STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

THE HISTORICAL IMPEDIMENTS TO ARAB-ISRAELI PEACE AND THE ROLE FOR THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

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This paper addresses the causal factors that have inhibited a final peace settlement and discusses the actions necessary for the United States to undertake to create a real peace in the hotly contested region. Since the adoption of UN resolution 181 that divided British-ruled Palestine into Jewish and Arab states and brought about conflict between them, a peaceful settlement has eluded Israel and its Arab neighbors for more than 50 years. While there have been diplomatic stopgap measures to end the hostilities, friction between the two groups has been intense enough to ignite four major wars and many border skirmishes. The opportunity exists today to end the Arab-Israeli conflict as long as the United States takes the lead in brokering negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians in an even-handed manner.

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INTRODUCTION

Cultures at Odds

Unfortunately, there is still no permanent peace between Arabs and Israelis despite diplomatic measures made by many to bring an end to hostilities in the Middle East. Over the last 50 years, principal sponsors including the United Nations (UN) and several states have earnestly sought to bring about peace in the region. However, they faced formidable odds --two emotionally-charged and ideological-driven peoples, the Israelis and Palestinians, trapped by a dilemma. Each group assumes unique entitlement to the same deeply-rooted biblical homeland. Some of the cities in the same area hold tremendous historical significance to both groups. Jerusalem is sacred to Jews as the historic symbol of the Jewish homeland and capital of the first Jewish kingdom; it is equally sacred to Muslims as the holy site where the Prophet Mohammed ascended into heaven. Since the adoption of UN Resolution 181 that partitioned British-ruled Palestine into Jewish and Arab states in 1947 with Jerusalem as an international zone (FIGURE 1) under UN jurisdiction,[1] each side has acted on its claim with religious zeal. As Karl Kraus

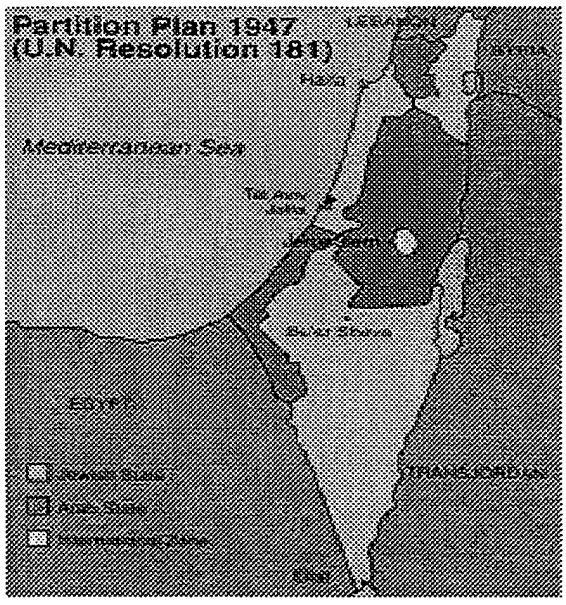

Figure 1. http://www.israel-mfa.gov.il/facts/images/1947

warned, 'every ideology gravitates toward war'[2] and this case is no different. Indeed, Israeli and Arab ideologies seemed worlds apart, providing an prominent stimulus for serious conflict. The displacement of Palestinians by Jewish immigrants in Israel after World War II, however, further accelerated an inevitable collision between Arabs and Jews in the region even more dramatically.

The past fifty years serve as vivid testimony to a very bitter and seemingly endless ideological and philosophical struggle. Both Israeli and Arab camps have either launched or repelled crusade after crusade to recover their claim through: four major wars (1956 Sinai War, 1967 Six-Day War, 1973 October War (also know as Yom Kippur War), and the 1968-70 War of Attrition); relentless terrorist activities; and many border confrontations. Together, the gains and losses have amounted to a land holding shoving match, resulting in considerable bloodshed supplied by both sides.

Expectations for a final settlement, however, are high given the progress and commitments made to date. Yet, there is an equal possibility to repeat the same mistakes of the past if the United States does not take the lead role in brokering negotiations and encouraging a peace settlement.

As a historical reference, this paper first addresses a number of important inter-related causal factors that have

impeded a Middle East peace since 1947. They include the regional players':

- Unwillingness to compromise
- Regional Alliances and Partnerships with the Superpowers
- Willingness to Wage War
- Employment of Terrorism
- Misguided Regional Foreign Policy
- Relentless Leadership
- Contentious Water Rights Claims

Understanding these factors and appreciating their impact on Arab-Israeli relationships should help determine what actions the United States must take to further moderate Arab-Israeli relations. Even though there are many other issues dividing countries in this region, a settlement between Arabs and Israelis would undoubtedly held promote regional stability in the Middle East and ultimately advance America's national interests.

CAUSAL FACTORS INHIBITING THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

Unwillingness to Compromise

The first causal factor that emerged between Arabs and Israelis was an unwillingness by both parties to compromise. Early on, after Israel's independence in 1948, the UN sponsored a number of peace initiatives aimed at ending hostilities and finding an amicable solution, but the warring factions were not

ready to concede. No one recognized the region's incredible volatility and the lasting endurance of the opposition.

From the onset, Middle East peace was complicated and not easily welcomed despite outside intervention. The Arabs wanted back what was rightfully theirs; the Israeli's were not about to relinquish their stronghold or forfeit some of their additional gains. The Israeli leadership understood the cost of its stance. Moshe Dayan, a former military general in the Israel Defense Force (IDF) and later a member of Israel's Labor Party, admitted in 1973 that Israel's presence in the occupied territories was essential and would make peace unattainable.[3] Israel also signaled early on what actions it would take to retard earnest attempts by foreign diplomats seeking to exploit land trades for peace.

One of the first mediators on the scene after Israel's declaration of statehood in 1948, Count Bernadotte, represented one of many UN sponsored initiatives and exemplified the naiveté of the early architects of Middle East peace. He and his advisors devised a plan uniting Arab Palestine and Transjordan but overlooked the extremist and covenant nature of both sides.[4] Each side would take whatever action necessary to either retain or recover their property. Bernadotte's murder in Jerusalem that same month presumably by Yitzhak Shamir's Lehi (Stern Gang) militia[5] foreshadowed the improbability of a speedy and durable compromise. Other peace plans surfaced and diplomatic actions

continued. In 1949, the UN Conciliation Commission sponsored the Lausanne Conference seeking to overcome the impasse. Unfortunately, Israel softened its commitment by agreeing only to the spirit of the 1947 Partition Resolution, viewing the resolution's "boundaries as only a basis, not *the* basis for further discussion."[6] Israel's loose characterization of its commitment angered Egyptian, Lebanese, Syrian, and Transjordan representatives[7] and probably revealed a certain *distrust* between the two camps. More importantly, it indicated a certain hostile and polar growth between Arabs and Israelis over sacred soil.

In the early 1950s and continuing through the early 70s, emissaries and special envoys representing the United States, the UN, and the UK met with Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and Syria, attempting to broker armistices, peace agreements, cease fires, and special withdrawal arrangements. Yet, massive immigration to Israel, colonialism in the occupied territories, anti-Israeli propaganda in the Arab world, and a growing number of incidents along the border made a permanent peace even more unrealistic.[8] Arabs saw little hope for progress and their anger intensified. In a move of solidarity, eight Arab heads of state gathered in Khartoum, Sudan on September 1, 1967 and established what later became known as the three no's:

- No peace with Israel,
- No recognition of Israel; and

- No negotiations with Israel,

This Arab summit sent an unequivocal message that any peace settlement or armistice agreement with Israel would be temporary. Consequently, armed conflict loomed as an inevitability. However, each side would have to seek alliances and partnerships first in order to muster enough military strength if they wanted to assault or repel each other's aggression.

Regional Alliances and Partnerships with the Superpowers

As both groups looked for outside help, the necessary creation of alliances and partnerships emerged and successfully polarized the regional players. These particular associations represented a second causal factor that would inhibit the peace process.

Israel gathered support from powerful Zionist organizations that exerted tremendous influence on governments outside the region. The aftermath of Hitler's attempt to systematically eradicate the Jewish race during World War II helped Zionists garner the West's support for a Jewish State. Meanwhile, the Arab nations mustered regional support by arousing nationalistic feelings among fellow Muslim neighbors to recover lost Palestinian territories which the Jewish state acquired.

Neither side had enough standing military weapons, however, to promote their full political agenda. Aside from the newly formed and sometimes renewed political and social alliances, none of the Middle East countries had any significant indigenous

military capability available to them either, yet the demand for military hardware in the region became apparent. Access to foreign military hardware and military training expertise would solve the problem. By the 1956 Sinai War, Israel secured military aid from France as a result of France's fear of Arab radicalism, and the Arab nations secured arms from the eastern bloc through Czechoslovakia.[9]

Israeli Zionists continued to garner political clout from Jewish organizations located principally in the United States, which had become the center of world Jewry and an extremely influential body. American Zionists had convinced President Truman of the UN partition resolution almost a decade earlier,[10] and their influence had now grown considerably. The 1967 Six-Day war was the last war Israel would fight without significant military aid from the United States.

Among the Arab states, the Egyptians, Syrians, Jordanians, and Iraqis comprised the initial Arab alliance. The exodus of Palestinians from Israel whose numbers swelled to 870,000 as early as 1957[11] became problematic for the neighboring Arab countries hosting the refugees. The refugee dilemma threatened an already heightened domestic, political, economic, and social condition among the host nations. As a result, the Arab alliance decided to act before the problem substantially interfered with their own internal affairs.

Egypt assumed the leadership position on behalf of the Arab-Muslim world in its opposition against Israel up and through the 1973 War. Egyptian President Nasser led the charge by stoking the fire in the hearts of the regional Arab community fanning the flames with strong rhetoric. He warned his fellow Arabs with words like "the evil introduced into the heart of the Arab world must be eradicated . . . and that the rights which have been usurped from the Arabs must be returned to their owners, further urging "liquidation of the traces of aggression."[12] Nasser reinforced his rhetoric with military might by inviting the "first major Soviet foothold in the Middle East" by late 1955.[13] Consequently, Egypt soon became reliant on the Soviet Union's foreign policy. Ironically, the Soviet Union even blocked trading the Sinai, the Golan Heights, and the West Bank for peace and demilitarization as they became more involved after 1967.[14] Because of superpower influence, a peace settlement seemed elusive.

Greater differentiation developed between the superpowers in the Middle East region and after the 1967 war the Soviet Union demanded Israel's prompt withdrawal behind armistice lines while the United States considered a land trade proposal useless unless it was accompanied by meaningful peace settlement.[15] Each superpower stood firmly behind their client states. Eventually, the superpowers would heavily subsidize major weapon sales to their proxies in the Middle East region. By the 1973 October

War, the United States had pulled-out of Vietnam and diverted significant arms subsidies into Israel without any restrictions. Surprisingly, Israel was not pressured to return Arab territories and Israel became not only a strategic ally, but also a proving ground for the Unites States' next generation weapons.[16] The Soviet Union responded in kind by forging strong diplomatic ties with Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, and created a weapons subsidy pipeline equal in stature.

By 1973, Palestinians were still without a home, fractures within the Arab alliance enlarged, and internal fighting ensued. The Arab alliance seemed to lose its focus and the recovery of Palestinian land seemed remote. Growing concerned, a disgruntled PLO mounted an offensive against an inhospitable Jordan (where most of the fedayeen PLO commandos were stationed). The fedayeen were eventually expelled and settled in Lebanon where they gradually became a state within the state. Seeking to contain the rise of the PLO in 1982, Syria entered Lebanon to clip the wings of the Palestinian movement and sought to "confine the damage resulting from Israel's war in Lebanon to the Palestinians."[17] The PLO had become a tiny nation in exile seeking legitimacy and governance, and its Arab benefactors appeared to want control. From 1985-87, Syria and Jordan actually competed for control of the Palestinian movement.[18] Their actions seemed to conflict with an agreement reached

decades earlier by the League of Arab states that affixed Palestinian territories for the Arab people of Palestine.[19]

Up to the 1973 War, the alliances, coalitions, and partnerships split the Middle East into two regional groups and positioned two superpowers against each other. The superpowers had made commitments to their partners. Consequently, subsidies flowed freely into the Middle East. These alliances provided the firepower that could substantially fuel a war and dashed little hope for peace.

Willingness to Wage War

As Arab nationalism and Zionism grew steadily in the Middle East, preemptive and retaliatory strikes followed. Four major wars in the Middle East demonstrated the determination of its players to use military action if diplomatic action(s) failed or the threat to peace was imminent or justified. Another causal factor inhibiting peace emerged. Indeed, as Carl von Clausewitz pointed out in the early 19th century in his book On War, 'the purpose of 'war is a continuation of policy'[20] and this region showed no exception.

In each conflict, Israel managed to retain and even gain its land holdings in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. Believing its survival as a nation depended on military preparedness, Israel relied heavily on internal mobilization procedures, a high state of alert, indigenous defense industries, adequate military budgets, American support and preemptive

intervention.[21] Its military doctrine placed a premium on offensive warfare in view of its tiny land mass, small population, and proximity to its potential adversaries. Israel endorsed the right of self-defense even if it required a preemptive strike to impede an imminent attack citing Article 51 of the UN Charter.[22] In 1967, it believed it exercised this right despite its legitimacy that the UN Security Council later challenged and eventually condemned.

In the 1956 Sinai war, Egypt, then in the 1967 war, the loosely knit Egyptian-Syrian-Jordanian coalition suffered military defeats and political setbacks. Arab forces exhibited operational frailties and unbalanced objectives. Militarily, they lacked cooperation, coordination, training, modern equipment and preparedness. The losses would speak for themselves. In the three-front Six-Day War of 1967, the Arab coalition lost 416 combat aircraft while Israel lost a total of 26 aircraft and approximately 850 soldiers.[23] The Arab coalition suffered a disparate loss of ground forces as well. Egypt lost approximately 10,000 soldiers and 80 percent of it military equipment; Jordan lost 6,000 soldiers.[24]

In contrast, the 1973 War which caught Israel by surprise this time shattered their false sense of security and exposed a closing technology gap between Egypt and Israel. The Arab coalition, now heavily financed by Saudi Arabia,[25] seemed to re-invent itself, militarily. Egypt became a well-disciplined and

determined army. Politically, Egypt even freed itself from Russian supervision by expelling Russian military personnel 3 months prior in July 1973.[26] Egypt became a sovereign army and reconsidered other relationships outside the region besides the Soviet Union, a major turning point in establishing preliminary stability in the region.

During the 1973 War, in combat and up against an open pipeline of Soviet-made arms, Israel took a tremendous pounding against one of the densest surface-to-air missile (SAM) walls ever constructed by Egypt.[27] It was not until Israel regained the upper hand by mounting an offensive against Damascus and threatening another one in Cairo that President Sadat pressed for a cease-fire.[28]

This last major war between the Israelis and Arabs, *a major turning point*, gave rise to firm security arrangements between Israel and Egypt, and security commitments by the United States. Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, removed ideological barriers from the peace process and concentrated instead on occupational considerations. This action would mark a significant step toward regional peace. Unfortunately, a door had been opened to a more formidable weapon that was used intermittently and very effectively by both groups decades earlier. The possibility of regional peace surfaced, but this clever instrument would take the conflict into another dimension, lure other Arab states into

action, and make the prospect of peace appear even more difficult.

Employment of Terrorism

Before and during the major war periods, this powerful weapon called terrorism made its debut; it also showed how warfare could become incredibly unrestrictive. It was both cheap and highly effective. Each side employed it unscrupulously. What was one man's terrorist became another man's freedom fighter, It would be the fourth causal factor inhibiting peace.

Terrorists initially targeted military operations centers although they accepted collateral damage. In 1946, underground Israeli agents of the Irgun group bombed the King David Hotel that was being used as a British headquarters in Jerusalem. Ninety-one Britons, Arabs and Jews perished.[29] Other underground Israeli agents working in Baghdad used terrorism to bomb synagogues and Jewish cafes under the guise of vindictive Arabs attacks to persuade 130,000 Jews to flee Iraq in 1950 and find refuge in Israel.[30] Extremist Jewish groups including the Irgun and Stern Gangs used terrorism to drive away innocent Arabs from villages like Deir Yaseen located on the western edge of Jerusalem. In the process, they murdered 254 defenseless civilians[31] and forced the remainder to flee.[32]

As militant Israelis implemented terrorism, militant Arab factions learned from their opposition and employed terrorist methods with equal passion. They applied the same intensity (the

words "Deir Yassin" was used repeatedly by militant Arabs to justify their own atrocities[33]) to obstruct any reconciliation which would have jeopardized their future land claims. Arab terrorists even assassinated fellow Arabs championing peace or deemed anti-PLO. In 1951, King Abdullah of Jordan was slayed after offering an overture of peace with Israel. The Fatah assassinated Jordan's Prime Minister Wasfi al-Tall in 1970 for his stance against the PLO.[34]

After the major war period, terrorism became the weapon of choice. Eleven Israeli Olympians were murdered in Munich, at the Olympic Games of 1972 and the PLO became a household word for terrorism. The entire world discovered the shock value of terrorism. It seemed to have the same affect that V-1 rockets had during World War II against England. The public could not pinpoint the location of the next strike or completely protect themselves. In this case, however, strikes were sure to target national leaders.

Militant fundamentalists gunned down Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in 1981 for recognizing the state of Israel.[35] The very existence of Israel still denied Arabs land they believed was rightfully theirs justifying radical measures. Believing they were dispossessed of their native land, militant fundamentalist groups reaffirmed their repossession rights at any cost. The intensity of terrorism escalated and the targets expanded after alliances formed between countries like Egypt and Israel, once at

odds. After an Israel-Lebanon peace and withdrawal agreement was signed between the United States Secretary of State Shultz and Ambassador Philip Habib, terrorists destroyed the United States Marines headquartered in Beirut.[36] Even an Israeli assassin showed the same disdain for peace by gunning down one of its leaders seeking a land for peace trade. On 4 November 1995, Israel's Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin who had been jointly awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in December 1994 along with his foreign Minister Shimon Peres and PLO leader Yasser Arafat, was fatally shot. He spoke at a Peace Rally in Tel Aviv and was gunned down by a fellow Israeli who opposed Rabin's decision to trade land for peace. Rabin became the enemy in the eyes of a new breed of religious Zionists who mystified land in the context of religious passion.[37] The assailant argued he was "under instructions from God to stop the peace process."[38]

Fighting this powerful weapon called terrorism has clearly raised the limits even more over what both sides have been willing to accept as casualties. Israel adopted a non-negotiation policy with terrorists, while some terrorists adopted self-sacrifice measures. Israel traded the lives of 22 children during a hostage crisis in northern Galilee in 1974, and 30 bus passengers in 1978 in Haifa-Tel Aviv both held by terrorists, while the terrorists traded their objective of provoking Israel with their own lives.[39]

Sadly, terrorism is not just a regional problem anymore. It is global and affects us all. Findings of the FBI and the judiciary in America indicated that the group responsible for blowing up the World Trade Center in building in New York City in February 1993 was operating as either an independent or freelance group of Islamic fundamentalists.[40]

Lately, a new breed of state sponsored terrorist groups has emerged with special allegiances and particular alliances. The Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement) who opposes the September 1993 peace accord between Israel and the PLO formed an alliance with Iran, in 1992.[41] The Hezbollah (party of God), sponsored by Iran, vows to fight the West's support of Zionism. The list goes on. The addition of groups like Black September (the Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine "PFLP", in charge of assassinations), Al Fatah (in charge of guerrilla operations), and the Fatah Revolutionary Council (extremely violent spin-off from the PLO) have thwarted attempts to extinguish terrorism in the Middle East.

The Middle East region now constitutes one of the most formidable sources of terrorism in the international community, accounting for over 21% of all international terrorist incidents worldwide in 1992, and over 23% in 1993.[42] Even though the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) is negotiating with Israel, these splintered PLO factions like Hamas and other militant fundamentalist associations aim to disrupt most of the

gains made. For so long, Arab attitudes towards normalization of relations with Israel was seen as an admission of historic defeat giving rise to their mantra.[43]

These terrorist groups are also adept at indoctrinating their martyrs ideologically, psychologically and tactically in order to achieve their motive of impeding the peace process.[44] Terrorism is not confined to one side though. Some Israelis have been just as fanatical. Ideological-based factions in Israel have grown discontent with land for peace trades because of its potential threat to Israel security. An alarming number of Israeli Jews appear to "support, encourage and [even] intend to carry out the murder of leaders who either support or might implement a policy of returning territories as part of a peace agreement."[45] Undoubtedly, they could strike against peace initiatives with equal terrorist force. The rise of Prime Minister Netanyahu symbolizes the Israeli public's change of heart.

Terrorist organizations have already shown their commitment to a cause. With potential easy access to biological and chemical Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), both groups might just see WMD as another resource at their disposal to advance their aims unless the regional parties and their supporters intervene to stop such action.

Misguided Regional Foreign Policy

The Middle East regional players' application of foreign policy has sharply inhibited an Arab-Israeli peace settlement.

Early during the inception of its political evolution, Israel generally acted quickly and eschewed diplomatic options.[46] At the same time, the Arab coalition came to the aid of each other in their efforts to challenge Israel.

The geographical reality of Israel -- a tiny nation surrounded by potentially hostile neighbors -- has driven them to act without hesitation before seeking international approval. Both the 1976 raid against plane-hijackers in Entebbe and the 1981 surgical strike against an Iraqi nuclear reactor demonstrated Israel's quick flair for action. On the other hand, the "armed incursion and shelling of Beirut against PLO strongholds in 1982 showed how their impetuous action could backfire. These particular actions of Israel and their Lebanese Phalangists partners who opposed the PLO accounted for the massacre of 2,750 people, many of whom were innocent Palestinians women and children living in the Lebanese refugee camps of Sabra and Shatilla.[47] This action has probably helped ferment Israel's greater isolation and alienation within the international community the most.[48] Not surprisingly, events like these have continued to fuel: the Arab community's distrust of Israel; the rise in terrorism; the certain influence which the United States is believed to exert by not restraining, or punishing Israeli for its human rights infractions; and provocative dialogue by senior Arab military leaders. In his book, The Arab Military Option, General Shazly suggests the only recourse left for the Arab

community is to strengthen its military position which would finally leverage a settlement.[49]

Relentless Leadership

Leadership within both Israeli and Arab camps have been generally consistent. Even though the government complexion among the regional players has been very different, both groups have employed leadership as a causal factor inhibiting peace.

Israel's parliamentary form of government (Knesset) has facilitated a political leadership with strong military bonds. Retired military heroes rose from the ranks and helped establish governments that were combat tested and politically motivated. The Israeli government with its military complexion developed a security strategy that relied on strengthening its land holdings. These land holdings were seen as security buffer zones that would reduce the risk of attack. These buffer zones also became a divisive issue between proponents and opponents of peace in Israel. As a result, the government developed interesting coalition arrangements among their political parties. Unusual marriages resulted among political groups blending religious and geo-political agendas. In the end, Israel's overarching security objectives dominated. All parties tended to agree that relinquishing any land would jeopardize Israel's security given its historical legacy.

Because the Arab coalition has included nation states run by kings and self-appointed rulers, decisions tended to be

paradoxical. Its leaders took strong action such as squelching the opposition while competing for overall Arab control. Nasser, leader of the Free Officers, overthrew King Farouk in 1952. He considered himself the leader of the Arab nation and took the requisite action he believed would benefit Egypt by attempting to eliminate Israel. After the 1967 Six-Day War, President Assad of Syria tried to pilot the Arab community by attempting to forge an arrangement with Jordan, Lebanon and the PLO. Interestingly enough, he distanced himself from Egypt although his efforts failed as well because Jordan, Lebanon, and the PLO were unwilling to surrender their foreign policy autonomy to Syria.[50] In 1982, Assad flexed his domestic muscle, and struck back at rising opposition at home. His assault against the old quarter community of Hama who rose against his leadership resulting in 22,000-25,000 civilians casualties.[51] A transformation in Arab leadership has taken place since. Only one leader, President Saddam Hussein, remains as militaristic as earlier Arab leaders and he is determined to represent greater Arab interest in the region. His irrational behavior, however, has prevented the reformation of a real Arab coalition. In fact, Arab nationalism has now dissipated considerably and the leaders of the regional Arab nations are divided over whether Israel is a greater threat than Iran.[52]

Contentious Water Rights

Because of its scarcity, water in the Middle East is a more valuable commodity than oil, and represents another causal factor inhibiting peace in the region. Israel recognized the importance of water sources early and took unilateral action to divert it or prevent its diversion elsewhere by its neighbors. To demonstrate its resolve in this respect, Israel bombed Jordan's Mukhaiba Dam to ensure its unrestrictive water flow into Israel.[53] Today, almost half of Israel's water use is "captured, diverted, or preempted from its neighbors."[54] Israel also shares a common mountain aquifer which lies under the occupied territories and flows naturally into Israeli territory with the Palestinians.[55] Already constrained, the Israelis believe they cannot afford to jeopardize this vital water source by giving the Palestinians unlimited rights. On the other hand, the Palestinians believe that they should be able to tap into whatever water source exists within their territory. Invariably, the arguments could rage in the courts for years regarding ownership and control of water sources, but violent conflict seems much more likely. Indeed, there are other alternatives, but the cost is high. Some water experts estimate that Israel would have to spend approximately $2 billion to seek alternate sources like desalinization.[56] Other experts argue that reducing Israel's overly saturated agriculture demands would eliminate the need for continued water demands.[57]

CURRENT PROSPECT FOR PEACE

The heated rhetoric, and likelihood for major hostilities between Israel and the Arab community has started to simmer as evidenced by both sides willingness to compromise. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) who earlier endorsed and actively supported a Jihad aimed at Israel's demise has taken risky reconciliation steps -- starting with the recognition of Israel as a state -- along with the cessation of terrorist activities. Israel responded in kind with an equally bold step. On September 13, 1993, after meeting secretly in Oslo, Israel agreed with the PLO to "put an end to decades of confrontation and conflict" and establish a Declaration of Principles (DOP) outlining self-government for Palestinians in the West bank and Gaza Strip.[58]

The Oslo Accords created a forum and dialogue to work the final details of a real peace plan. The entire political climate in the region began to show signs of stability. Unfortunately, with the assassination of Yitzak Rabin, one of the major Israeli architects of the land-for-peace plan, the peace process has stalled and the likelihood for conflict has swelled. Since Oslo, Israel has continued expanding settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, jeopardizing negotiations.

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat recently responded with what he believes to be his only recourse. He has raised the specter of another intifada if U.S. President

Clinton's talks with Netanyahu, Israel's less moderate leader, and Arafat do not produce progress.[59] Israel's insistence on the retention of security buffer zones in the occupied territories has created another wedge against progress.

Netanyahu's religious-right coalition government voiced strong opposition to any further transfer of land to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat as long as Arafat's Palestinian Authority fails to meet its obligations to take "all measures necessary in order to prevent acts of terrorism.[60]" If the past is any indication of the future, the progress of peace will be slow and Arafat's threats could become real.

ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES

Fifty years after the inception of UN resolution 181, nobody is in a better position than the United States to recognize that peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors depends on Israel returning the occupied territories. Moreover, having been instrumental in forging relationships and guarantees, the United States is the lead player who can most appropriately broker discussions. However, the United States cannot proceed without understanding what causal factors still inhibit negotiations and reinforce negative perceptions in the region. First, the regional players' decades worth of unwillingness to compromise still exists. It would be inaccurate to suggest that major

progress has not been achieved. Israel, Egypt and Jordan have separate peace agreements, and there is open dialogue between Israel and Syria. Major confrontations between Israel and three of its border neighbors have been dormant for some time and the risk of war is remote. But, Israel's insistence that any land trade be contingent on the cessation of all extremist activity is destabilizing and opens the door to continued terrorist activity. The terrorism threat is actually strengthening Israel's right wing and jeopardizing the likelihood of future land trades for peace. While it cannot eliminate terrorism in the Middle East or elsewhere, the United States must recognize that combating terrorism through continued presence, and defense and intelligence support to Israel and friendly Arab nations would eliminate regional paranoia. The United States must also hold accountable those countries promoting and/or supporting terrorism.

Second, the United States must reduce the regional players' military capabilities and deter military action. Even though the collapse of the Soviet Union has left the United States as the only standing superpower, Israel and the Arab countries are still free to seek alliances outside the United States umbrella. Israel and Egypt have enjoyed major financial and military relief from the United States although these subsidies cannot last forever. The election of President Clinton foreshadowed the American pubic's concern over its domestic agenda. His

predecessor, President Bush, overlooked the United States public's growing distaste for an overwhelming international agenda. Consequently, today military budgets and external subsidies could shrink even more if the American public demands greater funding for social programs. On the other hand, Russia with a downward spiraling economic condition, needs an infusion of capital. Economic reforms have chilled the demand for military goods at home although arms sales are up world-wide, especially in the Middle East. Russia's dormant military industrial capability would welcome increased demand abroad for their weapons. Russia could also provide special bargains to some oil-rich Arab countries like Iraq who seek military aid. Therefore, the United States must continue to subsidize the Middle East and at the same time encourage the regional players to develop a long term security arrangement which would protect them much like NATO where an attack on one constitutes an attack on them all. If Israel were to return the occupied territories to the Palestinians, there is a possibility that they could become an integral member of a much larger security arrangement. Clearly, this might take a long time considering Israel's last fifty years of occupation, preceded by centuries of distrust between Arabs and Jews. That Israel was kept out of the Gulf War provides ample evidence that Israel would not be easily welcomed to any Middle East alliance. Saddam Hussein knew this well. He tried to lure Israel into the Gulf War with the deployment of

SCUDS against Israel because he knew that Israel's involvement would divide the Arab coalition. To prevent such a division, the United States quickly deployed Patriot batteries to forestall Israel's entrance into the war. It worked.

Third, the United States must proceed with regional consensus building among its regional allies. Continued Iraqi belligerence has actually strengthened prospects for peace in the region. If Iraq continues its belligerency, Iraq's Arab neighbors will eventually isolate Iraq enough to make it a non-player in the region. Nonetheless, the United States must continue to be seen as an honest broker in the region and help guide foreign policy through consensus building as it has been doing since the days of Henry Kissinger. At the same time, the regional players must maintain an open dialogue between each other and avoid unilateral action. The diplomatic channels that exist through the UN must be seen as a vitally important forum where the regional players can discuss their concerns before any defensive action is undertaken.

Fourth, the United States must encourage the leadership in the Middle East to compromise. Continued construction of Jewish settlements in the Gaza strip and West Bank only complicates matters. The United States must hold Israel accountable and encourage its leaders to return the occupied lands under an acceptable security arrangement. The United States must also encourage Egypt, Syria, and Jordan to convey to other Arab

nations the futility of war with Israel, backed by certain guarantees. The United States should be ready to render aid if these guarantees fail.

Fifth, the United States must ensure that water rights be fairly distributed. Since water tables are dropping in the Middle East and populations are rising, the regional players must develop a master plan which assumes shared sacrifice. This means rationing and investments in desalinization facilities. At the very least, the United States could initially help shoulder some of the costs by trading some military subsidies for construction of water purification plants.

CONCLUSION

The peace process may be slow, but as Secretary Madeline Albright said, "the choice for Israelis and Palestinians alike is between two futures. They can shy from the risks of peace and ensure a future of more uncertainty, hardship and fighting or they can come together to renew their partnership and fulfill the promise of peace."[61] The United States is clearly committed to peace in the Middle East and it must be continually demonstrated. The historical record of its involvement is positive. Israel, Egypt and Jordan have bi-lateral peace agreements although more positive relationships must be established with Syria and Lebanon. The world looks to the United States for leadership. It is time to fully exercise that responsibility and bring about a regional peace between Arabs and Israelis. Fifty years of

conflict is long enough to learn what causal factors might continue to inhibit peace in the Middle East.

WORD COUNT - 5869

ENDNOTES

[1] Available from <http://www.israel-mfa.gov.il/facts/images/1947map3.jpg>; Internet: accessed 12 December 1997.

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