



## TRUMP AND PALESTINE: THE CROWNING OF AN AMERICAN APPROACH

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### Abstract:

The American approach to the problem of Palestine long rested on several recognizable pillars: a basic sympathy with the Zionist program, a sincerely felt belief that Palestinian Arabs had largely been victimized by historical forces that the United States itself had found it necessary to serve, and an unstated—but real—feeling of guilt over the key role Washington played in the 1948 birth of the Jewish state. Donald Trump's presidency upended the long-held US posture on the Palestine issue, making Washington far more amenable to Israel's growing appetite for Arab Lands taken in 1967. In his first two years in office Trump instituted a series of administrative and economic measures apparently designed to force the PLO's acceptance of a still-unannounced peace plan. This article suggests that Trump's strategy will fail.

**Key words:** Peace Process, Jared Kushner, Donald Trump, U.S. Embassy, Jerusalem, Mid-East Peace

*Título en Castellano: Trump y Palestina: La coronación de un enfoque estadounidense*

### Resumen:

*La aproximación estadounidense al problema de Palestina se ha basado durante mucho tiempo en varios pilares reconocibles: una simpatía básica con el programa sionista, una creencia sincera en que los árabes palestinos habían sido víctimas en gran medida de las fuerzas históricas que los propios Estados Unidos había considerado que era necesario servir, y una sensación de culpabilidad no declarada, pero real, sobre el papel clave que Washington jugó en el nacimiento del estado judío de 1948. La Presidencia de Donald Trump ha dado la espalda a la postura estadounidense de larga duración sobre la cuestión de Palestina, lo que hace que Washington sea mucho más receptivo al creciente apetito de Israel por las tierras árabes tomadas en 1967. En sus primeros dos años en la presidencia, Trump instituyó una serie de medidas administrativas y económicas aparentemente diseñadas para obligar a la OLP a aceptar un plan de paz aún sin anunciar. Este artículo sugiere que la estrategia de Trump fracasará.*

**Palabras Clave:** *Proceso de Paz, Jared Kushner, Donald Trump, Embajada de Estados Unidos, Jerusalén, Paz en Oriente Medio.*

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## 1. Introduction.<sup>2</sup>

To say that the United States blundered into the Palestine issue during the decade preceding Israel's establishment in 1947 is technically wrong, but only by a hair's breadth. Unlike human beings, nation-states simply do not "blunder" into situations. As collective entities, their decision-making processes require too much time and effort to suggest that "blundering" is really a satisfactory explanation for any decision, no matter how regrettable its consequences. More to the point, an adequate characterization of the dynamic that led to U.S. involvement with the Palestine problem in the 1930s and '40s must be one that is applicable to the decision-making processes of a collective. Perhaps "distracted," or "unfocused," or "unthinking," or "short-sighted" would more accurately label the process that ultimately determined the role Washington played in Israel's birth.<sup>3</sup>

In any case, the truth is that not blunders, but, on the contrary, a series of calculated measures, paved the way to the day in November, 1947 that saw the United States energetically support a U.N. General Assembly resolution calling for Palestine's partition into Arab and Jewish states and Jerusalem's internationalization. The supreme irony, of course, was that the overwhelming majority of those "calculated steps" had aimed at avoiding precisely the outcome to which they ultimately led: associating the United States with the Jewish state's creation.

The immediate aftermath of that portentous event was the 1948-49 War in Palestine, the rise of a Jewish state that was soon capable of besting any combination of Arab states militarily, and the massive displacement of nearly one million Palestinians—the birth of the Palestinian refugee problem. For American policy-makers, this train of events led to three enduring consequences. First, there was relief that the thorny Palestine issue had finally been resolved (and seemingly at no great cost to American interests). Second, the Palestine issue's denouement produced a visibly demonstrated feeling that the United States had somehow incurred responsibility for the welfare of not only Israel but also for that of the Arab states along its borders. Finally, a similar sentiment was demonstrably visible in a largely unspoken but nonetheless real feeling (guilt) that as the principal sponsor of the Partition Resolution the United States now owed an enormous moral debt to the Palestinian people.

Israel's birth occurred almost simultaneously with the break-up of the worldwide alliance against the Axis Powers in World War II. As the international environment became increasingly marked by the East-West tensions shaping what became known as the "Cold War," Washington sought a new approach to the Middle East, one that would simultaneously please domestic pro-Israel opinion and not further alienate the Arab World, where a flowering crop of varied U. S. interests—ranging from cheap energy resources to opportunities for trade and educational endeavors—were promising to bloom very soon.

The key element in Washington's new approach to the Arab-Israeli problem was articulated in 1950, when the United States, Great Britain and France agreed to apply an arms limitation policy to the Middle East region. Their joint declaration explained the new approach as follows:

The three governments, should they find that any of the states [Israel and the Arab states] was preparing to violate frontiers or armistice lines, would, consistently with their obligations as members of the United Nations,

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<sup>2</sup> I express my deepest thanks to my wife, Conchita Añorve-Tschirgi, for contributing the vital technical help that finalized this project in publishable form.

<sup>3</sup> Dan Tschirgi (1983): *The Politics of Indecision: Origins and Implications of American Involvement With the Palestine Problem*, New York, Praeger Publishers.



immediately take action, both within and without, the United Nations, to prevent such violation.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the “Territorial Integrity Formula” became the lynchpin of the American approach to the Palestine issue for nearly two decades. Britain and France, on the other hand, forfeited their self-proclaimed roles as neutral “policemen” in 1956, when they joined Israel in the frustrated attempt to loot Egypt’s Suez Canal. For Washington, however, the attractions of the approach proved very real. First, it allowed the United States to claim, with some degree of credibility, that despite evidence of pro-Israel bias, U.S. policy was firmly linked to the highest standard governing relations among states: the principle of territorial inviolability. The presumed benefits of basing U. S. policy on this principle were weighty. For by doing so, Washington could henceforth proceed on the basis of an objectively-based principled stand that could be challenged only by actors who rejected the legitimacy of the existing international system. A major implication of this lofty position was that Washington could deal impartially with regional actors on a wide range of issues, most importantly, of course, in the realm of disinterested peace-making.

Closely linked to the “peace-making benefit” of the approach was its fundamental tie to a monetized understanding of the Palestinian refugees’ plight. In 1953, Eisenhower’s powerful Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, captured the unfortunate logic of this outlook in a radio address to the American public following a tour he had taken of the Middle East. “Today,” said Dulles,

the Arab peoples are afraid that the United States will back the new state of Israel in aggressive expansion. They are more fearful of Zionism than of communism, and they fear lest the United States become the backer of expansionist Zionism. On the other hand, the Israelis fear that ultimately the Arabs may try to push them into the sea. In an effort to calm these fears the United States [joined in issuing the Tripartite Declaration]. That Declaration when made did not reassure the Arabs. It must be made clear that the present U. S. administration stands fully behind that Declaration. We cannot afford to be distrusted by millions who could be steady friends of freedom. They must not further swell the ranks of communist dictators.<sup>5</sup>

Trapped by his personal history, Dulles could not avoid the mistake of assuming that the Palestinians’ real loss could be counted in dollars and cents. The inevitable corollary was clear—restitution for Palestinian losses could be calculated, again in terms of the same objective standard: dollars and cents. Thus, the way to a fair solution of the Palestine issue was open and clear. “Development” was the obvious means to generate the material means to satisfy the requirement of fairness.

Dulles’ outlook was typically American at the time. But it was also deficient in that it lacked any appreciation of the possibility that human motivation could transcend the limits of material valuation and find motivating purpose in such intangibles as demands for dignity, respect, and the human right to be treated justly. This was the fatal flaw in the American perspective on Palestine from the start. Its distorting impact on U.S. efforts to cope effectively

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<sup>4</sup> US Department of State: “Tripartite Declaration Regarding the Security of the Near East”, Department of State Bulletin, 5 June 1950, vol. XXII, n° 570, at

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.c061302992;view=1up;seq=7>

<sup>5</sup> “The Security of the Near East: Address by Secretary Dulles”, Department of State Bulletin, vol. 28, n° 729 (15 June 1953), pp. 831-835, at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=msu.31293008121323;view=1up;seq=342>



with the Arab-Israeli conflict have deeply colored the sad political history of American relations with the Middle East until today.

On the other hand, the Territorial Integrity Formula did serve a useful purpose as the cornerstone of Washington's approach to the Arab-Israeli for almost twenty years. During that period, American diplomacy occasionally attempted to interest the Arab states and Israel in joint development projects that might have alleviated the refugee problem. Though backed by serious people, and often by sincere intent, such efforts inevitably failed to find traction in the slippery sands of the Middle East. Washington generally consoled itself by noting that the time for a political rapprochement had not yet arrived. The basic assumption underlying the U.S. view of Israeli-Arab enmity was that the Arabs had lost relatively little, and would in time overcome the psychological trauma they had suffered. Time was therefore a very important element of Washington's political thinking about the Middle East. It could be hoped that "in time" Arab resentment would abate; that "in time" reasonableness, rather than rage, would become the dominant feature of Arab reaction to things Palestinian.

Today, it would immediately be evident to most readers of the lines just presented above that the use of the collective noun "Arabs" implicitly denied any role to the Palestinian people. A major consequence of Israel's War of Independence was indeed the temporary extinction of the Palestinians' political identity. By the end of that War, the Jewish state's existence was an unchallengeable reality but the territory of the unborn Palestinian state envisaged by the United Nations had been shared by Jordan, who absorbed the West Bank, including the Old City of Jerusalem, and Egypt, who took control of the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip.

It required sixteen years for Palestinians to recover sufficiently from the initial shock of their dispossession. In 1964, the Palestinian Liberation Organization was established. From the start, the PLO was adamant that it be considered "the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." Although that claim has not gone unchallenged over the years, the PLO has continued until today to preserve its preeminence as the world's Palestinian voice.

In the meantime, the world has gone about its business, and in doing so, seems to have largely accepted the premise that the emergence of Arab-Israeli peace will take time, but probably not the time still left to our own lifetimes. This philosophical fatalism may yet prove to be correct, but there is no sure way to determine that. So, we mere mortals are left with somewhat of a dicey issue: should we write off the Middle East as a theater in which reasonableness is by definition out of place for the foreseeable future, or, on the other hand, must we simply accept the perpetration of a monumental historic injustice?

I shall return to this question. But, again in the meantime, I hope the reader will not be offended if I turn once more to the historical record.

In 1897, at the First Zionist Congress in Basle, the Zionist Movement was formally founded by Theodore Herzl. From the outset, the Movement was not monolithic. Instead, it took the form of a very large tent under which a great variety of political aims and programs could find shelter and support. Herzl's vision was stark and amazingly clear. As he confided to his diary at the time, he was certain that the meeting in Basle would lead to the establishment of the Jewish state within "fifty years."<sup>6</sup> His insight was, of course, correct: the broad tent

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<sup>6</sup> Herzl's diary entry for 3 September 1897 is as follows: "Were I to sum up the Basel Congress in a word — which I shall guard against pronouncing publicly — it would be this: At Basel, I founded the Jewish State". Theodore Herzl: *Complete Diaries*, edited by Raphael Patai, translated by Harry Zohn, at <https://archive.org/stream/TheCompleteDiariesOfTheodorHerzlEngVolume3OCR/TheCompleteDiariesOfTheodorHerzlEngVolume2#page/n79/mode/2up>



accommodated all views that could accept the goal of seeking to establish “a home for the Jewish people in Palestine secured under public law”.<sup>7</sup>

Following the end of World War I, the League of Nations created the mandate system, under which Palestine, was considered a “Class A” mandate and assigned to Great Britain, which in theory was to prepare the area for independence. By then, Zionists had already succeeded in eliciting from London the well-known Balfour Declaration which stated that “His Majesty’s government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country”.<sup>8</sup>

Under the mandatory administration, Zionists proceeded to colonize Palestine but under the leadership of Chaim Weizmann adhered to the policy first employed by Herzl of not declaring their long-term objective of obtaining a Jewish state. Instead, under Weizmann’s watch the growth of Palestine’s Jewish community, now known as the *Yishuv*, was dedicated to the practical tasks of strengthening the Jewish community’s organizational viability. By 1920, the country’s Jewish community still numbered just over some 60,000 persons; that is just over 10% of Palestine’s population.<sup>9</sup> Then, of course, came the terrible succession of events in Germany that would ultimately produce World War II. The immediate impact was reflected in the tremendous upsurge of legal Jewish immigration into Palestine. By 1939, that country’s Jewish population had swollen to 445,000—that is, to about 30% of Palestine’s inhabitants.<sup>10</sup>

Palestinian Jewry made great strides toward achieving self-sufficiency under the mandate. Structured along democratic lines, it was directed by what amounted to a communal quasi-government that, among other things, levied taxes, administered the Jewish educational system, and maintained a semi-secret and technically illegal militia, the *Haganah*. While submission to the *Yishuv*’s authority was technically voluntary, the vast majority of the Jewish community was enthusiastically loyal to the *Yishuv*’s institutions.

Exceptions to this general rule were found among members of extreme rightist and leftist groups and among ultraorthodox Jews.<sup>11</sup> The most important dissident group within the *Yishuv* was the right-wing “Revisionist” faction.

Revisionist Zionism was born in the mid-1920s, fathered by a Russian Zionist activist, Vadimir Jabotinsky. Jabotinsky had earlier spent some years in Italy, where he presumably was impressed by the doctrines and postulates of Italian fascism. In 1925, he disassociated himself from the Chaim Weizmann’s World Zionist Organization and created an alternative body known as the New Zionist Organization. In ideological terms, Jabotinsky’s revisionist Zionism disdained the gradualist approach to Palestine’s colonization taken by Weizmann and his orthodox Zionist Movement. Jabotinsky favored the adoption of a bluntly maximalist Zionist stance in support of outright and explicitly-proclaimed demands for Jewish sovereignty over both banks of the River Jordan. In a sense, the events surrounding the early years of Revisionist Zionism are now so outdated as to be useful only for antiquarian purposes.

<sup>7</sup> The Basle Program, at: <http://www.mideastweb.org/basleprogram.htm>

<sup>8</sup> “The Balfour Declaration” at [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/balfour.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/balfour.asp)

<sup>9</sup> Tschirgi, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Walid Khalidi (1971): *From Haven to Conquest*, Beirut, The Institute for Palestine Studies, Appendix I: “Population, Immigration, and Land Statistics, 1919-1946”. See also, Barnet Litvinoff (1965): *To the House of Their Fathers: A History of Zionism*, New York, Frederic A. Praeger, p. 186.

<sup>11</sup> Tschirgi, *op. cit.*



But in the Middle East history has a way of imposing itself on all of us. The father of Israel's current—and longstanding—Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu was Benzion Netanyahu. Benzion served as Vladimir Jabotinsky's secretary before the latter's death in 1940. Although Benjamin Netanyahu was born in Tel-Aviv, he was largely raised in the United States, but returned to Israel in time to join, and eventually to lead, that country's Likud Party to victory in the 1996 elections. Likud is the modern version of Jabotinsky's Revisionist Zionism.

The Revisionist Zionist trend in Zionism would remain strong throughout the life of the mandate, giving rise to the terrorist Irgun group that battled fiercely against British forces in the late 1940s. While it never dominated the *Yishuv's* ruling institutions prior to Israel's establishment, Revisionist Zionism would emerge as a dominant force in Israeli domestic affairs by 1977, when Menachem Begin—former commander of the Irgun—became prime minister. Until that event, Israel's politics seemed destined to remain in the hands of the left-of-center politicians who had guided Zionist policies from the Movement's inception.

The tensions created by the 1948-49 war in Palestine were destined to metamorphose into apparently permanent features of Middle East reality. Combined with important, prevailing features of the international environment, Arab-Israeli enmity dictated the nature and architecture of many of the world's political crises after the end of World War II. Thus, the 1956 Suez War, the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and endless incidents of violence throughout the world came to be legitimately seen as spin-offs of the Middle East problem. To many, it appeared that this catalogue of horrors could only lead to some climactic orgy of mutual destruction.

Yet, there was another side to the Middle East saga, one that was consistently unrealized, but just as consistently also sustained the hope of optimists of all stripes that some means might ultimately be found for Israelis and Palestinians to achieve a mutually agreed formula through which their differences could be resolved peacefully. Tellingly, perhaps, incipient signs of this fundamental alteration in the dynamics of the conflict began to be seen only a decade after the PLO's formation in 1964, when Egypt and Israel signed the First Disengagement Accord after the October War (also known as the Yom Kippur War) in 1974.<sup>12</sup>

By that time, of course, the structure and dynamics of the original Palestine problem had been irrevocably changed by 1967 Arab-Israeli War. That seismic clash not only expanded the list of active belligerents to include the full roster of Arab countries but also intensified emotional feelings on all sides. At one swoop Washington's reliance on the Territorial Integrity Formula as a facile basis for sustaining a principled aloofness from the core political question at stake in Palestine—whether Palestinian Arabs or Zionist Jews, or somehow both, would prevail politically in that ancient land—was shown up as empty. The depressing pace of the ongoing cycles of violence (raid and counter-raid) and escalating rhetoric (threats and counter-threats) to which Arab-Israeli relations had degenerated rendered the determination of the “aggressor” impossible. Thus, it was essentially irrelevant whether Israel dropped the first bomb on the morning of June 5, 1967. It could not be known whether the action was a measure of pre-emptive defense or of aggression.

For more than fifty years, the world community has wrestled with the consequences of the “Six Day War.” These were first and foremost the expansion of Israel's territorial limits by a significant margin; precisely put, at the end of hostilities, the Jewish state controlled a total of 26, 501 square miles of territory that only days previously had been Arab lands under the

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<sup>12</sup> Ann M. Lesch and Dan Tschirgi (1998): *Origins and Development of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Westport, CT and London, Greenwood Press, p. xxx.



authority of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria.<sup>13</sup> Since the start, the question has been what, if any, role will the occupied territories play in erecting a final solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict?

More than a half-century of diplomacy has so far failed to answer this question. Beginning with United Nations General Assembly Resolution 242, of November 22, 1967, incessant calls have been made for Arabs and Israelis to engage in some process of settling their conflict on the basis of a “Land-for-Peace” exchange. This has long (for 52 years) been the obvious formula for bringing the Middle East’s most intractable conflict to an end. But what to most observers seemed obvious 52 years ago, has yet to fully penetrate the understandings of Palestinians and Israelis. Arabs simply refused to recognize the existence of the state of Israel. Israel, in turn, adamantly long refused to recognize the existence of Palestinians as their opposite number.

Although it took seven years for the first sign of movement toward reasonableness to appear, the moment eventually came. In 1974—following yet another Arab-Israeli war—Egyptian President Anwar Sadat agreed to the First Egyptian-Israeli Disengagement Accord, an internationally valid commitment to which Israel also agreed. With this, the diplomatic ice seemed to have been, if not broken, at least heavily chipped. The same year saw a similar agreement between Syria and Israel. Before the year was over, PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat addressed the U.N. General Assembly in New York in conciliatory tones that implied a clear threat of a return to a policy of violence should his diplomatic initiative be rejected. Three years later, the Carter Administration endorsed the establishment of a Palestinian “Homeland.”<sup>14</sup>

In the following years, these incipient signs of progress toward some accommodation on the core issue of who would rule in Palestine were repeatedly frustrated. Historians will long debate the reason for this: was it Palestinian intransigence regarding the final degree to which their just cause could expect to be amended, or was it Israeli inflexibility on the same point?

Whatever the outcome, those same historians will have no alternative but to conclude that what had become known as the so-called “Peace Process” appeared to be little more than a creeping juggernaut of death and destruction that appeared to hold small hope of ultimately resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict peacefully. A sign of the growing anger this generated in the Palestinian public was shown in 1987—a full twenty years after the start of Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza—when Palestinians erupted in a series of largely spontaneous riots against the Israeli occupation. The disturbances did not abate for some four years. This became known as the “First Intifadah.”

A “Second Intifadah” lay in wait just a few years down the road. In September, 2000 Ariel Sharon—soon to be named Israel’s Prime Minister—visited Jerusalem’s Al-Aqsa complex, in a clearly provocative move. The available pile of smoldering Palestinian resentment burst into a flame that was not quenched until the Sharm El-Sheikh Summit Conference of February, 2005.

In the meantime, the striking difference between relations between Israel and the Palestinians, on the one hand and, on the other, the Jewish State and its Arab counterparts was clear. Egypt and Israel signed a formal peace in 1979, as a result of which Cairo recovered essentially all of its lost territory in the Sinai Peninsula. In late October, 1994, Jordan and Israel concluded a peace treaty. Israeli relations with Syria, on the other hand, at times seemed promising, but ultimately led to nothing.

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<sup>13</sup> Dan Tschirgi (2009): *Origins of U.S. Involvement in the Modern Middle East Problem: U.S.-Israeli Relations Over Arab Lands Occupied in the June War, 1967-1969*, Saarbrücken, Germany, VDM Verlag Dr. Müller Aktiengesellschaft & Co., KG, p. 18.

<sup>14</sup> Lesch and Tschirgi, *op. cit.*, p. xxiii.



## 2. The Oslo accords and its aftermath

The apparent lack of diplomatic movement in Israeli-Palestinian relations was deceptive. A by-product of the 1991 Madrid Conference called by the United States in the wake of the First Gulf War was the initiation of secret Israeli-PLO contacts that within two years, in 1993, produced what seemed to be the most striking diplomatic breakthrough imaginable: a functioning agreement between the Israel and the P.L.O. on a framework for jointly administering the occupied territories; and this within a context that foresaw a final definitive agreement within a specified time-frame of five years. The Oslo Accords marked the high point to date in the search for an end to the Palestine conflict. The Accords were in two parts. Oslo I, signed in 1993 established the essentials of the framework that would presumably lead to a final peace treaty between the Palestinians and Israel. Oslo II was signed two years later. It further specified the modalities of extending Palestinian self-rule in the occupied territories, and committed the parties to the position that negotiations toward a final settlement were to conclude within five years.

The Oslo Accords led to the closest approximation to a final settlement of the Palestine issue that has been reached to date. In the context of the mid-1990s, it seemed to herald the dawning of a radically new era in the Middle East. That, however, was not to be the case. Yasser Arafat returned to Palestine in 1994 as President of the Palestinian Authority advanced by the Oslo Accords. He remained Chairman of the PLO. However, it was not long before the generally perceived “momentum” toward peace dissipated.

Debate, of course, still rages over the causes of this outcome. Many blame Arafat, claiming that in the end he simply could not bring himself to abandon his fight against Israel. In support of this thesis, proponents of this notion frequently point to an incident that occurred in 2002, when a ship, the *Karina A*, was apprehended in the Red Sea by the Israeli navy. The vessel had sailed from Iran. It turned out to be laden with tons of weaponry. Israeli sources alleged that the ship belonged to the Palestinian Authority and blamed Yasser Arafat for plotting to use its cargo to launch a treacherous attack on Israel. This widely spread account of the “*Karina A* Affair” was called into serious question by Brian Whitaker, of London’s *The Guardian* newspaper.<sup>15</sup> So far as I am aware, the definitive story behind the “*Karina A* Affair” has never been clarified. On the other hand, pro-Palestinian sources are apt to blame Israeli domestic political currents for the collapse of the supposed momentum toward peace generated by the Oslo Accords.

Yasser Arafat died in November, 2004 under questionable circumstances. He was succeeded as both President of the Palestinian Authority and Chairman of the PLO by Mahmoud Abbas. By then, further far-reaching changes had altered the dynamics of the Palestinian-Israeli struggle. Perhaps chief among these was the split that occurred in the Palestinian National Authority (PA) shortly after Arafat’s death. In January, 2006, Hamas defeated Arafat’s Fatah party in elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council (effectively the Palestinian legislative organ called for in the Oslo Accords). Within a year, this event led to the still ongoing political schism within the Occupied Territories, with Hamas serving as the *de facto* government of Gaza and the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority exercising its rule over the Occupied West Bank. Repeated attempts to repair the split have been frustrated.

In 2001, speaking on the verge of impending national elections, Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben Ami exuberantly crowed to reporters covering the Taba Summit of January 21-27, “We can say we have the basis for an agreement which can be implemented and achieved after

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<sup>15</sup> Brian Whitaker: “The Strange Affair of Karine A”, *The Guardian*, 21 January 2002, at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/jan/21/israel1>



the elections in Israel.”<sup>16</sup> Of course, it didn’t happen. The right-wing Likud Party won the 2001 elections and Ariel Sharon became Israel’s new Prime Minister. Sharon—at this stage of his life—had no interest in pursuing Ben Ami’s vision of peace with the Palestinians.<sup>17</sup> The Taba Summit stands as the pinnacle of the post-1967 “Peace Process.”

### **3. The Peace Process under the presidencies of George W. Bush and Barack Obama**

During the ensuing two decades, little further progress was produced by the so-called “peace process.” However, partly as a result of the shock generated in Washington by the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on American soil, President George W. Bush was moved to make an historic commitment in a speech to the United Nations. The United States, he pledged, would favor the establishment of “a peaceful and democratic” Palestinian state side by side with Israel.<sup>18</sup> Bush’s remarks at the UN General Assembly came just short of three months after he had first revealed his startling departure in Washington’s approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The occasion for that was a short speech delivered in the White House’s Rose Garden in the mid-afternoon of June 24, 2002. In the course of those remarks, President Bush left no doubt that his administration’s vision was that “of two states living side by side in peace and security.”<sup>19</sup> He went on to present a somewhat more elaborate view of his vision:

I call on the Palestinian people to elect new leaders, leaders not compromised by terror. I call upon them to build a practicing democracy, based on tolerance and liberty. If the Palestinian people actively pursue these goals, America and the world will actively support their efforts. If the Palestinian people meet these goals, they will be able to reach agreement with Israel and Egypt and Jordan on security and other arrangements for independence.

And when the Palestinian people have new leaders, new institutions and new security arrangements with their neighbors, the United States of America will support the creation of a Palestinian state whose borders and certain aspects of its sovereignty will be provisional until resolved as part of a final settlement in the Middle East.<sup>20</sup>

Reactions by Arabs and Israelis to the Bush proposal were predictable. Arabs found the Bush Plan totally one-sided in that it placed the full onus of peacemaking on Palestinians. According to Kathleen Christison—who, following her retirement from the CIA, has frequently written analyses critical of Israel:

...the administration undermined its own initiative by privately assuring Israel that essentially it meant nothing. Sharon was reassured that the administration did not intend to launch an initiative, and Sharon’s foreign

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<sup>16</sup> Dan Tschirgi: “Obama and the Middle East, Round Two”, *UNISCI Discussion Papers*, nº 33 (Octubre / October 2013), p. 179, at <https://www.ucm.es/data/cont/media/www/pag-72488/UNISCIDP33-10TSCHIRGI.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Shortly before he had the stroke that caused his death in 2014, Sharon appeared to have had a change of heart. He formed a new party—*Kadima*—which was to support a two-state solution.

<sup>18</sup> Husam Mohamad: “President George W. Bush’s Legacy on the Israeli-Palestinian ‘Peace Process’”, *Journal of International and Area Studies*, vol. 22, nº 1, (2015), pp. 79–92. *JSTOR*, at [www.jstor.org/stable/43490281](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43490281).

<sup>19</sup> George W. Bush: “President Bush Calls for New Palestinian Leadership”, at <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020624-3.html>

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*



minister, Shimon Peres, was given the clear impression that there was no peace plan behind Bush's vision of a Palestinian state.<sup>21</sup>

Barak Obama's eight-year presidency saw only the continuation of the stagnating and festering Palestine issue. Despite the initially bright hopes that the first black U.S. President raised, the reality proved to be that Obama was no more willing than any of his predecessors in office—save Eisenhower—to confront Israel over occupied Arab territories.<sup>22</sup> The tenor of US-Israeli relations became particularly problematical as Obama's basically conciliatory personality clashed with the combative instincts of Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu. The multiple sources of the two leaders' differences were not only rooted in their distinctive temperaments, but also exacerbated by their sharply differing appraisals of current realities. Thus, the issue of Iran's possible pursuit of nuclear weaponry emerged as a veritable litmus test for establishing political credibility. For the Obama Administration, Iran's agreement in 2015 to the "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action" (JCPOA)—the international agreement outlining specific steps to be taken by all parties in the interest of controlling Iran's nuclear energy-linked activities—was a welcome and realistic advance toward nuclear non-proliferation. In contrast, the agreement's critics saw it as paving the way for Iran's development of a viable nuclear weapons capability. From the outset, Israel adopted a strongly rejectionist policy toward the JCPOA. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, an outspoken advocate of this negative view was chosen by Obama's Republican opponents to offer Congress his arguments against the existing multilateral international agreement with Iran. Netanyahu did this in early March, 2015 in a speech to a joint session of the U.S. Congress.<sup>23</sup> Despite Israel's opposition, the United States government remained committed to the JCPOA. However, in early May, 2018, the then-President Donald Trump would outrage the international community—but please Israel's governing right-wing coalition government—by having the U.S. withdraw from the Iran deal.<sup>24</sup>

By 2017, at least 9,545 Palestinians and some 1,247 Israelis had died since 2000 in the plague of violence that swept the Occupied Territories as a result of Palestinians' growing frustration with the occupation.<sup>25</sup> By then, however, the problem was no longer Barak Obama's. Instead, it now belonged to President Donald J. Trump, the unlikely winner of the 2016 election. Despite Trump's opponent, Hilary Clinton, having outpaced Trump by a margin of more than three million votes, she nonetheless lost the race for the presidency—the outcome of an anachronistic peculiarity of the American electoral system.

#### **4. The president Trump approach**

As President, Trump lost no time in establishing that he was strongly biased in Israel's favor, and—second—that he was uninterested in any claims Palestinians might care to make. These

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<sup>21</sup> Christison Kathleen: "All Those Old Issues": George W. Bush and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 33, n° 2, p. 36, at

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B9F3w57hgHoxTWxyTVNQR19kTUE/view>

<sup>22</sup> In 1957, President Eisenhower had gone on national television to urge Israel to withdraw from Egyptian lands occupied during the 1956 Suez War. For the most compelling assessment of Barak Obama's overall record on the Palestine issue, see Josh Ruebner: "Obama's Legacy on Israel/Palestine", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 46, n° 1 (2016/17), at [https://www.palestine-studies.org/sites/default/files/jps-articles/JPS181\\_05\\_Ruebner.pdf](https://www.palestine-studies.org/sites/default/files/jps-articles/JPS181_05_Ruebner.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Krishnadev Calamur: "In a Speech to Congress, Netanyahu Blasts 'A Very Bad Deal' With Iran", *National Public Radio*, 3 March 2015, at

<https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/03/03/390250986/netanyahu-to-outline-iran-threats-in-much-anticipated-speech-to-congress>

<sup>24</sup> Landler Mark: "Trump Abandons Iran Nuclear Deal He Long Scorned", *The New York Times*, 8 May 2018, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/08/world/middleeast/trump-iran-nuclear-deal.html>

<sup>25</sup> Calculated from information taken from "Israel-Palestine Timeline", *The New York Times*, at <https://israelpalestinetimeline.org/charts/>



characteristics were both amply demonstrated when as President-Elect, Trump announced his choice for U.S. Ambassador to Israel: David M. Friedman.<sup>26</sup>

If Trump was biased, Friedman was, as they say, simply over the wall. At the time of his appointment, Friedman, an Orthodox Jew, had already acquired a highly visible right-wing record that placed him firmly in favor of Jewish settlements in the territories occupied by Israel since 1967. Friedman, who prior to becoming U.S. Ambassador to Israel had no diplomatic experience, was on public record as not believing “it would be illegal for Israel to annex the West Bank.”<sup>27</sup> In a statement accepting his nomination as envoy to Israel, Friedman proclaimed himself eager to do the job “from the U.S. embassy in Israel’s eternal capital, Jerusalem.”<sup>28</sup>

The controversy provoked by Friedman’s nomination was immediate and heated. Predictably, the liberally-inclined Jewish organization “J Street,” condemned Friedman for “lacking any diplomatic or policy credentials” and being “an unacceptable choice...beyond the pale for Senators considering who should represent the United States in Israel.”<sup>29</sup> For his part, Friedman had already voiced his view of the J Street crowd:

“...are J Street supporters really as bad as Kapos? The answer actually is no. They are far worse than Kapos—Jews who turned in their fellow Jews in the Nazi death camps. The Kapos faced extraordinary cruelty and who knows what any of us would have done under those circumstances...But J Street? They are just smug advocates of Israel’s destruction delivered from the comfort of their secure American sofas—it’s hard to imagine anything worse.”<sup>30</sup>

Quite apart from choosing an ambassador to Israel who was already committed to a position on the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem that flew in the face of what had been the clear official policy of the United States since the end of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Trump moved quickly in other areas. He named his son-in-law, Jared Kushner and his lawyer Jason Greenblatt, to formulate a plan for Palestinian-Israeli agreement that, according to Trump, would be “the deal of the century.” Kushner had no diplomatic, or other, experience that might have qualified him for the role. Greenblatt had worked as a lawyer for the Trump Organization, rising to the position of Executive Vice President and Chief Legal Officer. Shortly after Trump’s election to the presidency, Greenblatt was appointed Assistant to the President and Special Representative for International Negotiations. In July, 2017, Ambassador to Israel, David M. Friedman joined Kushner and Greenblatt as the third Jewish member of Trump’s vanguard team of American policymakers on the Palestine conflict.

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<sup>26</sup> Rosenberg Matthew: “Trump Chooses Hard-Liner as Ambassador to Israel”, *The New York Times*, 15 December 2016, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/15/us/politics/donald-trump-david-friedman-israel-ambassador.html>

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

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* See also “Joint Statement From Jason Dov Greenblatt and David Friedman”, at <https://medium.com/@jgreenblatt/joint-statement-from-jason-dov-greenblatt-and-david-friedman-co-chairmen-of-the-israel-advisory-edc1ec50b7a8>

<sup>29</sup> “Stop Friedman”, at <https://jstreet.org/get-involved/stop-friedman/>

<sup>30</sup> Eric Levitz: “Trump Picks Lawyer Who Says Liberal Jews Are Worse Than Nazi Collaborators As Israeli Ambassador”, *New York Times Magazine*, 16 December 2016, at <http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2016/12/trumps-israel-ambassador-likens-left-wing-jews-to-kapos.html>



Some five months later, on December 6, the President announced that the United States formally recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and, further, that he had ordered the United States Embassy to move to that city from its existing premises in Tel Aviv.<sup>31</sup>

On May 14, 2018 the embassy's move was celebrated with a spectacular party that began in the late afternoon. "First Daughter," Ivanka and her husband, Jerad Kushner headed the list of celebrities in attendance. Closely following the couple was Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu. Donald J. Trump addressed the gathering via a video linkage. On the Gaza-Israel border, 52 protestors were killed that day by Israeli troops.<sup>32</sup>

By then, Trump had already taken serious steps to further undermine U.S. relations with the Palestinians. These initiatives developed on several fronts, and were clearly designed to establish that the U. S. government was now solidly opposed to Palestinian aspirations. They included diplomatic, administrative and financial steps aimed at undermining the PLO's organizational viability.

John Bolton, Trump's National Security Advisor, announced the first measure—that the administration was closing the Palestinian Liberation Organization's office in Washington, D. C.<sup>33</sup> Bolton justified the decision by stating it had been caused by "the PLO's refusal to carry out substantive negotiations towards the achievement of a peace agreement with Israel." He further claimed that by trying to prosecute Israeli nationals at the International Criminal Court, "the PLO is violating the conditions Congress set as law for the continued operation of its Washington office."<sup>34</sup>

The second measure was announced by Assistant Secretary of Education for Civil Rights Kenneth Marcus. Mr. Marcus informed the press that henceforth the Department of Education would use "the State Department's definition of antisemitism in adjudicating all complaints regarding alleged acts of antisemitism in US educational institutions."<sup>35</sup> This was a significant development, particularly in light of events on American university campuses over the last twenty years or so, a period during which liberal consciousness had made great strides and increasingly called into question the justice of Israel's occupation of Arab territories conquered in 1967. In the *Jerusalem Post's* treatment of the matter, Caroline Glick used her position as a journalist to editorialize as follows:

Discrimination and bigotry are not free speech issues. Allowing pro-Palestinians to intimidate Jewish students into silence is not about guaranteeing free speech, it is about blocking free speech and trampling the civil rights of Jews.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup>Landler Mark: "Trump Recognizes Jerusalem as Israel's Capital and Orders U.S. Embassy to Move", *The New York Times*, 6 December 2017, at

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/06/world/middleeast/trump-jerusalem-israel-capital.html>

<sup>32</sup> "Gaza Clashes: 52 Palestinians Killed on the Deadliest Day Since 2014", 14 May 2018, *BBC News*, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-44104599>

<sup>33</sup> Glick Caroline B.: "Column One: Ending the Palestinian Exception", *The Jerusalem Post*, 13 September 2018, at <https://www.jpost.com/printarticle.aspx?id=567190>

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* The State Department's definition of anti-Semitism is as follows: "Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."

Elaborating on this definition, the State Department offered examples of "contemporary anti-semitism," among which figured: "Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as a collective—especially but not exclusively the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.... Accusing Jews as a people



By the late-summer and fall of 2018, the Trump Administration's political assault on Palestinians was almost fully developed. At the end of August, Washington revealed it "would no longer contribute to the United Nations relief agency for Palestinian refugees."<sup>37</sup> Reportedly, Trump took this course at the urging of Benjamin Netanyahu, who went against the advice of his own security services. The latter wanted Trump to cut support to UNWRA gradually but to leave Gaza unaffected.

Within the next few weeks, the blows directed at the PLO were rapidly and forcefully delivered. These included—in addition to the abrupt termination of American support for UNWRA (which was cut off after the organization had received \$65 million for Fiscal Year 2018, in contrast to the \$359.3 million it received in 2017), such things as the reassignment "for other purposes" of over \$231.5 millions of direct economic aid to the Palestinian Authority (including \$25 million for East Jerusalem hospitals) and a decision to prevent Palestinians from participating in an ongoing program of Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM). The latter was jointly funded by USAID and the US Embassy in Israel to the tune of approximately \$10 million annually.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, additional congressional legislation also significantly affected U.S. financial aid to Palestinians. The Taylor Force Act was passed in March, 2018, with provisions scheduled to become effective in February, 2019. Named for an American citizen killed in a terrorist attack in Israel, the new law made it theoretically possible for the Palestinian Authority to be sued by any survivor who could establish its culpability in a terrorist act.<sup>39</sup>

In their haste to support both Trump and the right-wing government of Israel, members of the US Congress realized only after the legislation had been signed into the new law of the land that no exception had been made for funds designed to enhance Israel's security.

Given that the PA had received over \$60 million in Fiscal Year 2017 to support its efforts on behalf of Israel's security, US lawmakers scrambled to find a formula that would exempt pro-Israel security measures from the thrust of the bill they had just approved. Unfortunately, these events unfolded just as the rivalry between Republicans and Democrats over Trump's

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of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, the state of Israel, or even for acts committed by non-Jews...Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust...Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel...than to the interest of their own nations."

The State Department's clarification went on to provide specific examples of ways in which anti-Semitism manifests itself in regard to the state of Israel, among which was listed this: "Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis." However, a final caveat closed the apparently open-ended recital of what might be considered anti-Semitic practices with the following curious italicized declaration: "*However, criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as anti-Semitic*". "Defining Anti-Semitism", U. S. Department of State, 8 June 2010, at <https://www.state.gov/s/rga/resources/267538.htm>

<sup>37</sup> DeYoung Karen, Eglash Ruth and Balousha Hazem: "U. S. Ends Aid to United Nations Agency Supporting Palestinian Refugees", *The Washington Post*, 31 August 2018, at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/us-aid-cuts-wont-end-the-right-of-return-palestinians-say/2018/08/31/8e3f25b4-ad0c-11e8-8a0c-70b618c98d3c\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.4993f179c282](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/us-aid-cuts-wont-end-the-right-of-return-palestinians-say/2018/08/31/8e3f25b4-ad0c-11e8-8a0c-70b618c98d3c_story.html?utm_term=.4993f179c282)

<sup>38</sup> "U.S. Foreign Aid to the Palestinians", Congressional Research Service, (RS22967), 12 December 2018, at <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=818599>

See also "Trump Administration Cuts All Aid to Palestinians in the Occupied West Bank and Gaza", *The National Post*, 1 February 2019, at <https://nationalpost.com/news/world/trump-administration-cuts-all-aid-to-palestinians-in-the-occupied-west-bank-and-gaza>

<sup>39</sup>See Christian Broadcasting Network: "Palestinians Reject US Aid to Avoid New American Terrorism Laws", at <http://www.1.cbn.com/cbnnews/israel/2019/january/palestinians-reject-us-aid-to-avoid-new-american-terrorism-laws>



desire for a wall along the Mexican border led to a prolonged shutdown of the American government in late 2018.

As a result, the Palestinian Authority must have derived at least a tiny bit of satisfaction when, on the day after Christmas, Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah informed Secretary of State Pompeo that the government of Palestine had “unambiguously” decided against accepting any form of U.S. financial support.<sup>40</sup> Unnamed “senior officials” of the Israeli government let it be known that they too “had been working behind the scenes” to ensure that the new law would be amended to allow Israel to continue benefitting from the PA’s security contribution.<sup>41</sup> Their efforts were in vain.

On December 26, 2018, the PA officially requested that all US financial aid be curtailed.<sup>42</sup> A spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas issued the following grim assessment:

The suspension of aid to our people, which included critical sectors such as health and education, will have a negative impact on all, create a negative atmosphere, and increase instability.<sup>43</sup>

This amounted to a remarkably understated scream of anguished outrage at what Palestinians could not but perceive as a monumental betrayal by a Great Power that had led them on for decades by promises and actions proffered in good faith by individuals who would not have knowingly lied, but who—in the final analysis—failed to understand that the very system of government in whose name those same promises were given was such that “*non-monetizable*” values counted for little, if anything. The Palestinians’ current plight was, in short, the result of their having counted on “Democracy, American-style.”

When that style of democracy did the “unthinkable” and produced the Trump Presidency, Palestinians should have realized (and perhaps many did) that their immediate future was bleak. In contrast, those who perceived opportunities to advance their own agendas in a monetized Trumpian atmosphere were delighted. Thus, brutal dictators and sleazy politicians throughout the world looked forward to thriving under the auspices of the congenial environment created by Donald Trump. Prominent among the latter, was Israel’s Prime Minister, “Bibi” Netanyahu, who by early 2019 was scheduled to be formally charged with multiple counts of bribery.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to Trump’s personal war on Palestinians, legislative actions—at both the state and federal levels—threatened to complicate the Trump Administration’s easy development of a *de facto* total alliance with the Jewish state. The primary issue in this regard has been the BDS Movement, a popular, Palestinian-inspired, grassroots, international endeavor to pressure Israel into compliance with international law. Although the Movement’s exact origins remain cloudy, its founding conference was held in 2005 in Ramallah, Palestine. The Movement originally drew inspiration from the South Africa-focused apartheid international boycotts of the 1980s. Today’s BDS Movement calls for economic and social pressures—specifically the boycotting of goods and services linked to Israel, and the cancellation of foreign investments

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* The text of Rami Hamdallah’s letter to the Secretary of State is available in full at <http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/israel/2019/january/palestinians-reject-us-aid-to-avoid-new-american-terrorism-laws>

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Farrell Stephen and Lubell Maayan: “USAID Assistance in the West Bank and Gaza has Ceased: U.S. Official”, *Reuters*, 1 February 2019, at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-palestinians-usaid/usaids-assistance-in-the-west-bank-and-gaza-has-ceased-us-official-idUSKCN1PQ418>

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Horovitz David: “Netanyahu’s Legal War Will Wait; It’s His Political Life He’s Fighting For Now”, *The Times of Israel*, 28 February 2019, at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahus-legal-war-will-wait-its-his-political-life-hes-fighting-for-now/>



in that same area. At the same time, the Movement insists that governments around the world “hold Israel to account including by ending military trade, free-trade agreements and expelling Israel from international platforms such as the UN and FIFA.”<sup>45</sup> While the Movement’s goals are obviously ambitious, under Trump’s presidency there developed a large-scale controversy that rapidly boiled down to a struggle over the constitutional implications of opposing BDS.

Basically, the issue became one of a citizens’ right to express political opinions—a right guaranteed by the U. S. Constitution’s First Amendment. So far, at least 26 States have enacted measures intended to protect Israel from economic boycotts and similar sanctions.

An attempt was made in early 2019 to introduce federal legislation that would have hindered pro-BDS legislation at the state level. The bill, co-authored by Senator Marco Rubio and Joe Manchin, and opposed by Senators Bernie Sanders and Dianne Feinstein on grounds that it violated the constitutionally protected right of free speech, did not survive.<sup>46</sup> However, there is a high probability that sooner or later the Rubio-Manchin Act, or some derivative of it, will become the new law of the land. Should this prove to be true, it would do much to validate the growing fears of liberals, among whom I count myself, that Washington’s policy toward the Israel-Palestine conflict is almost beyond hope of redemption. As a university professor and a writer who frequently focuses on the Palestine-Israel conflict, while adhering to the ethical requirement of full disclosure, I must here declare my own recent adherence to the BDS Movement, a small but perhaps significant gesture that I hope may help tilt the balance a bit against the prevailing tendency in the West to extend virtually automatic support to Israel’s Palestine-related policies.

According to the European Union, as of this writing, there are approximately “630,000 Israeli settlers in 143 locations in the West Bank...including East Jerusalem...and 106 outposts.”<sup>47</sup> The EU’s most recent Six Month Report on Israeli Settlements stressed that 2017-18 had seen “an extraordinary three-to-four-fold increase in the advancement of housing units...compared to 2015/2016...”<sup>48</sup> In other words, the two years of the Trump presidency coincided with the “extraordinary” increase in the building of dwellings for settlers in the West Bank and Jerusalem. There is nothing surprising in this. However, it does focus one’s thoughts on the significance of the trajectory of U.S. policy toward the Palestine issue over the past half century.

For the moment, at least, it is possible to describe that course as having slowly and cautiously moved the United States on a pro-Israel path that suddenly, and unexpectedly, culminated in the Trump Administration’s almost totally undisguised sponsorship of Netanyahu’s crassly expansionist ambitions. The missing piece of the puzzle is something that cannot be clarified until Trump’s vanguard team of Palestine policymakers—Kushner, Greenblatt and Freidman—reveal the contents of their own “Trump Plan” for a definitive peace agreement. The “Plan” has been a closely guarded secret until today and will not be revealed until after Israel’s scheduled elections on April 9, 2019. Speculation is rampant as to its actual contents but nothing is certain—save the certainty that it will be extremely surprising should the Plan win the acceptance, even as a basis for discussion, of Palestinians and Israelis.

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<sup>45</sup> “What is BDS? Palestinian BDS National Committee, at <https://bdsmovement.net/what-is-bds>

<sup>46</sup> Beauchamp Zack: “The Controversy Over Laws Punishing Israel Boycotts Explained”, *Vox*, 9 January 2019, at <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2019/1/9/18172826/bds-law-israel-boycott-states-explained>

<sup>47</sup> “Six Month Report on Israeli Settlements in the Occupied West Bank, Including East Jerusalem,” (Reporting period July-December 2018), European Union, Office of the European Union Representative (West Bank and Gaza Strip, UNRWA), at

[https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/palestine-occupied-palestinian-territory-west-bank-and-gaza-strip/48438/six-month-report-israeli-settlements-occupied-west-bank-including-east-jerusalem\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/palestine-occupied-palestinian-territory-west-bank-and-gaza-strip/48438/six-month-report-israeli-settlements-occupied-west-bank-including-east-jerusalem_en)

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.



In the meantime, Israel faces an uncertain future dominated, in the immediate sense, by the issues surrounding its upcoming elections on April 9, in which Netanyahu—under the onus of facing imminent and multiple criminal charges of corruption—hopes to retain his leadership of the state. In his quest for personal power, the Prime Minister may have already and inadvertently stacked the cards against himself. In late February, with the Prime Minister’s blessing, an Israeli political party, described by *The New York Times* as “extremist,” merged with what the *Times* described as “a somewhat more mainstream party of religious Zionists, the Jewish Home [Party].”<sup>49</sup> The extremist party is called, *Otzma Yehudit*, or “Jewish Power.” It claims to be the direct descendant of Meir Kahane’s group, *Kach*. According to the *Times*, the pact that Netanyahu approved “could easily catapult *Otzama Yehudit* from a disreputable fringe into Israel’s next governing coalition.”<sup>50</sup>

So long as Israel’s policies continue to be shaped by the mindset of people like Benjamin Netanyahu, the ultimate destiny of Israel remains in real peril. Israeli historian Benny Morris retired recently from his position at Ben Gurion University and in a wide-ranging interview with the Israeli daily *Haaretz* offered the following speculation on Israel’s future prospects:

This place will decline like a Middle Eastern state with an Arab majority. The violence between the different populations, within the state, will increase. The Arabs will demand the return of the refugees. The Jews will remain a small minority within a large Arab sea of Palestinians, a persecuted or slaughtered minority, as they were when they lived in Arab countries. Those among the Jews who can, will flee to America and the West....

The Palestinians look at everything from a broad, long-term perspective. They see that at the moment, there are five-six-seven million Jews here, surrounded by hundreds of millions of Arabs. They have no reason to give in, because the Jewish state can’t last. They are bound to win. In another 30 to 50 years they will overcome us, come what may.<sup>51</sup>

Benny Morris’ vision is certainly apocalyptic but it hardly goes far enough. Are we really intended to swallow the possibility that a nuclear-armed Israel will simply lay back and allow itself to be “overcome”? All reason suggests the utter improbability of such an outcome. Instead, a truly reasonable speculation would complete Morris’ scenario by pointing to the obvious: that an existentially-threatened, nuclear-armed Israel, such as Morris imagines, would not hesitate to unleash nuclear devastation upon its antagonists.

<sup>49</sup> Halbfinger, David M.: “Netanyahu Sparks Outrage Over Pact With Racist Party”, *The New York Times*, 24 February 2019, at

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/24/world/middleeast/benjamin-netanyahu-otzma-yehudit-jewish-power.html>

<sup>50</sup> Meir Kahane was an American-born Orthodox Rabbi, who settled in Israel in 1971 and formed an extremist anti-Arab political party, *Kach*. *Kach* won one seat in Israel’s Knesset in 1984, but it was subsequently barred from participating in elections because of alleged incitement to racism. In 1990, Kahane was assassinated by a naturalized American citizen of Egyptian descent while visiting New York.

<sup>51</sup> Aderet Ofer: “Israel Will Decline, and Jews Will be a Persecuted Minority. Those Who Can Will Flee to America”, *Haaretz*, 22 January 2019, at

<https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium.MAGAZINE-israel-will-decline-and-jews-will-be-persecuted-those-who-can-will-flee-1.6848498>



Apart from doomsday scenarios of this sort, there are other perspectives that offer more optimistic conclusions. These, of course, will not be found in the outlooks of the Trumps and Netanyahus of this world. Rather, they can be readily discovered in the ideological antithesis of the Trumpian-Netanyahuian position: the humanistic faith in reason and dialogue and the concomitant belief that true compromise, as opposed to simple imposition, is possible in human affairs.

The irony of it all is that we have now come to a pass at which it becomes increasingly evident that Israel will have to be saved from its own worst inclinations. The bright spot in this gloomy assessment is that there is no dearth of support for it in Israel itself. The turn taken by Israeli politics to the right after 1977 did not eclipse, but rather outshone, the country's leftist tendencies, which had dominated Israel's political vision from the state's inception. A revival of Israel's politically relevant left is overdue and, one hopes, may be expected soon.

## **5. Conclusion**

In the United States, the Trumpian era will possibly end in 2020. If so, a backlash against Trump's signature projects in all areas can be expected.

In any case, Trump's version of what is in the interest of the United States must necessarily be transitory. It is bound to be replaced by some broader, more inclusive, vision that will, in all probability, offer space for more justice to the Palestinians.

The clear implication of these thoughts for the Palestinians themselves is, at this time, the following: hold steady, this too shall pass.

To return now to the question raised much earlier in this essay: *should we write off the Middle East as a theater in which reasonableness is by definition out of place for the foreseeable future, or, on the other hand, must we simply accept the perpetration of a monumental historic injustice?*

It would make no more sense to "write off" the Middle East as a theater in which reasonableness is out of court than it would to do the same to any other part of this world. As a universal standard, reason must apply universally. Therefore, simple acceptance of a monumental historic injustice is an unacceptable option. The conclusion, of course, is that the struggle toward the goal of recognizable justice must be waged.



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