and El-Alami, *The Palestine–Israel Conflict*, 82.

the Accords a betrayal and accusing Rabin of essentially using his Arab support base in the Knesset to betray the country.<sup>105</sup> Undeterred, Rabin attempted to promote further economic cooperation with surrounding countries at the Amman economic conference. Following the conference, a religious student assassinated Rabin at a peace rally on 4 November 1995.

Following Rabin's death, terrorist attacks continued, and according to Cohn-Sherbok, "Peres told Arafat that the future of the peace process was at risk unless the Palestinian Authority was prepared to act against Hamas."<sup>106</sup> Opposition to the accords continued in Israel, and Peres, facing political pressure, called for an election. On the night before the election, Peres ordered Operation Grapes of Wrath against anti-Israel organizations in Lebanon north of the security zone. Following the bombing of a civilian shelter that killed over one-hundred Lebanese civilians, Israel aborted the operation amidst international condemnation. Peres lost his reelection bid, Netanyahu became the PM, and violence and relations with the PLO worsened.

***b. Camp David II and the Al-Aqsa Intifada***

Netanyahu invited further instability by ordering the opening of an ancient tunnel next to the Temple Mount. The Palestinians reacted with violence, and President Clinton tried to stave off any further instability by inviting Netanyahu, Arafat, and King Hussein to the United States on 15 January 1997, resulting in an agreement to give eighty percent of Hebron to the Palestinian Authority and withdraw more Israeli troops from the West Bank. According to Cohn-Sherbok, one month later, two Israeli helicopters crashed in northern Lebanon. On 13 March, a Jordanian soldier shot seven Israeli girls, and one day later the Israeli government agreed to start building more settlements in West Bank land that had been annexed to Jerusalem, which resulted in further UN condemnation. In response to these developments, the PA "issued an order imposing the death penalty on any Arab who sold land to a Jew."<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Cohn-Sherbok and El-Alami, *The Palestine-Israel Conflict*, 82-3.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

The Netanyahu led government continued to conduct Israel-first and reactionary activities that ultimately made peace less likely and “spoilers”—like terrorist attacks—more effective in derailing compromise. For example, according to Cohn-Sherbok, “the government dramatically altered the maps from the Oslo Accords under which the vast majority of the West Bank would be transferred to the Palestinians...[and] Israel would annex a large part of the territory captured from Jordan in 1967. The Palestinian area would lack statehood and...would be between territories annexed by Israel and intersected by a series of highways controlled by the army.”<sup>108</sup> Cohn-Sherbok also points out that, following more suicide bombings, the Likud government halted further territorial transfer to the Palestinians, stopped Palestinian workers from coming into Israel and its territories, and stopped money transfers to the Palestinian Authority.<sup>109</sup>

Despite the tension, in October of 1998, Netanyahu and Arafat met with U.S. President Bill Clinton in Washington to try come to some sort of agreement on the way forward with the peace process. Eventually, this process resulted in the Wye Memorandum, in which Israel initially pledged to relinquish more of the occupied territory as well as Israeli redeployment, while Arafat agreed to formulate and implement a plan to combat the terrorism and monitor militant groups with a joint committee involving the United States and Israel. This cost Netanyahu, however, as Smith writes, “Netanyahu...faced open Likud rebellion and had to rely on the Labor Party to gain Knesset approval of the Wye Memorandum. Beset from all sides, he suspended the withdrawals scheduled...and agreed in late December to call for new elections, scheduled for May of 1999. His cabinet had collapsed and his colleagues mocked him in the Knesset.”<sup>110</sup>

In July of 2000, President Bill Clinton invited Arafat and the new Israeli PM, Ehud Barak, to Camp David to try to hammer out a more permanent solution to the violence. During this summit, neither side was able to come to an agreement, with Arafat refusing to budge on the Palestinian’s right to return while Israel wanted to annex section

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<sup>108</sup> Cohn-Sherbok and El-Alami, *The Palestine-Israel Conflict*, 86.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>110</sup> Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 462.



of Palestinian areas. In September, Ariel Sharon made a public visit to the temple mount in Jerusalem that outraged Palestinians and served as a catalyst for the second Intifada. Despite the chaos, in October Arafat and Barak met with the Secretary of State Madeline Albright in France to continue talks. According to Cohn-Sherbok, in January of 2001, further talks were held in Taba, Egypt, in which the both the Israelis and the Palestinians agreed to limiting their arms and that the 1967 lines would be a starting point for negotiating Israel and Palestine state lines. In regards to West Bank, both sides presented options, and both agreed with potential land exchanges and sovereignty over their lands and holy sites. Jerusalem was to be the capital of both states—with the town of Al-Quds—counting as the Palestinian “Jerusalem,” with each side assuming control over their respective neighborhoods. The summit ended without a signed agreement.<sup>111</sup>

Following the Taba talks, the violence in Palestine increased, and Barak called for elections to be held in March of 2001, which he lost to Sharon, who pointed to the violence as proof of the need for hardline Israeli tactics and positions. Arafat did not want to continue with the peace talks with the Camp David and Taba framework. In April, the United States attempted to persuade both sides that a settlement was vital to their respective security, and a fact-finding committee led by George Mitchell stated that it was imperative for both sides to find a way to stop the violence. In October of 2001, U.S. President George W. Bush publicly supported the idea of a Palestinian state, but both Israel and Palestine viewed this announcement with suspicion. Palestinians inferred this was an attempt to stop the intifada, and Sharon seemed to view the announcement as a way for Bush to court Arab countries in the War on Terror, and called for a targeting of Palestinians that supported the Intifada. Bush rejected Sharon’s interpretation, and Sharon in turn reasserted the strong relationship between Israel and the United States.

According to Cohn-Sherbok, given the context of the 11 September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, many Americans began to identify Hamas and Hezbollah as terrorists—and empathized with the Israelis, especially given the apparent Palestinian support for Bin Laden. Violence between Israeli forces and Palestinians continued and on

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<sup>111</sup> Cohn-Sherbok and El-Alami, *The Palestine–Israel Conflict*, 87–90.

3 January 2002, when a ship named MV Karine A, ostensibly bound for the Palestinian National Authority and carrying illegal armaments from Iran, was intercepted by the Israelis. This seizure seemingly undermined Arafat and the PLO's position or renouncing violence.<sup>112</sup> In March, the United States drafted Resolution 1397 in the UNSC which referred to a Palestinian state next to Israel, and called for an end to the violence.<sup>113</sup> Meanwhile, Yasser Arafat appeared to be powerless to stop the violence, as his calls for a ceasefire seemingly went unheeded, and on 27 March 2002, a Palestinian terrorist targeting a hotel at an Israeli resort that killed around thirty people.

Two days later, in response to the hotel bombing, Israel blamed Arafat and launched Operation Defensive Shield, which was a massive military offensive into the West Bank in an attempt to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure. Secretary of State Colin Powell travelled to the area and attempted to stop the violence, but was unable to do so. Defensive Shield caused an uproar in Arab countries, which served as a catalyst for UN involvement and two UNSC Resolutions: 1403—which called for Israel's withdrawal, and 1405—which called for an investigation into allegations that the IDF had committed a massacre in the Palestinian refugee camp of Jenin. Israel, suspicious of UN neutrality, blocked the investigation.

*c. The Rose Garden and the Road Map*

In June, more suicide attacks and Israeli retaliations caused Bush on 24 June 2002 to give his Rose Garden Address, in which he stated that both sides were being unreasonable, that Israel needed to withdraw back to positions they had held before Sharon's temple mount visit, end settlement activity, and that the Palestinians needed to elect a new leader.<sup>114</sup> This was also the first time that a U.S. president had called for a Palestinian state. Regardless, terrorist attacks in August, September, and early 2003,

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<sup>112</sup> Cohn-Sherbok and El-Alami, *The Palestine-Israel Conflict*, 96.

<sup>113</sup> "Security Council Demands Immediate Cessation of all Violence in Middle East; Affirms Vision of Two States, Israel and Palestine," UN, 12 March 2002, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2002/sc7326.doc.htm>.

<sup>114</sup> "President Bush Calls for New Palestinian Leadership," White House Archives, 24 June 2002, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020624-3.html>.

prompted an Israeli attack on Gaza against a defiant Arafat. The United States attempted to pressure Israel to withdraw, but it refused to do so.

Following the Rose Garden Address and the fall of Saddam Hussein in March of 2003, a Road Map was developed by the United States, the UN, the European Union, and Russia, which proposed a three-phase plan to peace: phase I was to end the violence and build Palestinian institutions, phase II was to be a transition phase focusing on state sovereignty and government, and phase III was a final transition of Palestine into a state and the end of the conflict.<sup>115</sup> Smith paraphrases Chris McGreal when he asserts that two months later at the Aqaba Summit in June, Bush was pressured by lobby groups to change key wording to better fit Sharon's wishes. The changes included distinguishing authorized and unauthorized settlements—to be determined by Israel—and changed the proposed Palestinian state to stable, peaceful, viable, and democratic, with no mention of sovereign or independent.<sup>116</sup>

Following the Aqaba Summit, Arafat's successor, Mahmud Abbas, sought a truce with Hamas on 15 June 2003. In October of 2003, an unofficial agreement labeled the Geneva Initiative took place between Israeli and Palestinian officials that was based on Camp David framework, which called for Israeli to "ultimately withdraw from 98 percent of the West Bank; the remaining 2 percent would be retained in exchange for 2 percent of Israeli territory," according to Smith.<sup>117</sup> Over the next two months, the Sharon government sought and received U.S. approval to keep most of the concentrated Jewish settlements located in the West Bank in exchange for the other areas, and that the Palestinian right of return only applied to a Palestinian state. Smith asserts that "The Sharon government then assassinated Hamas leaders Shaykh Ahmad Yasin and Abd al-Aziz Rantisi in March 2004 to ensure there would be no Fatah–Hamas truce."<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> "A Performance-Based Roadmap to a Permanent Solution to the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict," UN, last accessed 8 August 2017, <http://www.un.org/News/dh/mideast/roadmap122002.pdf>.

<sup>116</sup> Aluf Benn, "Israel Removes All Mention of 'Independent State' in 'Road Map,'" *Haaretz*, 16 March 2003, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-removes-all-mention-of-independent-state-in-road-map-1.16119>; Smith, *Palestine and the Arab–Israeli Conflict*, 504.

<sup>117</sup> Smith, *Palestine and the Arab–Israeli Conflict*, 504.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 505.

*d. Palestinian Decentralization and Israeli Intransigence*

In 2005, Israel left Gaza, and in 2006, Hamas won Parliamentary elections there, which prompted an economic and physical blockade of Gaza by the United States, the UN, and Israel, which in turn led to violence between Fatah, Hamas, and Israel. In response, Israel invaded Gaza and was attacked by Lebanon. Following UN intervention and the withdrawal of Israel, Hamas and Fatah clashed again in 2007, resulting in Hamas controlling Gaza and Fatah controlling the West Bank. In November, Bush called for the heads of Arab states, Israel, and Fatah to a conference in Annapolis, Maryland to revive the peace process. Hamas, democratically elected, was not invited. Over the next year, Israeli PM Olmert and Abbas met several more times, but no agreement was signed, and Israeli settlement building continued.

In June of 2008, Israel and Hamas agreed to a truce. In November of 2008, prior to upcoming Israeli elections early the next year, Israel broke their truce with Hamas—ostensibly due to rocket attacks on Israel—and invaded Gaza, triggering a violent response by Hamas. In the subsequent Israeli election, Netanyahu was able to form a government. Since this timeframe, there has been little to no progress towards peace. Netanyahu insists that the Palestinians recognize Israel as a *Jewish* state prior to peace negotiations, and has increased the number of settlements being built, while insisting that a return to the 1967 borders is an impossibility because they are not defensible.

### III. FRAMING AND ASSESSING INTENT

#### A. ANALYSIS OF ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

##### 1. Israel

Although Israel has been drawn to the negotiating table several times with the Palestinians or their representatives, there has been a clear pattern of security-centric thinking that, when combined with its history of violence with regional actors and various militant Palestinian groups, make it difficult to compromise on their security and difficult to counter the more radical sections of their population.

##### *a. Form and Function*

Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, early Zionists and Israelis have been primarily concerned with security in the face of existential threats—whether real or imagined—and an exclusively Jewish state. Following the pogroms in Eastern Europe and the actions of the Nazi regime in Germany during WWII, the Jews were persecuted and stateless. This situation was one of the primary motivators for the creation of a Jewish state and presumably the Jewish mindset that their survival required a sort of exclusivity of ownership. Israel, then, was founded with the intention of being an *exclusively Jewish* state for a persecuted people. Even land purchases by early Jewish settlers were conducted with this in mind. As Smith writes, in 1901, “the Jewish National Fund (JNF) was established for the express purpose of purchasing and developing land that became inalienably Jewish, never to be sold or worked by non-Jews, as part of the program to establish a dominant Jewish presence in the area.”<sup>119</sup> Today, according to a Pew research poll, 91 percent of the Israeli public think that a Jewish state is necessary.<sup>120</sup> Another poll suggest that 42 percent of Israelis view the settlements as helping Israel’s security and 25

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<sup>119</sup> Smith, *Palestine and the Arab–Israeli Conflict*, 32.

<sup>120</sup> Michael Lipka, “7 Key Findings About Religion and Politics in Israel,” Pew Research Center, 8 March 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/08/key-findings-religion-politics-israel/>.

percent view it as making no difference; only 30 percent thought that settlement building hurts Israeli security.<sup>121</sup>

***b. Strategic Patience***

At the time of this thesis, Israel as a state is only 69 years old. The short proximity of time between the foundation of Israel and the present coupled with recurring hyperbolic rhetoric from Arab states in the region facilitates a healthy recollection of Israel's initial struggle as well as the intentions of the original founders. It is a primary motivator for Israeli intransigence in the face of the Palestinian insistence of their right to return. Many experts such as Chas W. Freeman, Nathan Thrall, Matthew Duss, and others have argued that Israel has lost any real interest in peace with the Palestinians, and is instead attempting to play the long game with hopes that: 1) any negotiation will result in significantly less compromise than originally proposed; 2) that the problem will eventually go away entirely with time as first generation refugees die out; 3) the Jewish population and the settlement activity continue to grow, creating a *fait accompli* on the ground; 4) the Palestinian people will remain disjointed; and 5) regional militaries will continue to remain powerless in the face of Israel's superior might.<sup>122</sup> Thrall also states that, "history suggests that a strategy of waiting would serve the country well: from the British government's 1937 Peel Commission partition plan and the UN partition plan of 1947 to UN Security Council Resolution 242 and the Oslo accords, every formative initiative endorsed by the great powers has given more to the Jewish community in Palestine than the previous one."<sup>123</sup>

On the other hand, there have been extraordinary amounts of time and effort by some Israelis, such as Itzhak Rabin, to pursue peace with the Palestinians. Rabin paid with his life, but others have also been serious about peace, such as Menachem Begin in

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<sup>121</sup> Kelsey Jo Starr, "No Consensus Among Israeli Jews About Settlements' Impact on Security," Pew Research Center, 3 January 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/03/no-consensus-among-israeli-jews-about-settlements-impact-on-security/>.

<sup>122</sup> Kurtzer, et al., "The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," 3–4; Nathan Thrall, "Israel–Palestine: The Real Reason There's Still No Peace," *Guardian*, 16 May 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/16/the-real-reason-the-israel-palestine-peace-process-always-fails>; Chas W. Freeman, Jr., "Lessons From America's Misadventures in the Middle East," 66.

<sup>123</sup> Thrall, "Israel–Palestine."

the Camp David Accords. One differentiation between peace then and peace now is that the amount of loaded or credible hostility aimed at Israel by its neighbors, and the realistic pressure Israel's primary partner—the United States—places on it, have both seemingly declined substantially.

*c. Changing Dynamics*

Israel's first days of existence and the subsequent three decades stand in relatively stark contrast to the present: multiple wars coupled with a colder, more realpolitik United States that was far more concerned with the Soviet Union and the global power struggle than any special relationship with Israel. This shift disincentivizes Israel from prioritizing any peace process as U.S. support is continuous and generous, organized external threats are unlikely to occur as the Middle East remains in chaos, and—in part thanks to U.S. economic support—Israel is the strongest state in the region militarily. In addition, according to Yoram Peri, settlers and the military that manages and protects them have had an increasingly large influence in the Israeli government, which limits the ability of political figures to go against this key constituency.<sup>124</sup> Finally, as Rabin—arguably the PM that came closest to negotiating real peace with the Palestinians—was assassinated after a peace rally, Israeli leaders are faced with the possibility that going against the will of a certain segment of the Israeli population might either cost them their life or serve as a catalyst for civil war. It seems to follow that there is an element of fear involved that might limit the ability of Israeli PMs to credibly negotiate for peace. Even if they do negotiate, the opposing principles espoused by each side seem to halt any serious negotiations before they even begin.

According to Rex Brynen, the Palestinians are acting from the starting position that Palestinians require the right of return and recognition from Israel that it is a primary cause for their exile. For Israel, on the other hand, the right of return is a practical impossibility because Israelis desire a Jewish state and they reject responsibility for the

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<sup>124</sup> Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room: How the Military Shapes Israeli Policy* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2006), 8.

Palestinian diaspora.<sup>125</sup> From an Israeli perspective, the one event that could seemingly threaten Israeli security and integrity as a Jewish state would be a legitimate return of the Palestinians, as then Israel would no longer be Jewish majority state. In addition, according to Jim Zanotti, a recent regulation law was passed in the Knesset that allows Israel to expropriate private Palestinian land to legalize settlement building. In addition, Israel may pass a Nationality Bill, which would identify Israel as a Jewish state and establish Hebrew as the sole official language.<sup>126</sup>

**d. *The Political Shift***

Since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, mostly hard line political parties such as Likud and its offshoot Kadima have remained prominent, and Benjamin Netanyahu of the Likud has won the last three elections for PM. Likud and Kadima have dominated the last 32 out of 40 years of elections. Likud as a party could be best characterized as an Israel-first party with an emphasis on security, settlements, and land retention, though in truth settlement populations have consistently risen since around 1972 regardless of which party was in office. All Israeli land concessions have come during Likud PM: Menachem Begin in 1978 and Ariel Sharon in 2005. However, Likud publicly undermined Rabin and Peres during their peace initiative in the mid 90's, and seem to have no real interest in talking to the Palestinian representatives, especially Hamas.

**e. *Peace Process Activity***

Throughout the attempts at peace, such as the Camp David I and II Accords, the Oslo Peace Process, and the Annapolis talks, Israel has remained consistently stubborn. In Camp David I, Begin's refused to deal with the PLO preempted their participation in the peace talks. Despite this, Begin did agree to the "framework for peace in the Middle East," which was subsequently rejected by the PLO as it lacked their input and the right

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<sup>125</sup> Rex Brynen, "Return, Repatriation, and Resettlement," in *The Palestine Refugee Problem: The Search for a Resolution*, ed. Rex Brynen and Roula El-Rifai (London, UK: Pluto Press, 2014), 79, 81, 83, 85, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=3386748>.

<sup>126</sup> Jim Zanotti, *Israel: Background and U.S. Relations in Brief*, (CRS Report No. R44245) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2017), 12–3, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R44245.pdf>.



of return. After the eruption of the Intifada, Rabin proposed possible solutions but again rejected the PLO as a negotiating partner. The compromise of Jordan representing Palestinian interests was acceptable to the Israelis however, and the peace talks continued at the Madrid Conference and then in Oslo, Norway for the Oslo Accords. Smith writes that within the Oslo Accords, it appeared that real peace was possible, as they agreed to a Declaration of Principles in which the PLO recognized Israel's right to exist, renounced terrorism, and Israel planned for a withdrawal and Palestinian self-rule.<sup>127</sup> However, terrorist attacks and subsequent public backlash against the peace process led by the Likud opposition forced Rabin to react by closing the West Bank and Gaza while intending to continue the peace process to its conclusion, which was interrupted by his assassination. His next in line, Peres, seemingly tried to win the public's support in a snap election by assuming a more militaristic angle and attacking Lebanon in Operation Grapes of Wrath, but the maneuver was not politically effective: it did not help him win the election, and it also caused international condemnation of Israeli aggression.

Following Peres's loss, the new Netanyahu government restarted settlement building, and opened a tunnel next to the Temple Mount, which instigated more violence and unrest, and in turn gave the Israelis justification for punitive measures, which weakened the new Palestinian Authority. Still, Netanyahu met with Clinton and Arafat and pledged to relinquish more territory and redeploy Israeli troops, yet these promised concessions cost Netanyahu political capital and party support, forcing him to suspend the agreements and then in turn losing his bid for reelection. Another Likud member, Sharon, deliberately visited the Temple Mount in order to undermine Netanyahu's successor Ehud Barak in his attempts at peace. The resulting Intifada prompted Barak to call for elections, yet the Intifada also presumably influenced the Israeli population to prioritize security—not peace—and Sharon became PM.

In 2003, Hamas and the PLO agreed to try to negotiate a truce while Israel sought terms limiting the right of return for Palestinians. After coming to a tenuous agreement, Smith asserts that the Israelis assassinated key Hamas leaders to ensure that they would

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<sup>127</sup> Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 436.

not form a centralized leadership for the Palestinians in both the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>128</sup> In 2005, Israel withdrew from Gaza following an agreement with Bush that the United States would accept the realities of major Israeli population centers in the occupied territories (rather than calling for a return to the 1967 borders) in exchange for an Israeli withdrawal and an eventual Palestinian state.<sup>129</sup> However, following this agreement, Israel retained control of all of Gaza's entry and exit points, and the bad conditions and infighting between Hamas and Fatah following the 2006 election gave rise to attacks on Israel, which were used to justify Israeli counterattacks. These Israeli offensives further degraded living conditions and infrastructure within Gaza, almost guaranteeing the cycle of violence would continue and thereby undermining the peace process while simultaneously establishing a context that empowered peace process spoilers.

In 2007, Bush initiated a conference in Annapolis, Maryland to try to restart the peace process, yet Hamas was not present, and the conference and subsequent talks did not produce any agreements. According to Smith, Olmert "declared on several occasions that peace would require Israeli withdrawal from most of the West Bank and from nearly all of East Jerusalem. In the meantime, settlement building in the West Bank continued, as did the extension of Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem."<sup>130</sup> The following year, Israel made and then broke a truce with Hamas prior to Israeli elections following rocket attacks on Israel, again seemingly for a political advantage, yet Netanyahu and the Likud defeated the incumbent party.

In 2009, Obama and his administration tried to restart the peace process, but Netanyahu insisted that the Palestinian leadership recognize Israel as a Jewish state at the same time offering a halt to the resumption of settlement activities if they would do so. According to Smith, Netanyahu defied Obama's references to the 1967 borders, instead insisting that further peace talks should be predicated on the inclusion of existing Israeli

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<sup>128</sup> Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 505.

<sup>129</sup> "Letter From President Bush to Prime Minister Sharon," Whitehouse Archives, 14 April 2004, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2004/04/20040414-3.html>.

<sup>130</sup> Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 513.

settlements as being a part of the Israeli state, which was rejected by the Palestinians, who sought to base the negotiation on the 1967 borders.<sup>131</sup>

Israeli intent, based on their history, appears to be increasingly tied to appeasing certain sectors of their population, namely the settlement bloc. An organic, full-scale withdrawal back to 1967 borders or significant land concessions for a dubious peace now seems out of the question without significant political risk to the sitting government, and would probably cause some sort of uprising or serious division in Israeli society.

## **2. The Palestinians**

The Palestinians have struggling for their right to return to Israel-occupied territories since their expulsion in 1948. The rise of Palestinian militancy and terrorist tactics combined with the instability they have introduced into host nations have weakened their cause to some degree, especially with the increased focus on eliminating terrorist groups following 9/11. Furthermore, it seems they have been unable to infuse enough power in a single leader to act on their behalf with any true authority or control.

### ***a. Intentions and Decentralization***

The intentions of the Palestinians have nearly always been the right of their return to Palestine following their expulsion in 1948 and 1967. Initially, the Palestinian's plight was portrayed as an example of the results of Western Imperialism and as a lever for host nations to gain prestige and legitimacy as Arab leaders. In 1964, inspired by the events in Algeria as the National Liberation Front (FLN) threw off the yoke of French subjugation, the Palestinians militarized and organized under the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and, according to Smith, based their activities on the assumption that they could eventually provoke an Israeli overreaction.<sup>132</sup> Since then, there have been an average of 44 Israeli deaths per year due to terrorism, and multiple disproportionate Israeli reactions have in turn left many times that number of Palestinians dead.

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<sup>131</sup> Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 515–6.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

Throughout their exile, many Palestinian refugees have remained committed to someday returning to Palestine, as many of them live in dilapidated refugee camps in host countries with subpar living conditions, little political agency, and a history of causing political unrest to try and co-opt or coerce host nation regimes in their efforts against Israel. This somewhat changed in 1988 when Arafat, supposedly long open to peace in private, seemingly felt secure enough, or desperate enough, to announce that the PLO would give up using terrorism as a tool in their struggle. Following the intifada, Arafat's death, and the split between Hamas and the PA, the intent of both seems to be a resolution to the Palestinian refugee crisis, the establishment of a Palestinian state, and the right of return.

Where they seem to differ is that Hamas, much like Likud, is more hardline in the sense that it is unwilling to allow for any concessions regarding territory that Israel has gained since their first independence. In fact, in their initial charter, Hamas calls for the reclamation of all of Israel, the assistance of neighboring countries in helping them to realize this, and views the Israelis as foreigners on Muslim land, which to them makes the idea of negotiation a sin against Islam.<sup>133</sup> This seems to indicate that their fundamental position precludes any sort of negotiation or peace with Israel. The PLO has similar sentiments in their charter—though their public position has seemingly become more moderate over time. Regarding the PLO Smith asserts that, “armed struggle was a long term strategy, not a tactic to be discarded if diplomacy seemed preferable.”<sup>134</sup>

The central question regarding the Palestinian intent is the authority and representative power of their leadership. The history of the peace process and conflict with Israel is filled with “spoilers” that have derailed the peace process, provoked Israeli attacks, and exposed internal divisions within the PLO and its constituency. It seems to follow that the Palestinians are not a united group—which is not surprising considering how spread out they are, the differences in their ideology, and how long they have been living apart. In addition, the power struggle between Hamas in Gaza and the Palestinian

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<sup>133</sup> “The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement,” Yale Law School Lillian Goldman Law Library, The Avalon Project, last accessed 2 September 2017, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/hamas.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp).

<sup>134</sup> Smith, *Palestine and the Arab–Israeli Conflict*, 307.

Authority in the West Bank—as indicated by recent PA sanctions against Hamas—arguably leaves the peace process with no avenue of progress, and no clear single intent by the Palestinian actors.

## **B. THE UNITED STATES**

The U.S. role in the peace process has is controversial, since they are obviously Israel’s benefactor and champion on the world stage. However, this does not preclude the U.S. desire for peace, as Israel has in many ways been the greater spoiler in the Middle East, precluding the U.S. from furthering cooperation or stability in the tumultuous region.

### **1. The Evolving Friendship and the Global Context**

One of the most disputed questions regarding the Peace Process between Israel and the Palestinians is the intent and orientation of the United States. The U.S. relationship with Israel has fundamentally changed since Israel’s founding, as the global context has shifted dramatically, which is arguably the primary impetus for the U.S. shift away from a more calculated support of Israel to the special U.S.–Israel relationship that is in play today.

Since the first Zionist settlements in Palestine, Israel has courted an outside patron as a kind of guarantor of their security or economic well-being. At first, it was the British, who sympathized with the Jews while also wanting influence in the region, who supported their efforts to establish a homeland. When the British started to realize the friction and instability the Jewish migration was causing among the local Palestinians, they started to try to impose limits on the Jewish ability to migrate, and in turn the Jews, feeling betrayed, started to rise up against them while the WZO applied pressure at the UN. Following the World Wars, Britain’s financial troubles and the rise of Communism led to the British relinquishing their aspirations in the region while the United States stepped in to try to establish influence as a means to contain the Soviet Union.

Shortly after the conclusion of WWII, the United States focused on containing what it saw as the preeminent threat to the new world order: the Soviet Union. As part of

this strategy—underpinned with the prevalent domino theory, the United States looked to the Middle East as a key battleground with its large percentage of the world’s oil supply. As Malik Mufti points out, in accordance with this agenda, from 1945 to 1955 the United States adopted a four-pronged approach with sought to maintain the regional status quo, support nationalistic leaders that could presumably be counted on to oppose communism, form an anti-Soviet alliance in the region, and finally avoid regional conflict.<sup>135</sup> Israel was unhappy with that arrangement, however, and according to Mufti, sought to drive a wedge between Egypt and the United States, which it was eventually able to do when it raided Gaza in February of 1955. This reoriented regional focus and initiated an arms race among superpower clientele, which incentivized the United States to choose Israel, followed by Nasser announcing his intent to purchase from the Soviet Union.<sup>136</sup> Nasser courted both Superpowers, and the United States began pulling away from him when his ambition or rhetoric went against U.S. strategy, which simultaneously increased U.S. support and friendship for Israel, especially when Nasser’s standing with other Arab nations fell and it was no longer as important to try to maintain good relations with Egypt.

Israel’s decisive victory in 1967 shifted helped further shift the U.S. stance towards Israel. According to Fawas A. Gerges, the United States supported Israel’s position that no withdrawal from the newly occupied territories would be conducted without a peace agreement in exchange. President Lyndon Johnson had “Five Great Principles of Peace” including recognition of Israel’s right to exist, justice for the Palestinian refugees, and territorial integrity. This is perceived as the beginning of America’s special relationship with Israel.<sup>137</sup>

After the Yom Kippur War, at the onset of the Carter administration, according to Bernard Reich and Shannon Powers, the inauguration of Carter and Begin marked a

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<sup>135</sup> Malik Mufti, “The United States and Nasserist Pan-Arabism,” in *The Middle East and the United States: History, Politics and Ideologies*, ed. David W. Lesch and Mark L. Haas, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2014), 128–30.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>137</sup> Fawas A. Gerges, “The 1967 Arab–Israeli War: U.S. Actions and Perceptions,” in *The Middle East and the United States: History, Politics and Ideologies*, ed. David W. Lesch and Mark L. Haas, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2014) 184–5.

period with “increased public tension and recrimination.”<sup>138</sup> Though both sides agreed for peace and security for Israel, according to Reich and Powers, there were numerous disagreements concerning methods and mechanisms, poor personal chemistry, multiple efforts to influence the policy of the other by both sides, and the pressure that the United States placed on Israel in the Camp David Accords.<sup>139</sup>

In 1979, an uprising of Iranian malcontents under the leadership of Ruhollah Khomeini led to revolution in Iran, which resulted in the fall of the Shah—a longtime U.S. ally—as well as the U.S. “Twin Pillars” policy. This event helped to shift the United States to an even closer relationship with Israel. Reich and Powers explain that Reagan “was opposed to dealing with the PLO until that organization dramatically changed its policies by renouncing terrorism, accepting UNSCR 242, and acknowledging Israel’s right to exist.”<sup>140</sup> Although the Reagan years were mostly positive for the relationship between the two countries, Reich and Powers assert that the Israeli bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor, Israel’s offensives into Lebanon, Israel’s settlement building in occupied territories, Israel’s extension of Israeli law into the occupied Golan Heights, Israel’s objections when the United States sold arms to Saudi Arabia, and Israel’s reaction to the first Intifada were all sources of tension between the two countries.<sup>141</sup> However, the United States also sought to keep ties close during the Reagan years, and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on 30 November 1981 “in which the parties recognized the need to enhance strategic cooperation to deter threats from the Soviet Union,” according to Reich and Powers.<sup>142</sup>

During George H.W. Bush’s (GHWB) presidency, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the first Gulf War seemed to diminish Israel’s geostrategic importance. A counter-Soviet force was no longer required, and the polarizing effect of Israel essentially blacklisted it from being able to join in any potential coalition with Arab states. Reich

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<sup>138</sup> Bernard Reich and Shannon Powers, “The United States and Israel,” in *The Middle East and the United States*, ed. David W. Lesch and Mark L. Haas, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2014), 223–4.

<sup>139</sup> Reich and Powers, “The United States and Israel,” 224.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 225–6.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

and Powers argue that the America's forceful resumption of the Peace Process also created tension and doubt within Israeli circles, and the Bush administration attempted to tie monetary aid for Soviet refugee settlement to Israel's demeanor towards the peace negotiations. Bush also asked Congress to delay Israel's request for \$10 billion in loans.<sup>143</sup> Finally, Bush clearly favored the Labor party over the Likud. All of these examples seem to point to the America's intention during this period to seriously pursue peace.

After the Cold War's end, the next seemingly large shift in U.S. policy was that of the War on Terror following the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001. This global context and concerns over the predominately Middle Eastern origin of most of the primary transnational terrorist organizations, once again caused a reassurance of the U.S.–Israel friendship, as Israel was viewed of having to deal with this type of threat on a continuing basis. In addition, as one of the only Democracies in the Middle East with a large and influential voting bloc in the United States, Israel seemed a natural ally in the U.S. quest to solidify U.S. power in the region in accordance with its interests. As Reich and Powers point out, “at the same time, Osama Bin Laden continued to link the attacks to the plight of the Palestinians and attributed that to unequivocal U.S. support for Israel—a view widely accepted in the Arab and Muslim worlds.”<sup>144</sup> Continued Palestinian attacks on Israel after the Madrid Conference alienated a seemingly powerless Arafat and pushed the United States even more to the Israeli point of view, with Bush acknowledging Israeli “facts on the ground” in occupied territories, and abandoning the notion of any return to the 1967 borders.

In more recent history, President Barack Obama seemingly tried to tone down the America's aggressive reputation abroad, adopting a humbler approach as the U.S. actions during the Bush administration were often seen as unjustified and imperialistic. Though downplaying U.S. power in many of his speeches, Obama seemed to display a more realist approach to many of his dealings in the Middle East, especially in regards to the Arab Spring, in which he weighed each situation—and the importance of the regime

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<sup>143</sup> Reich and Powers, “The United States and Israel,” 228–9.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.



under siege—before deciding whether or not to support the uprising. This was perceived as confusing: espousing idealistic liberal Democracy, while continuing more practical relationships with monarchies such as Saudi Arabia, appeared hypocritical. Regardless, the objective relationship with Israel under Obama’s watch remained strong, with his Secretary of State John Kerry expending a lot of time and energy attempting to rekindle the Peace Process with a seemingly uncooperative Netanyahu.

## **2. Financial Aid and the Qualitative Military Edge**

The United States, especially after the first Camp David Accords, has increasingly supported Israel with economic aid that has primarily been used to either prop up the Israeli economy, when needed, or has directly strengthened the Israeli military. According to Jeremy Sharp, since the foundation of Israel, the United States has given a total of \$129.8 billion dollars to Israel in aid, \$79.8 Billion of which has been for the military.<sup>145</sup> Over the span of Israel’s existence, the type of aid provided by the United States has shifted from being primarily intended for economic aid to military aid, in what is framed as intending to ensure Israel’s Qualitative Military Edge (QME). Sharp explains that, “U.S. military aid for Israel has been designed to maintain Israel’s...QME over neighboring militaries. The rationale for QME is that Israel must rely on better equipment and training to compensate for being much smaller in land and population than its potential adversaries.” Though this practice of aid really began with Johnson, since 1999 the aid agreements have been codified in a Memorandum of Understanding—which is not legally binding—covering 10-year timeframes. The latest MOU occurred in 2016 when the Obama administration promised \$38 billion over the course of a decade starting in 2019.

Figure 1 seems to show that the total amount of U.S. aid to Israel increased exponentially during the Nixon Presidency, and that the percentage earmarked for military spending has steadily increased over the past few decades since GHWB, with the largest agreed aid package ever signed by Obama in late 2016. However, Figure 1 is

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<sup>145</sup> Jeremy Sharp, *U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel* (CRS Report No. RL33222) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2016), 35–7, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33222.pdf>.

slightly misleading. Figure 2 shows the amount of aid sent when adjusted to the 2017 U.S. Dollar (USD) value; there is a significant flattening of comparative aid value, with the average yearly aid sent to Israel peaking at Carter and then steadily declining up to the present, and the total value of aid peaking in the Reagan years. For the newly signed MOU, when using 2017 USD value and not accounting for future inflation, the projected spending over 10 years will fall short of Reagan and Clinton’s total aid given or the average aid given by Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, GHWB, and Clinton. Sharp also writes that the total value of aid sent for other than military use has sharply declined following the G.W. Bush years due to a phasing out of economic aid, a process that started with the first MOU in 1999 due to the economic progress and stability that Israel had achieved.<sup>146</sup>

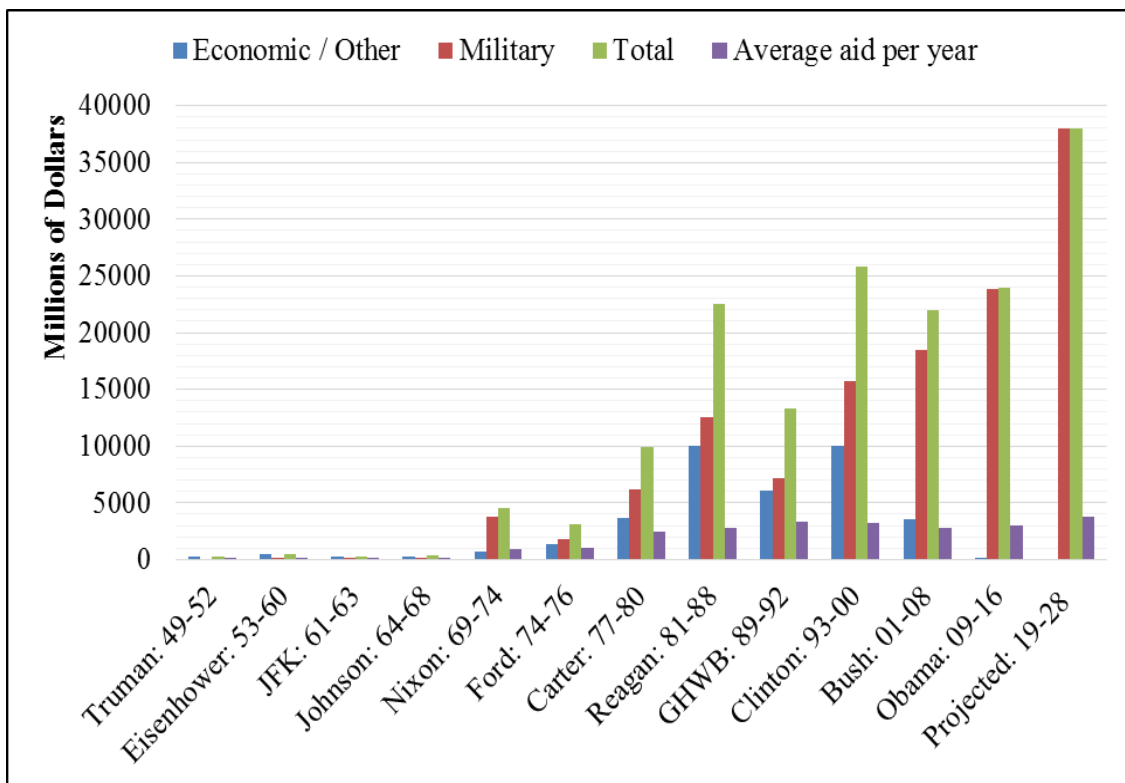


Figure 1. A Comparison of U.S. Monetary Aid to Israel during U.S. Presidencies<sup>147</sup>

<sup>146</sup> Sharp, *U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel*, 1.

<sup>147</sup> Adapted from Sharp, *U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel*, 35–7.

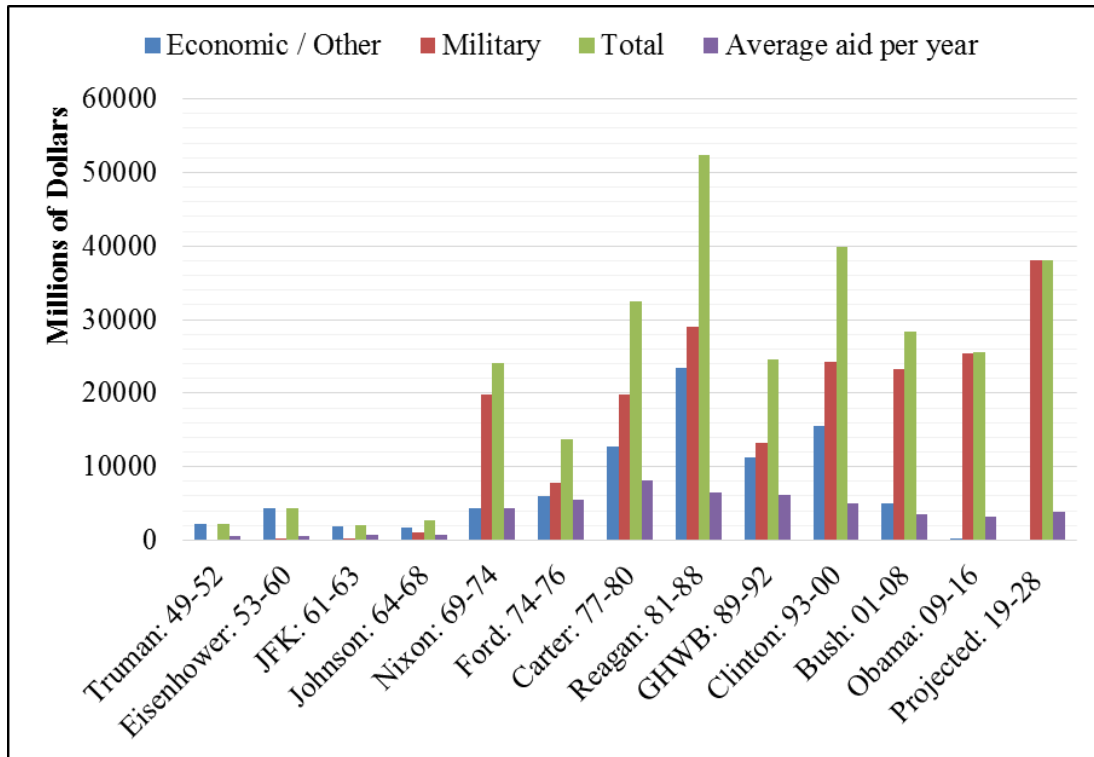


Figure 2. Adjusted Dollar-Value Comparison<sup>148</sup>

The QME was first made policy in Public Law 429, which states, “the President shall carry out empirical and qualitative assessment on an ongoing basis of the extent to which Israel possesses a qualitative military edge over military threats to Israel.”<sup>149</sup> In accordance with this pledge, the United States has helped Israel acquire advanced technology, assisted in the development of multiple missile defense programs, assisted in anti-tunnel defense, and has allowed Israel to purchase some of America’s most advanced fighter aircraft, such as the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. In addition, as Sharp explains, in 1987 Congress granted Israel the status of “major non-NATO ally (MNNA),” which entitles Israel to participate in the Excess Defense Articles (EDA) program, allowing the United States to sell or give excess or outdated equipment to NATO and MNNA partners

<sup>148</sup> Adapted from Sharp, *U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel*, 35–7.

<sup>149</sup> “Naval Vessel Transfer Authority Act,” *United States Congress*, Public Law 110-429, last accessed 19 August 2017, <https://www.congress.gov/110/plaws/publ429/PLAW-110publ429.htm>.

as well as the ability to potentially fund joint research and development in pursuit of foreign policy objectives.<sup>150</sup>

Despite the large price tag of the latest MOU, it is in some ways more limiting. Sharp explains that the most recent MOU will eventually eliminate off-shore procurement (OSP)—which allows Israel to spend a percentage of their aid money on Israeli-manufactured equipment—includes funding for missile defense, which is usually not included in the MOU, and stipulates that there will be no supplemental funding or Congressional aid increases on top of what has already been agreed upon, except in the case of an emergency.<sup>151</sup> In addition, Sharp writes that Israel houses an emergency stockpile of U.S. military equipment that is intended for U.S. use but which Israel can request to use in case of an emergency without having to wait for congressional approval.<sup>152</sup>

The QME is an objective indicator of U.S. commitment to Israel, and is line with the increased friendship over the years and the America’s interests based on the regional and global context. In the present, as Sharp notes, “Israel is the largest recipient of U.S. Foreign Military Financing. For FY2017, the President’s request for Israel would encompass approximately 54 percent of total requested FMF funding worldwide.”<sup>153</sup> As the provider of so much aid to Israel, it seems to follow that this allows the United States to potentially apply a great deal of leverage to potentially pressure Israel to alter their behavior. It also implies that there is an established, long-running political and economic relationship between the two, which opens the United States up to accusations of favoritism in the events of a conflict or dispute—such as during the peace process. This is especially true considering the wording of the QME, as it specifically prioritizes Israel’s security above other regional actors while simultaneously allowing Israel a consistent and significant military advantage against Palestinian forces or their champions.

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<sup>150</sup> Sharp, *U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel*, 13.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 6–8.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

Some, such as Thrall, view the economic aid as a potential tool, and points out that in the past, U.S. presidents made use of this economic lever to force Israel to do things they did not want to do. For example, he states that U.S. presidents have successfully threatened to withhold assistance in 1956, 1975, 1977, and 1978. In 1956 and 1975, the United States pressured Israel to leave the Sinai. In 1977, it pressured Israel to retreat from Southern Lebanon, and in 1978, it pressured Israel to sign the peace agreement with Egypt at Camp David.<sup>154</sup> Thrall goes on point out that in 1991, “U.S. Secretary of State James Baker...forced a reluctant PM Yitzhak Shamir to attend negotiations in Madrid by withholding a \$10bn loan guarantee that Israel needed to absorb the immigration of Soviet Jews. That was the last time the United States applied pressure of this sort.”<sup>155</sup> The Madrid talks were the first time that all belligerents sat down to talk directly with one another.

### **3. The U.S. Role in the Peace Process**

The conduct of the United States during the Peace Process has been hands-on, yet ultimately ineffectual so far. During the first iteration of the Peace Process during the GHWB years, the United States actively pushed for peace, and preferred what was seen as the more moderate Labor party over Likud. Reich and Powers suggest, however, that once Labor’s Yitzhak Rabin won the elections in 1992 and the United States successfully applied economic pressure by threatening to withhold the loan, the Bush administration viewed the success or failure of negotiations as being dependent on the Palestinian side of the table.<sup>156</sup> Still, most of the various negotiations during the GHWB years failed to deal with the main points of contention between the United States and Israel.

Bill Clinton came into office in 1993 and developed a close personal bond with Rabin, who was assassinated in 1995. Rabin’s successor, Netanyahu, pursued the peace process in a far slower manner that was apparently backed by the U.S. Congress,

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<sup>154</sup> Thrall, “Israel–Palestine.”

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Reich and Powers, “The United States and Israel,” 229–30.

according to Reich and Powers.<sup>157</sup> When Netanyahu was replaced by Ehud Barak in 1999, Clinton assumed that the prospects of peace had gone up, and aggressively tried to bring the Palestinians under Arafat and the Israelis to a tangible peace deal with extensive involvement by the United States. In 2001, Clinton stated that in order for the parties involved to reach a peaceful resolution, the Palestinians needed a state and to respect Israel's security requirements and demographic realities. However, the timing of the talks seemed rushed, and the lack of written documentation and Clinton's push in light of his presidential term ending may have hindered the chances of successful negotiations.

Following Clinton's attempts to establish peace, George W. Bush was, according to Reich and Powers, initially hands-off and less deeply involved. Yet there was still the hope for peace within the administration. In 2002, Bush made a Rose Garden speech in which he called for new Palestinian leadership to take up the helm, as Arafat by this time was not seen as a credible partner. Bush outlined a Road Map for peace in the region that delineated a systematic timeline for an eventual free and sovereign Palestinian state, yet the plan was never implemented.

#### **4. U.S. Neutrality**

With the interconnectivity of global commerce, social media, foreign affairs, and influence that a great power like the United States wields, it seems highly unlikely that a great power can be truly neutral in any conflict. The actions, reactions, or non-actions of such a dominant force on the world stage serve as a lodestone of attention and interpretation, and the introduction of the UN and the obligations inherent in its charter bring about a dichotomy of collective security and neutrality. In addition, the United States seems to have an objectively preferred party in the region. America's support for Israel against multiple Arab states in multiple wars, against multiple anti-Israel resolutions within the UN, coupled with billions upon billions of dollars in yearly aid, and the expressed intent to provide Israel with a military edge over its neighbors, render it obvious that Israel is America's preferred partner.

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<sup>157</sup> Reich and Powers, "The United States and Israel," 232-3.

However, friendship with Israel comes with a price. When judging the neutrality of the United States, there can be an attempt to account for this price when weighted against the historical closeness of the two states. During most presidencies involved in some iteration of the Peace Process, the United States viewed a return to the 1967 borders as essential, and seemed to be opposed to overly aggressive or expansionist actions by Israel—either out of principle or out of concern for the balance of power in the region. Though Bush broke this trend by his concession to the “facts on the ground,” he also envisioned a viable Palestinian state. His tenure also marked the beginning of the War on Terror, which to date has cost the United States more than \$2 trillion dollars. The War on Terror—a response to the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, was organized by Osama Bin Laden, who later explained that the U.S. support of the situation in Israel was one of Al-Qaeda’s primary motivators.<sup>158</sup> This action signified another great shift in America’s focus to anti-terrorism, affecting domestic and foreign policy and resulting in the attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq. As John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt explain, “saying that Israel and the United States are united by a shared terrorist threat has the causal relationship backwards. Rather, the United States has a terrorism problem in good part because it is so closely allied with Israel, not the other way around.”<sup>159</sup>

The United States then has good reason to see an amicable solution occur between Israel and the Palestinians or their champions, and a great deal of effort has been expended by the United States to try to work through a solution to the problem. For example, in the past it has supported Israeli leaders that appeared to be more likely to be able to come to fruitful negotiation with the Palestinians, like when, according to Reich and Powers, the United States indicated its preference for Labor’s Peres in the 1990 elections.<sup>160</sup> However, it is very possible that the United States is greatly hampered by the political influence of what Mearsheimer and Walt call the “Israeli Lobby,” which supposedly wields a large amount of financial and political influence on members of

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<sup>158</sup> Osama Bin Laden, “Letter to America,” 24 November 2002, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/nov/24/theobserver>.

<sup>159</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, “The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy,” 32.

<sup>160</sup> Reich and Powers, “The United States and Israel,” 221.

Congress and arguably during presidential elections.<sup>161</sup> Congress controls the financial aid money that is sent to Israel, and this in turn enables it to materially support Israel even if the incumbent administration is trying to act as a credible negotiating partner. In other words, the U.S. funding and backing of Israel in effect creates a kind of moral hazard with Israel, which is not punished for missteps or actions that are counter to U.S. interests or goals. The United States, then, effectively undermines itself: it can attempt to have a neutral or positive stance towards peace, but its background aid and support for Israel in turn sends the signal that the issue is not important enough for Israel to take it seriously, as there is no consequence for Israel's relationship with the United States either way. Consequentially, the United States can be neutral in intent insofar as an administration's desire for peace out of concern for the wider regional context or Israel's future, but its agreements and aid are not conducive to being a truly neutral arbiter of peace.

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<sup>161</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy, 40–5.



## IV. WAYS AHEAD

The way ahead for all parties involved is a difficult one, especially with the current chaos in the region. There are a few potential options that could help solve the issue of Israeli–Palestinian violence: 1) allow the refugees to return; 2) a two-state solution; 3) a three-state solution; or 4) maintain the status quo. All of these would likely require a role for the United States, either as facilitator or participant.

### A. ALLOWING THE RETURN

Allowing the Palestinian refugees to return to Israel would accomplish the primary goal of all Palestinian representatives. Allowing the return would significantly change the dynamics within Israeli society as well as Israel’s relationship with other regional actors. However, the Israeli people and their government want a Jewish state, and the possible introduction of millions of Palestinians into their society would cause a massive demographic shift. Such a shift would not only change the makeup of the population; it would probably have severe economic and infrastructure-related consequences in regards to housing, jobs, sanitation, medical needs, and other infrastructure.

Externally, the sudden absence of refugees would likely alleviate pressure on Jordan and Lebanon, and possibly even Syria once the civil war there has been resolved. In Jordan, according to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA), there are over 2.1 million Palestinian refugees, which is approximately 25 percent of their population.<sup>162</sup> According to Roula El-Rifai and Nadim Shehadi, ever since the Black September group challenged King Hussein for control of Jordan back in 1971, the Palestinians have not really been able to participate in Jordanian politics.<sup>163</sup> In addition, there many Palestinian refugees are fleeing Syria to Jordan in order to escape

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<sup>162</sup> “Syria: Humanitarian Snapshot,” UNRWA, last accessed 24 June 2017, [https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa\\_-\\_humanitarian\\_snapshot\\_may\\_2017.pdf](https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa_-_humanitarian_snapshot_may_2017.pdf).

<sup>163</sup> El-Rifai and Shehadi, “An Offer They Can Refuse,” 117–8.

the war there, which could tax or possibly outpace the Jordanian capacity to handle the influx.

If Israel allows for the return of Palestinians, Jordan will likely have to deal with the question of citizenship, as dual citizenship would probably not be allowed. In addition, the transfer of any refugees from Jordan would likely be facilitated in a very measured fashion to reduce any negative economic or social effects for either country. Presumably, Palestinians that assumed Israeli citizenship would gain more agency in Israel.

For Lebanon, the Palestinian exit would likely be a source of relief, as they have never been integrated into the society as much as they have in Jordan. El-Rifai, Shehadi, and Ilan Pappé all argue that Beirut acts a center of Palestinian political activity due to the opportunities for networked political activity and the wide variety of political organizations.<sup>164</sup> Palestinians in Lebanon are primarily located within refugee camps and have been one of the causes of many years of strife in the Lebanon civil war and the war with Israel. In addition, the Arab cause against Israel led to the establishment of Hezbollah in Lebanon, which has access to Iranian aid, has become an armed political player in the state, and is arguably a destabilizing force. Although Lebanon does not have nearly as many Palestinian refugees as Jordan does, it would still have a large effect on the country, as Hezbollah would probably lose much of its political power and reason for existence as an organization, and Israel would possibly be able to benefit from a more secure border to the North.

For Israel, the West bank, and Gaza, the return would be incredibly taxing on the Israeli infrastructure unless there was a methodical system in place to allow for a measured integration into Israeli society. Though it is very likely that the relative quality of life for the millions of refugees found in these two areas would probably improve, UNRWA has found that in Gaza especially, there is “extreme poverty, food

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<sup>164</sup> El-Rifai and Shehadi, “An Offer They Can Refuse,” 124–5; Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 219.

insecurity...and [an] unemployment rate at 41.1 percent.”<sup>165</sup> UNRWA also reports that there are power outages between 8–12 hours a day in Gaza, which affects medical and sanitization services and business.<sup>166</sup>

Presumably, an open door homecoming for Palestinians would greatly reduce the threat of external terrorism for Israel, and would present an obvious opportunity for Israel to claim some sort of responsibility for the Palestinian diaspora. However, there would likely be a violent reaction within Israel itself among population segments that would prefer to keep Israel strictly Jewish: if all of the Palestinian diaspora returned to Israel, it would no longer be a *Jewish* state in terms of demographics. In addition, the shadows of past grievances would be difficult to overcome in political and everyday life.

## **B. A TWO- OR THREE-STATE SOLUTION**

In the two-state solution scenario, Israel and Palestine would both have independent, viable, and sovereign states. There would probably not be a mass Palestinian refugee homecoming to Israel itself, there could possibly be a mass influx of Palestinians from their various locations in the surrounding area into the new Palestinian state. There are a couple of different problems that are holding up any progress on this front however, such as the issue of contiguous borders, where the borders start, settlements and their champions within Israeli society, the disposition of the holy sites within Jerusalem and Jerusalem itself, and Israel’s focus on security and political opportunism.

A successful two-state solution would be predicated on a couple of different things. First and foremost, the power of spoilers would have to be significantly mitigated, and achieving that would require a reorientation of political objectives and popular opinion within Israel. Specifically, Israelis and Palestinians would both need to be convinced that the other is a credible partner in peace, and that any terrorist attack that does take place during negotiations is most likely a dissatisfied third party that is trying to

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<sup>165</sup> “Gaza Situation Report 197,” UNRWA, 12 June 2017, <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/emergency-reports/gaza-situation-report-197>.

<sup>166</sup> “Gaza Situation Report 199,” UNRWA, 24 June 2017, <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/emergency-reports/gaza-situation-report-199>.

derail the process. Israelis would also have to be convinced that not accepting some kind of peace agreement had consequences that would noticeably affect their ability to continue their day to day lives, such as war, massive sanctions, or something else that is objectively worse than negotiating.

If spoilers are left powerless, then the next problem that would need to be addressed would be the disposition of the holy sites and Jerusalem. In previous attempts at peace, it was recommended that Jerusalem be split into an Israeli half and a Palestinian half. The problem has been that that the Israeli settlements into the West Bank have footprints that fall into the theoretical Palestinian half. These settlers would probably need to be recompensed in a similar fashion to the ones that left Gaza in 2005, and Israel might need to disincentive settlement in general, as it seems to follow that incentivizing settlements along border areas creates a kind of pioneer mentality of being paid to go live in the wilderness next to dangerous places and people. A potential solution for the holy sites is for both sides to come to an agreement as to who has jurisdiction over which site. If this arrangement creates friction with the disposition of Jerusalem as a whole, then it might be possible to adjust the border to take the Holy places into account while still attempting to maintain a contiguous border. Another possible solution would be the creation of some sort of neutral zone with oversight by the UN that would in turn be paid for by both countries, thus presumably reducing any potential political or religious friction.

The fate of Jerusalem is another problem on the road to peace. The city is important for both nations, and both want all or some of it as part of their country. Though there was still some talk of returning to the 1967 borders, this seems unlikely to happen, especially in regards to Jerusalem. The simplest solution seems to revolve around adjusting borders to account for major Israeli population centers—provided they do not interfere with the Palestinian state's contiguity. Although this solution seems to reward Israel for their stubborn refusal to return the land that they occupied following the 1967 War, it seems unlikely that there would be any major shift towards concessions in regards to withdrawing from settlements in such a culturally significant place.

Another issue is the shape of the border between the two states. Israel, in their Camp David II accords, wished to divide Palestine up into quadrants with Israeli roads and security zones that bisected the proposed Palestinian state in order for Israel to have full access to the Jordan River—which Israel sees as a key defensive position. It seems unlikely that the Palestinians would agree to a non-contiguous state, especially one in which another state has such incredible access to multiple parts of it.

The next potential solution to the Palestinian–Israel dispute would be that of a three-state solution. The idea of a three-state solution originates from the Palestinian decentralization and hostility between Hamas and Fatah, two of the largest organizations under the Palestinian Authority. These groups are ideologically separated and appear to have different opinions regarding Israel and the level of intransigence required for the situation. Unless these two can come together some kind of compromise, their infighting gives Israel a practical excuse not to deal at all—unless a clear split is made and there is no attempt for one to try to speak for the other. This separation of the Palestinian blocs would also potentially allow for an easier negotiation in regards to state boundaries, as Gaza would not have to be considered at the same time as the West Bank and Jordan. A problem with the three state solution is that the size of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank are very small, and would probably lack the infrastructure, defensive capability, and national identity to make a successful state, especially in the face of the potential return of so many refugees.

### **C. MAINTAINING THE STATUS QUO**

Another potential option would be to simply do nothing. Israel could continue to build settlements and hope that the Palestinians simply grow weary of their quest to either have a state of their own or return to Israeli lands. The sporadic terrorist attacks against Israel would likely continue, and the PA could continue to try to garner international attention in the hopes that the UN would somehow be able to step in and do something to force Israel to change its position. Israel would still be treated as a powerful regional pariah with no real economic or security ties in the region. Palestinian refugees would still find themselves without any country to truly call their own and in generally poor

living conditions as entire generations are raised with hate in their hearts for Israel. Israel itself might continue to insist on the primacy of a Jewish heritage in their country, potentially threatening its already shaky reputation abroad as well as its status as a democracy.

However, there are benefits for Israel to maintain the status quo, at least in the short term. As Nathan Thrall points out, the potential downfalls of a peace agreement actually outweigh those of peace, namely demographic concerns, potential water loss, and a weakening of their security and situational awareness due to territorial losses. In addition, every time that Israel has been part of a peace process with the Palestinians, the amount of potential concessions that are on the table for Israel has decreased; in other words, the longer Israel waits, the better potential deal that it seems to get.<sup>167</sup>

#### **D. PARTICIPANTS**

No matter what option comes about, one of the main questions is what countries are involved and what their role is going to be in facilitating some kind of agreement. Aside from the certain involvement of Israel and Palestine, there is the question of which, if any, of Israel's neighbors should be involved, whether the United States should be involved, and whether or not the UN should be involved in some form—as either observer, facilitator, or enforcer.

It seems to make sense for Israel's neighbors to have some say in such a seminal issue in the region and especially in Israel's immediate vicinity. Jordan, hosting over 2 million Palestinian refugees, would likely be included due to the sheer amount of potential emigration of its long-term Palestinian population as well as the Syrian Palestinians that could use Jordan as a possible route to Israel or the ones that have already fled from the Syrian civil war into Jordan. Due to the potential political instability in Jordan and the subsequent lack of political agency for Palestinians residing there, it seems to follow that Jordan would have a stake in reducing the possibility of future instability as well as unburdening some of their responsibility for their Palestinian tenants. In a similar vein, Lebanon would also likely have a stake in successful peace

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<sup>167</sup> Thrall, "Israel–Palestine."

negotiations. The Palestinians have been a catalyst for conflict within the state and with Israel, and are viewed as outsiders. The plight of the Palestinians has enabled Hezbollah to become a significant player in Lebanese politics, so a resolution of the conflict would likely weaken their local base of support as well as Iran's influence in the area.

The UN's involvement in any kind of peace process involving Israel would likely be a hard sell. According to a Pew poll taken in 2013, 70 percent of Israelis have a negative viewpoint of the UN, and an average of 68 percent of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have a negative view.<sup>168</sup> This seems to imply that a UN presence at Peace Negotiations would possibly be viewed with distrust by both sides. There is also a possibility that a peace negotiated vis-à-vis the supranational body would not be considered binding between the two, or that it would not be perceived to be a true neutral body as member states could be swayed to one side or another or influenced by other member states in their decision. In addition, the UN has no credible means of enforcing any sort of agreement between the two sides.

The United States would likely have a role in any peace negotiation between the parties. While the unique relationship that the United States and Israel have seems to preclude true neutrality, the United States has good reason to pursue a peace negotiation in hopes of producing a better Israeli reputation and standing in the region due to the effect that it has on U.S. interests and security. The U.S. National Security Strategy of 2015 states that U.S. security depends on a vigorous U.S. economy built on international trade, respect for universal values, the prioritization of the top strategic risks such as terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and infectious disease outbreaks. It also states, "We will work to address the underlying conditions that can help foster violent extremism such as poverty, inequality, and repression...In the Middle East, we will...confront external aggression against our allies and partners. At the same time, we remain committed to a vision of the Middle East that is peaceful and prosperous,

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<sup>168</sup> "UN Retains Strong Global Image," *Pew Research Center*, 17 September 2013, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/09/17/united-nations-retains-strong-global-image/>.

where democracy takes root and human rights are upheld. Stability and peace in the Middle East...also requires reducing the underlying causes of conflict.”<sup>169</sup>

With these goals in mind, the strategy of the United States seems to align with the promotion of peace between Israel and the Palestinians, due to the secondary effects it has on the U.S. reputation and the concomitant U.S. options and opportunities in the region. It will: 1) help to alleviate the underlying conditions for many of the problems in the region that originated with the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, such as the poverty and inequality facing the Palestinian people; 2) help to promote a stronger peace in the region, as Israel would no longer be the central focus of Arab angst and would be able to open possible economic and political ties to regional actors; 3) establish a more credible posture of the promotion of human rights for the United States in the Middle East; 4) help reduce the effect of terrorist recruitment rhetoric concerning Israel, the United States, and Western Imperialism; and 5) enable American and Israeli opportunity in the region and allow Israel to act as a coalition member and more valuable ally in the case of war.

The U.S. economic ties to Israel gives it a unique opportunity to leverage them against an Israeli peace agreement with Palestine. The MOUs are not legally binding, and therefore the yearly military aid money could theoretically be frozen. The groundwork for this would have to be carefully planned however, due to the potentially detrimental effect it could have on the political leadership in the United States and in Israel, and due to the money being given all at once at the beginning of the year. Secret initial negotiations and the long term messaging prior to substantial negotiations could possibly be effective in preventing or reducing reactionary or opportunistic political undermining or other spoilers.

The United States also holds a powerful position in the UN, and it has supported Israel for much of its existence. A partial withdrawal of support for Israel or support for the Palestinian cause there could end up being an advantage the United States could use,

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<sup>169</sup> “National Security Strategy 2015,” NSA Archive, last accessed 28 August 2017, 2, 9, 26, <http://nssarchive.us/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/2015.pdf>.



though this course of action could have severe effects on the U.S.–Israel relationship and might actually undermine the ability of the United States to influence Israel’s decision.

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## V. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Chas W. Freeman asserts that the peace process over the last five decades has been fraudulent, has institutionalized injustice, damaged Israel's democracy, and alienated and delegitimized it on the world stage.<sup>170</sup> The implications for the future of the Israeli–Palestinian dispute do not look very promising. With the combination of a long-established and relatively unchanging support for Israel among the U.S. constituency and Congress, the overwhelming commitment to the idea of Jewish state among the Israelis and the right of return for Palestinians, there seems to be little likelihood of change unless there is a significant shift in one or more variables that make up the foundation for these positions. This seems especially true given the decentralization and fragmentation of Palestinian leadership and ideology. This state of affairs could have serious implications for all countries involved.

### A. IMPLICATIONS

The implications of the status quo moving forward will likely be multifaceted. The Palestinians will likely continue to experience the suffering and lack of agency that has plagued them since their displacement. In addition, as new generations of Palestinians grow up in subpar conditions with little opportunity and stories of Israeli oppression, it seems to follow that many young Palestinians will step up to be the next generation of insurgents. If this occurs, it is likely that the Israelis will point to the Palestinians as the instigator, and the circle of violence will continue. In addition, the more hardline elements within Israeli society will be able to continue to take advantage of the circumstance—pointing to the attacks as credible evidence of the need for security, the need for a primarily Jewish state, and the need to be wary of non-Jewish elements within their territory.

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<sup>170</sup> Freeman, “Lessons From America’s Misadventures in the Middle East,” 66.

## 1. The Identity Spiral

One possible outcome of such a scenario is that the notion of being Jewish becomes ever more important, and defining what Jewish is could then become a political matter. This could cause a further hardening of *identific* lines within Israeli society, which would likely paint Palestinians as even more of an outsider and thus as a threat. If they are perceived as a greater threat and less trustworthy and duplicitous, then the political chances for any Israeli government to successfully negotiate a settlement seems slim, not just due to the expectations of its constituents, but also due to the likely reciprocation of these attitudes on the Palestinian side. Some even see this already occurring, as Michael J. Thompson of William Patterson University argues that Israel is not a full Democracy, but is rather a “Jewish Democracy” only, and that identity politics and exclusionary policies will become more entrenched as the country continues its turn to the right.<sup>171</sup> Thompson argues that this, in turn will have a serious affect as “The Israel *Volkstaat* has slowly emerged as the prominent path for the future and this can only spell disaster for Israelis and Palestinians alike since it will breed nothing but continued resentment and separation, both distinct and long-term barriers to peace.”<sup>172</sup>

## 2. Terrorism, Refugees, and the World Order

The United States will probably continue to have interests in the Middle East. However, intransigence on Israel’s part will likely continue to undermine potential cooperation between the United States and other regional actors. America’s ability to remain in the driver’s seat of the World Order is incumbent on not being surpassed, of course, but also on the world order remaining as a viable construct. Transnational terrorism and the instability caused by massive amounts of refugees are two kinds of events that can threaten this order with the second and third order effects and strain that they cause on individual states’ infrastructure and politics. Continued transnational terrorism seems inevitable, yet the frequency—and target—of it could possibly be reduced or redirected if the Israelis and Palestinians were able to forge an agreement,

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<sup>171</sup> Michael J. Thompson, “Deconstructing Israeli Democracy,” in *From Camp David to Cast Lead*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 22–26.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

especially if such an agreement was facilitated by the United States. If the status quo remains, then the United States will continue to spend blood and extraordinary amounts of treasure to counter the threat of terrorism.

In some ways, terrorism and refugees are connected. Refugees often do not have a home, agency, or comfort, and, when it becomes a long-term situation, they often seemingly have no future, as states tend to isolate them in refugee camps in order to mitigate the disturbance to the local economy and local politics. Refugees in this situation are prime targets for groups that seek to use them to further their own ends. Within the current context, Israel, as the region's most other state, would seemingly be an easy state for various actors to try to coopt refugees to go against. In addition, due to the inherent instabilities of the governmental systems and economies of most of the states in the Middle East, and the potential havoc that might be caused by environmental change in the area, there could potentially be a massive wave of refugees, and no state in the area is prepared to handle additional large amounts of refugees on its own. Alternatively, neighboring states might attempt to alleviate internal unrest by diverting blame towards Israel. In either of these scenarios, Israel will still be security centric, and it will hurt its image immensely if it turns away refugees without just cause. On the other hand, if it is not security centric in such a situation, then terrorists or other people like that will be able to easily make their way into the country.

Israel, then, has a hypothetical reason to assist or alleviate regional instability that would be caused by a massive movement of refugees, which would likely require some sort of peace—the current status quo would make dealing with such a situation much more difficult. On the same token, the United States also has a good reason to prevent or mitigate a flood of refugees destabilizing the region. If there is a flood of region that cannot find safe haven in the Middle East, then the most likely route to date has been through Turkey and into Europe. Turkey, who according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), was already hosting 2.9 million refugees as of 19 June 2017, would likely be hard pressed to continue to act as the gateway to Europe if

there were a significant addition to that number.<sup>173</sup> The issue of immigration was one of the reasons that the UK voted to leave Britain, a feeling likely exacerbated by the Cologne attacks on New Year's Eve of 2015 and the November 2015 Paris terrorist attacks.

The United States has historical, economic, and military ties to Europe. In fact, European Command (EUCOM) and the North Atlantic Trade Organization (NATO) have long been a backbone of U.S. influence within the European Area of Responsibility (AOR). Europe has many challenges, such as Russia's conventional presence in Crimea and Georgia, and its agitation efforts in the Balkans, Syria, and the Arctic. In addition, transnational threats such as ISIS and non-traditional threats such as refugees or potential super-bugs borne out of suboptimal living conditions and sanitation are a high priority. If the relatively small amount of refugees that settled into Europe have had such an impact and generated such worry among the countries there, then it seems to follow that a massive influx would have disastrous potential for the economy, health, or political orientation of European countries. Such a shift in political thinking could possibly negatively affect historical alliances, the European Union as a whole, and theoretically the world order. It seems to follow that the United States—as a world leader—would want a key ally such as Israel to be viewed as more of a neighbor in the Middle East, rather than an intruder. Regional states will need to support one another, and mitigate the effects on other areas—to weather the storm—so to speak, if it does come.

Another possible implication of the long struggle with the Palestinian people is that Israel is potentially losing. In counterinsurgency theory, the long war—the stalemate—generally favors the insurgent, especially if the government is unwilling to forgo a strictly military solution and instead address the cause of the conflict and put political considerations and negotiations first. Israel is not making friends, and it is making the lives of millions of Palestinians perhaps worse off than they might have been otherwise.

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<sup>173</sup> "Figures at a Glance," UNHCR, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>.

## B. CONCLUSION

For the United States, the current context seems to imply that U.S. policy towards Israel is currently full of negative implications. The amount of drawbacks that potentially arise from the status quo, and the continuing harm that *carte blanche* support for Israel does to United States strategic goals, seems to indicate that it is not strategically desirable for Israel to remain aloof from its neighbors while remaining under the unconditional protection of the United States. Freeman states that America should return to the practice of leading by example and stop intervening based on ideology—that “the biggest contribution that we could make now to Israel’s longevity would be to ration our support for it, so as to rethink and reform its often self-destructive behavior.”<sup>174</sup> The United States would seem to be better served if Israel was more of a stabilizing force in the region, and this would only be possible if there is an amicable solution to the Palestinian issue.

To create a higher likelihood of a peace agreement, the United States would likely have to carefully pressure Israel with some combination of actions: by withholding support at the UN, withholding monetary aid, or sending strong public statements in support of a solution—the United States would need to control the narrative. Israel would in turn need to be convinced of the consequences, and it would need to cease *all* settlement building during negotiations. At the same time, the United States could offer to formalize its alliance with Israel upon the conclusion of successful negotiations—essentially guaranteeing Israeli security in an effort to preempt any objections based on that reasoning. For the United States, it would most likely need to be attempted by a president that had already been elected in his second term with the support of Congress, while the Israelis would probably need to do a significant amount of negotiation legwork in secret to prevent spoilers or domestic unrest. This kind of pressure has proven useful in the past, and all negotiations without it have fallen short.

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<sup>174</sup> Freeman, “Responding to Failure,” 37.

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