

**American Foreign Policy Towards Palestine
From Nixon to Clinton**
السياسة الأمريكية تجاه فلسطين
من نكسون إلى كلينتون

Master's Thesis Presented by Ghada Mousa Arafat

**Date of Defense
30-05-2005**

Defense and Supervision Committee

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“Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master’s Degree in International Studies from the Graduate Faculty at Birzeit University – Palestine.”

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وللأسد في موته هيبة ليست لغيره وهم أحياء

إلى من شرفني بتدفق دمه في عروقي

إلى من علمني حب الأرض

إلى من علمني العز والكبرياء

إلى من علمني كيف أحيأ بهامة مرفوعة

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إلى من تتوق روحي إلى لقياه

إلى والدي الشهيد بإذن الله

القائد اللواء ركن موسى عرفات

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Abstract

This study is dedicated to identifying the elements of continuity and discontinuity of American foreign policy towards Palestine from Nixon to Clinton.

The importance of this research is derived from the fact that it explores the American-Palestinian relations through a very long period of time through which many major international changes occurred as well as internal changes within the Palestinian and American fronts. Moreover, the long time period covered in this research gives a clear idea about to which extent these variables dominate American behavior towards Palestine.

This study is divided into three chapters other than the introduction and conclusion. The first chapter is divided into three parts. The first part is dedicated to giving a general overview of American foreign policy from a theoretical point of view. The second part is dedicated to examining American foreign policy towards the Middle East. The third and last part gives a historic overview of American foreign policy towards Palestine prior to the Nixon era to pinpoint the historical background that established this relationship.

The second chapter explores American foreign policy towards Palestine from the Nixon era to George Bush senior. The chapter is divided according to the presidential periods as a mean to identify the elements of continuity and discontinuity in the American approach towards Palestine for each president.

The third chapter is dedicated to the Clinton tenure going through all the agreements signed between Palestinians and Israelis in order to highlight the main elements that controlled the relationship during that era.

The conclusion presents the constant variables in American foreign policy towards Palestine as well as giving some recommendations to improving the Palestinian-American relationship exploring other options Palestinians must tackle to improve their negotiation status and international performance. These conclusions could be summarized as follows:

- 1- American behavior towards Palestine is governed by the special American-Israeli relationship.
- 2- The U.S. tends to adopt the Israeli interpretation on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict neglecting the Palestinian perspective as well as refusing that the root of the conflict is the establishment of the Israeli state on the Palestinian land.
- 3- The U.S. supports Israel in creating facts on the ground that would jeopardize the outcome of any future peace talks between Palestinians and Israelis through buying time in negotiations for the benefit of Israel.
- 4- The U.S. tends to achieve political gains on behalf of Israel through exerting pressure on Palestinians to recognize the state of Israel and its right to exist and then to adhere to Israeli demands through negotiations regardless of Palestinian interests.

- 5- The U.S. tends to overturn Palestinian achievements within the United Nations through liquidating Palestinian rights and lawful political aspirations. The U.S. generally manipulates legal terms to undermine Palestinian rights and it isolates itself from International consensus.
- 6- The U.S. intervenes in the conflict to ensure the containment of the conflict so it would not develop into regional unrest.
- 7- Palestinians should no longer perceive the U.S. as a reliable broker of peace as it would not serve their interests.
- 8- The E.U. should be encouraged by Palestinians to be more involved in the conflict to counterbalance the American monopoly over it.
- 9- Palestinians should not give up on American public. A public relations company should be hired to work on improving Palestinian image within American society and Palestinian and Arab Americans should be mobilized to create a pressure group to counter the influence of pro-Israel groups.
- 10- Working on the Arab front should be a target to Palestinians. Arabs should be approached to convince Arabs to give up the unilateral track of the Arab-Israeli peace talks.

- 11- Finally, Palestinians should work on reforming and improving their institution's performance to be able to improve their international performance and to gain international trust.

ملخص

تقوم هذه الدراسة على رصد الثابت والمتغير في السياسة الأمريكية تجاه فلسطين في الفترة الممتدة من عهد نيكسون وصولاً إلى عهد كلينتون. وتكتسب هذه الفترة الزمنية أهميتها من زخم المتغيرات السياسية على الساحة الدولية بشكل عام والفلسطينية بشكل خاص.

تكتسب هذه الدراسة أهميتها من خلال رصدها وتعريفها للثوابت والمتغيرات في السياسة الأمريكية تجاه فلسطين حيث تعمل على ربط هذه الثوابت والمتغيرات بالمستجدات الدولية والداخلية في الساحتين الفلسطينية والأمريكية .

وتتبع أهمية دراسة السياسة الأمريكية تجاه فلسطين من الدور الأساسي والحيوي الذي لعبته الولايات المتحدة في الصراع الفلسطيني - الإسرائيلي بسبب طبيعة علاقتها الخاصة بإسرائيل بالدرجة الأولى ولكونها دولة عظمى بالدرجة الثانية.

تنقسم هذه الدراسة إلى ثلاث فصول أساسية بالإضافة إلى المقدمة والخاتمة على النحو

التالي:

يقسم الفصل الأول إلى ثلاثة أقسام ويقدم في القسم الأول نبذة عامة عن السياسة الأمريكية الخارجية ويضعها في إطارها النظري العام، وأما القسم الثاني منه فيركز على أهمية وخصوصية الشرق الأوسط بالنسبة للعلاقات الخارجية الأمريكية بشكل عام وطبيعة القضية الفلسطينية ضمن هذا الإطار على وجه الخصوص. ويستعرض الفصل الأول في جزئه الأخير تاريخ السياسة الأمريكية تجاه فلسطين في الفترة الواقعة ما قبل عهد نيكسون وذلك لتوضيح الخلفية التاريخية التي أسست ملامح هذه العلاقة.

ويختص الفصل الثاني من الدراسة بتغطية السياسة الأمريكية تجاه فلسطين من بداية حكم نيكسون إلى فترة حكم بوش الأب، متناولاً الثوابت والمتغيرات في السياسة الأمريكية من خلال دراسة فترة حكم كل رئيس على حدة، كأداة تمكن الباحث من الوصول إلى المؤثرات الداخلية والخارجية التي وجهت طريقة اتخاذ القرارات لكل من هؤلاء الرؤساء الأمريكيين في تلك الفترة تجاه فلسطين.

أما الفصل الثالث فيستعرض فترة حكم كلينتون التي دامت لثمانى سنوات. ويقسم حسب الاتفاقات التي تم التوصل إليها ما بين فلسطين وإسرائيل، وذلك بهدف توضيح العناصر التي أثرت في العلاقة الأمريكية الفلسطينية في تلك الفترة.

وأخيراً تجمل الخاتمة موضوع الدراسة موضحةً ومحددة الثوابت التي توصلت إليها الباحثة في السياسة الأمريكية تجاه فلسطين، كما وتقدم مجموعة من المقترحات التي تعنى بتطوير العلاقات الفلسطينية الأمريكية وتساهم في فتح آفاق جديدة أمام الفلسطينيين لتقوية موقفهم في المجتمع الدولي وموقفهم التفاوضي مقابل إسرائيل.

ويمكن تلخيص خاتمة البحث في النقاط التالية:

- ١- تشكل طبيعة العلاقة الأمريكية - الإسرائيلية الخاصة والتي لم تتغير بتغير المنظومة الدولية ما بعد انهيار الاتحاد السوفيتي وسقوط النظام الثنائي القطبية العقبة الرئيسية أمام الفلسطينيين في استمالة الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية نحوهم.
- ٢- الإصرار الأمريكي على تبني وجهة النظر الإسرائيلية في فهم طبيعة الصراع الفلسطيني - الإسرائيلي، والرفض الأمريكي الدائم بالاعتراف بأن أساس الصراع يكمن في تأسيس دولة إسرائيل على أراضي فلسطين.
- ٣- تمارس الولايات المتحدة لعبة شراء الوقت لصالح إسرائيل متبعة أسلوب المماطلة في المفاوضات مساعدة بذلك إسرائيل على خلق حقائق على الأرض تمكن إسرائيل من فرض شروطها على الفلسطينيين على حساب حقوقهم القانونية.
- ٤- تعمل الولايات المتحدة على ممارسة الضغوط على الفلسطينيين للحصول على مكاسب سياسية لصالح إسرائيل تتضمن الاعتراف بدولة إسرائيل وحققها في الوجود.
- ٥- هناك سياسة أمريكية متعمدة لعزل نفسها عن الإجماع الدولي العالمي تجاه القضية الفلسطينية، وتعويمها للحقوق الفلسطينية المقررة في القانون الدولي.
- ٦- تتدخل الولايات المتحدة في الصراعات فقط في حالة حدوث تصعيد للصراع خوفاً من توسعه وامتداد تأثيره بما يزعزع النظام الإقليمي.

- ٧- على الفلسطينيين أن يسلّموا إلى حقيقة كون الولايات المتحدة غير قادرة على لعب دور نزيه يخدم مصالحها في صراعهم مع إسرائيل ويتعين عليهم البحث عن طرف آخر قادر على خدمة مصالحهم وتفهم وجهة نظرهم من الصراع.
- ٨- على الفلسطينيين العمل على إشراك الاتحاد الأوروبي في الصراع ليشكل أداة توازن تواجه الاحتكار الأمريكي للصراع.
- ٩- على الصعيد الأمريكي، لا بد للفلسطينيين من العمل على إيصال فكرهم ووجهة نظرهم من الصراع إلى المجتمع الأمريكي من خلال التعاقد مع شركة علاقات عامة تعمل على تحسين الصورة الفلسطينية لدى المجتمع المدني، وكذلك العمل مع الأمريكيين من أصل عربي وفلسطيني لتشكيل جماعات ضغط توازي تأثير جماعات الضغط المؤيدة لإسرائيل.
- ١٠- على الفلسطينيين العمل باتجاه تعزيز المسار المتعدد للمفاوضات وخلق جبهة عربية لذلك، وللوصول لهذا الهدف لا بد لهم من تطوير وتعزيز دور المؤسسات الفلسطينية العاملة في مجال دعم المفاوضات سعياً إلى كسب ثقة المجتمع الدولي.

Introduction

Ever since the declaration of the Israeli state, Palestinians have been engaged not only in a war of liberation but also a war of recognition. Since most of the world decided to ignore Palestinians as a separate people with the right of self-determination and statehood, Palestinians have used both diplomacy and armed resistance to gain these legitimate rights.

As part of the Arab world, Palestinians depended at first on Arab nations to transmit their demands to the world. By the mid 1950s, doubts started to arise among Palestinians as to whether the Arab states were pursuing Palestinian interests or instead pursuing their own interests at the expense of Palestinian rights. The outbreak of the 1967 war and the humiliating defeat of the Arab armies that led to the occupation of the rest of historic Palestine, as well as other parts of three other Arab countries, made Palestinians lose their last shred of hope that the Arab states would assist them in gaining their rights. From that moment, Palestinians decided to rely on themselves in their struggle for independence and recognition.

By the late 1960s, Palestinians gained a political breakthrough internationally through a series of UN General Assembly resolutions recognizing Palestinians as a separate people and granting them all lawful rights, including the right of self-determination and liberation and the right of struggle to gain that goal. However, this advance was hindered by continuous Israeli violations of UN resolutions and American support for Israel. The United States, in practice, refused to deal with

Palestinians as a people of a sovereign nation. Palestinian claims were looked upon as unrealistic, neglecting the root of the conflict. The U.S. administration adopted solely the Israeli interpretation of the conflict.

Being one of the two super powers during the Cold War and the major power in the post Cold War era, the U.S. had been playing a major role in the Palestinian situation. Despite the fact that the international community made several attempts to present solutions to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Israeli rejection of such gestures and its insistence that only its closest ally, the U.S., should be involved in the conflict drove those attempts to a dead end. The American role has been marked for decades as being alienated from the international consensus, giving Israel the chance to dictate its own terms in almost all matters related to the conflict.

The aim of this thesis is to reach a full understanding and evaluation of the elements of continuity and discontinuity in the American foreign policy towards Palestine. In this work, the author will show that there are constant variables that have governed the American approach towards Palestine from the period of the Nixon administration up to the Clinton administration. To reach that goal, the research identifies these variables and examines their role in the American process of decision making towards Palestine and the different stages through which American-Palestinian relations have passed.

Two research methods will be used in this work. The first will be historic, which is useful due to the long time period covered. Alongside the historic method, the author will rely on the analytical method, especially when dealing with official

documents and statements. Due to the diversity of issues covered, the analytical method is also important in connecting these issues and reaching a precise and accurate conclusion.

This work covers the two major stages through which the Palestinian question developed. The first stage covers the period from Nixon to Bush Senior, while the second stage covers the Clinton tenure. But why choose such a long period? The advent of Nixon's presidency coincided with the most important stage in recent Palestinian history since during his years in power, Palestinians started to recover from the great shock they had received from the 1967 war which led to a new influx of refugees and gave a new legal status to the Palestinians. Palestinians became not only refugees but also civilians under occupation. During the Nixon era, the Palestinian national resistance movement came to light, attracting the attention of the world to the Palestinian question. Despite the international recognition of Palestinians as a people, Palestinians were generally ignored by the subsequent American administrations.

During Clinton's tenure, Palestinian efforts to gain American recognition were crowned; for the first time in the history of Palestine, a Palestinian national leader was welcomed not only to America but also to the White House as a friend and not a foe. On the other hand, the Clinton administrations are worth studying because they affected the destiny of Palestinians for generations to come through a series of decisions and policies that undermined some of the international gains Palestinians had achieved. During Clinton's eight years in office, the peace agreement between

Palestinians and Israelis was signed along with other agreements that, until the outbreak of the Intifada, were essential in preserving peace in the region. The U.S. played an initial role, sometimes as a mediator, others as a catalyst in each agreement. By the end of his tenure, the peace process was breaking down, with Palestinian-American relations at their lowest point since the signing of the peace agreement in 1993.

This work is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter gives a general overview of American international behavior from a theoretical perspective. Moreover, it highlights the importance of the Middle East in American foreign policy to place the Palestinian question within its general framework. The third section of this chapter gives a short history of the American approach towards Palestine prior to 1967 and the internal elements that affected policy makers while dealing with Palestine. The importance of this part lies in the fact that during this period the American perspective of the conflict was formed.

The second chapter deals with the period from Nixon to Bush Senior. It examines the American approach through this period by going through the attitudes and practices of each president towards Palestine. By dividing this period in this way, the author tackles the internal and external factors affecting the process of policy making towards Palestine.

The third chapter is dedicated to examining the Clinton tenure. The chapter is divided according to the agreements and major events that took place in those eight

years. Dividing the chapter this way is helpful in drawing an accurate picture of the ups and downs that Palestinian-American relations went through during this period.

The conclusion is devoted to pointing out the constant variables in the American foreign policy towards Palestine.

Chapter I

America and the World

1. American Foreign Policy in Theory:

This section will explain the general framework of American foreign policy and the way in which the U.S. conducts its relations with other states and international entities. Explaining American international behavior from a theoretical point of view is important because, as Stanley Michalak explains, when things “are categorized we understand or comprehend them by looking at the attributes of the categories into which they have been placed.”¹

Placing the Palestinian question within the context of the general behavior of American foreign policy helps in understanding the changes in American-Palestinian relations, if any indeed occurred.

A. Historical Background:

One of the theories that explain American foreign policy is the “Cyclical Theory”. This theory is based on the assumption that American foreign policy revolves around two tendencies: Introversion and Extroversion. The former is marked by concentrating on internal affairs while keeping normal relations with the international community. During this phase, decision-makers re-evaluate past international policies and determine future ones. On the other hand, the Extroversion

¹ Stanley J. Michalak, *Competing Conceptions of American Foreign Policy: Worldviews in Conflict* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1992), 4.

stage is marked by the interventionist international role. The extroversion stage can either be of an aggressive or cooperative nature, depending on the issue in question.²

Following the Monroe Doctrine in 1822, America went through an introversion stage, keeping friendly relations with others in order to protect its economic interests. No military action was taken by the U.S. outside its continent until the outbreak of World War I, where it shifted to the extroversion stage. Securing the European continent and restoring the balance of power were the main reasons behind this shift, though as soon as the war ended in favor of American interests, the U.S. went back to the introversion stage.

In 1939, World War II drove the U.S. back to the extroversion stage. Unlike WWI, the end of WWII did not restore the balance of power in Europe; consequently, the U.S. remained in the extroversion stage. The great European powers came out of the war devastated, both militarily and economically, leaving a political void in the continent. The rise of the USSR as a great power with no compatible power in Central Europe was a threat to the United States. The U.S. feared that the USSR would spread its influence and ideology into Europe and take over the lost colonies that used to be under European control.³ Being the only power capable of facing the Soviet threat, the U.S. increased its international involvement.

² ناصيف حتي، القوى الخمس الكبرى و الوطن العربي: دراسة مستقبلية. بيروت: مركز دراسات الوحدة العربية، أكتوبر ١٩٨٧. ص ٢١.

³ بكر مصباح تنيرة، "التطور الإستراتيجي الأمريكي للسياسة الأمريكية في الوطن العربي." في غسان سلامة و آخرون، السياسة الأمريكية و العرب (بيروت: مركز دراسات الوحدة العربية، فبراير ١٩٩١) ص ١٠٠-١٠١.

B. American Foreign Policy during the Cold War Era

The Cold War was marked by the struggle between the two Super Powers over world dominance, dividing the world into two blocks: pro-American and pro-Soviet. After the division of Germany, Europe was divided between the two blocks according to the military situation on the ground. The United States challenged Soviet dominance only when it tried to cross its sphere of influence and spread its power and communist ideology.⁴

Two main views dominated the mentality of American policy makers, at least until the defeat in Vietnam. Idealists believed that they could deal with the Soviet Union through open negotiations characterized by goodwill and self-sacrifice. In contrast, realists did not have faith in the ability to solve disputes through negotiations and goodwill.⁵

On the ground, Realism won the battle, especially after the adoption of George Kenan's views on the Soviet Union published in an article titled "The Source of Soviet Conduct". As a counselor at the American Embassy in Moscow, Kenan was capable of convincing American policy makers of his views as an expert. Kenan

⁴ William R Keylor, *The Twentieth Century World: An International History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 262-265.

⁵ Robert J Myers, *U.S. Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century: The relevance of Realism* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 4.

wrote that “the Soviets were expansionistic, and their hostility to the West was inherent in their ideology and their situation.”⁶

Is Realism the only theory capable of explaining American international behavior during the Cold War? The answer is definitely no; however, Realism is the theory that can best provide an explanation of the American behavior. For Hans Morgenthau, the founder of Realism, interest is defined in terms of power.⁷ This concept is very much applicable to American behavior during the Cold War. Both Super Powers were trying to spread their dominance throughout the international community, expanding their spheres of control. The United States went through an arms race with its rival that, had it escalated to the level of armed confrontation, could have lead to a global nuclear disaster.

It would be an over-simplification to evaluate all American attitudes and behaviors from a realist point of view, however, without considering the effect other theories have had on American policy makers. The U.S. did use military power to expand its power, but at the same it used economic aid and assistance programs as means of conduct with nations of the world.

C. American Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era

The end of the Cold War reshaped the international arena. The international system was no longer a bipolar system. However, as Samuel Huntington affirms, despite the fact that there is only one superpower, the world is not uni-polar. Instead,

⁶ Ibid, 23.

⁷ Charles W. Kegley, Jr. and Eugene R. Wittkopf, *World Politics: Trend and Transformation*, 5th ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 22.

according to Huntington, the world is a uni-multi-polar system with one super power and several major powers. The U.S. is that superpower. The other major powers are regional, and despite their strength, they cannot spread their interests and capabilities outside their own regions. There are also powers, which he called secondary regional powers, whose interests usually contradict those of the major regional powers.⁸

John Ikenberry holds a different view. For him, the so-called post-Cold War order does not exist. The collapse of the USSR did not create a new system; it brought back the world order created in the 1940s. Actually, according to Ikenberry, the advent of the Cold War reinforced the liberal democratic order of the 1940s.⁹

This drastic change in the international system, in addition to the disappearance of the most important aspect behind the U.S. international involvement, brought back the dilemma facing the future of American foreign policy. Some scholars believed that the end of the Cold War should have brought the U.S. back to the introversion stage. Others believed that the U.S. would still have to play its role as the world's leader and policeman. The fact that the Cold War lasted for almost half a century made it appealing to believe that classical isolationism was dead and could not be revived. To a certain extent, this was true. During the Cold War, the U.S. became an integral part of the international system. The Truman Doctrine, the

⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Lonely Superpower," in *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays*, 4th ed. (New York: Longman, 2002), 587.

⁹ John Ikenberry, "The Myth of Post-Cold War Chaos," in *American Foreign Policy*, 606-607.

Marshal plan, NATO, other security pacts, and overseas troop deployments that took place after the end of the Second World War cannot just be ignored or repudiated.¹⁰

There are five difficulties facing U.S. international engagement for the sake of a stable international order. First, the end of the cold war put an end to the pull-factor from which American foreign policy was derived for almost 40 years. Second, there has been an increasing trend among Americans to limit their international commitments and involvement. A 1995 survey conducted by the Time Mirror showed that 41% of Americans were in favor of limiting American involvement abroad. This percentage was the highest since the survey's inception in 1974. Third, in the near future, the emergence of economic globalization would reinforce the American public's tendency to resent American international involvement. The negative effects of globalization, especially on wages and market uncertainty, made people believe that it was in their best interest to withdraw from world affairs. Fourth, the end of the Cold War made realism insufficient in framing American foreign policy.¹¹ Finally, the end of the Cold War brought with it a problem for Americans: the identifying of American national interests. Sub-commercial interests, transnational and non-national ethnic interests became dominant in the foreign policy.¹² Realism was no longer capable of explaining in full the American foreign policy. After the end of the Cold

¹⁰ Arthur Schlesinger Jr., "America and the World: Isolationism Resurgent?" in *American Foreign Policy*, 580.

¹¹ John Gerard Ruggie, "The Past as Prologue? Interests, Identity and American Foreign Policy," *International Security* 21, no. 4 (Spring 1997): 91-92.

¹² Samuel Huntington, "The Erosion of American National Interests," *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 5 (Sep-Oct. 1997), <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/19970901faessay3794/samuel-p-huntington/the-erosion-of-american-national-interests.html>.

War, three competing grand strategies emerged, each one offering its own premises and predictions concerning the future of American foreign policy.

These strategies are:

- 1) Selective Engagement: its advocates drive their perception from the realist theory focusing on the concept of power. The Post-Cold War era cannot produce a balance of power. States deter each other, but they still need a leader that is capable of maintaining this balance of power. The U.S., for them, should claim that role.
- 2) Cooperative Security: its advocates derive their ideology from liberal theory. They believe that the U.S. has a huge national interest in world peace. The U.S. should work collectively with international institutions as much as possible.
- 3) Primacy: just like Selective Engagement, it is motivated by power and peace. Maintaining the Primacy, which emerged after the end of the Cold War, is vital for both world peace and American national security.¹³

By looking into American foreign policy on the ground, one can conclude that the best theory explaining such behavior is Neo-liberalism. Realism lost its ground when it could not predict the peaceful ending of the Cold War. Moreover, the economic suffering of the Soviet Union gave strength to liberal thinking.¹⁴

¹³ Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, "Competing Visions of U.S. Grand Strategy," *International Security* 21, no. 3 (Winter 1996/1997): 17-21, 32-30, 32-42.

¹⁴ Meyers, 143.

2. American Involvement in the Middle East

American involvement in the Middle East has never been easy since it is a region filled with political uncertainties and hostility. Conflicts between Middle Eastern states are common, and political differences are wide enough to create a source for vulnerable conflicts. Iran is seen as a threat to the Gulf States; Saddam Hussein of Iraq was a source of threat not only to the Middle East but also the whole world; Turkey is a major military power in the region, with its relations with Israel and growing alliance with the West; and finally, the most complicated and dangerous, is the Arab-Israeli conflict.¹⁵

A. Interests:

Internal problems are not the only causes of difficulty in maintaining American interests in the region. The conflicting nature of these interests has been a nightmare to a number of American administrations, with each president trying to balance his policies to pursue even-handed policies in the region., particularly with regard to American interests in Arab oil and the security of Israel. On the one hand, too much emphasis on securing Arab oil or pro-Arab policies would invoke negative reactions from the Jewish lobby and pro-Israel supporters, which would be damaging for any president or presidential candidate. On the other hand, pro-Israel policies could trigger a rise in oil prices and threaten the existence of pro-American Arab regimes.¹⁶

¹⁵ Henry Kissinger, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy* (London: Free Press, 2002), 165.

¹⁶ Eric Watkins, "The Unfolding U.S. Policy in the Middle East," *International Affairs* 73, Issue 1 (Jan. 1997): 1.

A.1 Oil:

A.1.a History:

World War II pinpointed the importance of the Middle East to the United States. Before WWII, U.S. involvement in the Middle East was restricted to the protection of its economic interests, with limited political involvement. During WWII, however, America was responsible for supplying almost 70% of the energy sources needed during the war, making it almost impossible to rely completely on American national energy sources. The need for external energy sources brought the Middle East, especially the Gulf States, to the attention of American policy makers and businessmen. In a speech dated February 18 1943, Theodore Roosevelt pointed out the importance of Arab oil, stating that Saudi Arabia had become very important to American national security.¹⁷

Moreover, by the end of the war, oil prices were booming in the international market, causing a dramatic shortage of dollar reserves in almost all European states. As a consequence, oil became a very important commodity in reviving the European economy, a mission taken very seriously by the U.S. More than 10% of the financial aid given to Europe was spent on oil, generating increasing demand over Western petroleum products. The U.S. feared that the increase in this trend would have a

¹⁷ رؤوف عباس، "أمريكا و الشرق العربي في الحرب العالمية الثانية." في سلامة و آخرون. ص ٣٨-٣٩.

negative effect on its national oil reserves. To overcome these difficulties, the U.S. encouraged its private oil companies to seek oil sources in the Middle East.¹⁸

A.1.b Cold War era:

The importance of oil in the Gulf is not due to the amount imported by the U.S. since it constitutes only 10% of domestic use; the Gulf oil is important due to its impact on the international economy. The Gulf produces almost 55% of the world's oil reserves, and during the Cold War, the U.S. did not want that oil to fall into the hands of hostile enemies. The Gulf oil can also be used as an indirect means to influence Europe and Japan, who depend much more on Gulf oil than the U.S.; 30% of European oil imports and nearly 80% of Japan's come from the Gulf.¹⁹

Being a net importer of oil in the 1970s, the U.S. became vulnerable to any change in oil policies in the Middle East.²⁰ The 1973 war strengthened the American fear that Arabs would use oil as a strategic weapon. However, to overcome this problem, the U.S. achieved a breakthrough in March 1974, ensuring that Arab oil would not be used any more as a strategic weapon. Kissinger took measures to put an end to the boycott and to eliminate any future attempts. In a press conference in November 1973, he clearly stated that the U.S. would take counter measures against

¹⁸ لوسون فرد، "إدارة ترومان و الفلسطينيين" في سليمان ميخائيل، فلسطين و السياسة الأمريكية: من ويلسون إلى كلينتون (بيروت: مركز دراسات الوحدة العربية، يونيو ١٩٩٦) ص ٩٥-٩٤.

¹⁹ Mamoun Fandy, "U.S. Oil Policy in the Middle East," *Foreign Policy in Focus* 2, no. 4 (Jan. 1997), <http://www.fpiif.org/briefs/vol2/v2n4oil.html>.

²⁰ Watkins, 3.

countries that joined the boycott. Furthermore, he also used economic incentives to persuade Arab countries to terminate the boycott.²¹

A.1.c Post Cold War era:

The end of the Cold War did not affect the importance of oil for America. Despite the fact that oil became a market commodity, reducing the threat of its being used for political means, the oil market witnessed changes that worked against American interests.²²

A.2 Safeguarding Israel:

A.2.a Opposing views:

Many attempts have been made to evaluate the American-Israeli relationship and its nature; the outcomes of that research have always been controversial. Two interpretations dominate the outcomes of such research that are viable during and after the Cold War. First, some scholars believe that the American policy-making process is mainly dominated by Zionist and pro-Israeli views. Advocates of this analysis give many examples to strengthen their interpretation. For example, George Ball, former Undersecretary of State, explained the American reaction to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 as follows: “Rather than pursuing our own objectives and looking out

²¹ محمد الأطرش، السياسة الأمريكية تجاه الصراع العربي الإسرائيلي: ١٩٧٣-١٩٧٥. بيروت: مركز دراسات الوحدة العربية، يوليو ١٩٨٧. ص ٢٧٣.

²² Watkins, 3.

for our own interests, we have offered ourselves to the Israeli government as the uncritical, undemanding supporter of its objectives, prepared to help it achieve goals not our own and then sweep up the breakage created by its violent pursuit of excessive ambitions.”²³

On the other hand, there are researchers who believe that Israel in fact serves American interests in the region and that Israel is a reliable collaborator in strategic, political and economic goals within and beyond the Middle East.²⁴ Moreover, this unique relationship between Israel and the U.S. is due to the symmetric nature of the parties’ interests. Advocates of this approach usually go back to statements made by American politicians that bolster this perception. For example, Kenneth Organski reached the conclusion that U.S. policy toward Israel is based on foreign policy reasons rather than domestic pressure or any other factor, stating: “U.S. policy decisions with respect to Israel have, in the main, been made by presidents and presidential foreign policy elites both by themselves and for reasons entirely their own. When the U.S. did not see Israel supporting U.S. interests in stemming the expansion of the Soviet influence, it did not help Israel. When U.S. leaders . . . decided that Israel could be an asset in the U.S. struggle with radical Arabs who were perceived as Soviet clients, they helped Israel.”²⁵

²³George Ball, “America in the Middle East: A Breakdown in Foreign Policy,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 13 (Spring 1984): 4.

²⁴Phyllis Bennis, “U.S. Strategic Reach in the Middle East,” *Foreign Policy in Focus* 1, no. 17 (November 1996), <http://www.fpif.org/briefs/vol1/mideast.html>.

²⁵Robert Lieber, “Domestic Politics and Foreign policy: Making Sense of America’s Role in the Middle East Process,” *World Affairs*, (Summer, 1998), http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2393/is_n1_v161/ai_20973123.

What gives Israel a privilege in its relation with the U.S. is the strong sense of resemblance in the minds of Americans between the way the two states were created and the difficulties they face. Americans believe that they share biblical heritage with Israel. They also believe that they share the same Western democratic values.²⁶

B. Threats:

American interests in the Middle East face a variety of threats that changed with the course of time.

B.1 Cold War era:

B.1.a The Soviet Union:

The first major threat to the American interest in the Middle East was the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The U.S. was aware that the Soviet Union had interests in the Middle East and feared that the spread of Soviet influence in the region would affect its dominance over Arab oil. In doing so, the Soviets would have been able not only to prevent the U.S. from obtaining oil resources, but also to dominate a very important segment of its economy. Moreover, European States would have been driven into the Soviet block in order to sustain their oil supplies from the Gulf.²⁷

²⁶ Kathleen Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine: Their Influence on U.S. Middle East Policy* (London: University of California Press, Ltd, 1999), 2-3.

²⁷ حتي، مصدر سابق، ص. ٦٧-٦٨

The Soviet Union did not only threaten American economic interests in the Middle East. The U.S. was also worried that the Soviets would supply unfriendly Arab states with nuclear weapons and support Arab Nationalist Movements.

B.1.b Arab Nationalist Movements:

In the 1940s, the U.S. was trying to counter the spread of Arab nationalist movements which called for the termination of Arab dependence on the West and were against American dominance in the region. It is true that some alliances were made during the Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy years with some nationalist movements, but they were exceptions. Between 1955 and 1970, U.S. policy was in opposition to secular Arab nationalism led by Abd El-Nasser of Egypt.²⁸

After the death of Nasser, Egypt became a close ally to America, but the threat of nationalists did not disappear completely. Arab nationalism was still alive in Syria and Iraq through their Ba' thist regimes.

B.2 Post Cold War Era:

The end of the Cold War did not put an end to American fears towards Arab nationalist movements. During the Iraq-Iran war, Saddam Hussein received great support from the U.S. as part of its Dual Containment policy. The end of the war, however, made the U.S. fear the growing military and economic power Iraq possessed at the time. Iraq had become a threat to the American-friendly Gulf states and Israel. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait materialized that fear. As a reaction to the Iraqi invasion,

²⁸ Fawaz A Gerges, "Islam and Muslims in the Mind of America: Influences on the Making of U.S. Policy," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 26, no. 2 (Winter 1997): 73.

the U.S. created a coalition through a huge number of UN resolutions aiming at the termination of the Iraqi presence in Kuwait.

Sanctions and war against Iraq did not leave American interests immune or safe from other threats. These newly realized threats would mainly target elites with close relationships to the U.S.²⁹ Though these threats seemed new, the U.S. was aware of them. The end of the Cold War brought to the surface their importance to policy makers, putting them on top of the priority list when dealing with the region. The most dominant threat was the so-called militant Islamic movements and trends.

B.2.a Militant Islamic Movements:

In April 1993, acting coordinator for counterturns, Laurence Pope, noted: “Twenty years ago in the Arab world, secular nationalism was the preferred ideology. And so it was the ideology that terrorists adopted as a cover for their actions. Increasingly, it’s Islamic ideology, extremist Islamic ideology, which provides that cover.”³⁰

There were two reasons behind perceiving Islamic ideology as a threat. The first was the outbreak of the Iranian revolution and its effect on oil revenues. The importance of Iran to American policy makers was not only restricted to its huge oil resources. Having an anti-American regime in Iran would also threaten American-friendly Gulf states and their oil. Serving as an aspiration for Islamists in the region and beyond, the Iranian Islamic regime threatened American allies and put pressure on Gulf

²⁹ Richard K Herman, “The Middle East and the New World Order: Rethinking U.S. Political Strategy After the Gulf War,” *International Security* 16, no. 2 (Fall 1991): 43.

³⁰ Geroges, 73.

governments to change their relationship with America.³¹ A U.S. official said: “The Iranian experience extremely conditioned U.S. thinking about the violent, anti-American nature of fundamentalist Islam.”³² The use of the word “nature” indicates the American perspective that “fundamental Islam” is constant, making it a contentious and perpetual threat against America.

Ironically, the U.S. used Islam as a weapon against the Soviet Union in the Cold War during the height of the Iranian revolution. In the name of Islam, the U.S. supported Islamic movements in Afghanistan to eliminate the Soviet dominance at the time. When the Soviets interfered militarily to support their client against Islamic movements, the U.S. supported these movements, providing them with financial and political support.

The second reason for America to view Islam as a threat is that it had not been attacked on its own soil nor witnessed war on its own ground since the end of the Civil War until 1993 when, supposedly in the name of Islam, America was attacked at home. In 1993, the World Trade Center in New York was bombed. Ten Muslims were convicted of waging war on the U.S. and its allies; in the same year, President Mubarak of Egypt, a close ally of the U.S., was subjected to an assassination attempt by the same group that attacked the WTC.³³

This research focuses on the American attitude towards one special part within the Middle East: Palestine. The issue of Palestine is at the core of the Arab-

³¹ Watkins, 6.

³² Gerges, 70.

³³ Ibid., 72

Israeli conflict, which dominates the agenda of American foreign policy in the region. The next section gives a brief history of the way American thinking has been shaped through the past decades in regards to the issue of Palestine.

3. American Involvement in Palestine: Historical Background:

Due to the interrelated and integrated history of Palestine and Israel, Israeli-American relations play a crucial role in Palestinian-American relations. Since Woodrow Wilson, the U.S. has committed itself to the Zionist program in Palestine, and American foreign policy towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been viewed from an Israeli perspective, thereby marring the Palestinian point of view.

Disregarding the root of the conflict, the Palestinian disposition in 1948, made it almost impossible for U.S. policy makers to have a full and unbiased picture of the conflict. For half a century, until 1993 when Israel and the Palestinians signed the peace agreement, the dominant assumption prevailing among American policy makers was that the Palestinian position was “mischievously inspired” and derived by “unreasoned hatred”.³⁴

A. Rooted Beliefs:

A.1 History:

The current American frame of reference towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was not formed with the creation of the State of Israel or when Zionism became a force in Palestine and the United States. It started in the 19th century, when Westerners started to visit Palestine, the “Holy Land”. The Westerners returned home with certain assumptions about the land and its people, most of which were negative.

³⁴ Kathleen Christison, “Blind Spots: Official U.S. Myths about the Middle East,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 17, Issue 2 (Winter 1988): 46.

Arabs in general were commonly perceived as wild, cruel robbers. The significant religious status of Palestine made it attractive to Orientalists who perceived Palestinians as being aliens in their own homeland. In their writings, Palestinians were referred to as “Arabs”, without giving them any special identity. “The assumption that the real Palestine was not Muslim or Arab but Christian and/or Jewish constituted a symbolic dispossession of the Palestinians and gained hold of the Western imagination before the first Zionist settlers ever conceived of migrating to Palestine”³⁵

By the end of the 1920s, the idea that Palestine was a Jewish land had become firmly established. The U.S. was committed to supporting Zionism, and Wilson’s successors in the 1920s were more tied to Zionism than he had been. In the late 1920s, U.S. Jews were still a small minority even though they were skilled and well organized. Yet in this early period, they had monopoly over public views and were capable of playing an important role in shaping U.S. policy towards Palestine. The fact that the American public held a negative perception towards Palestinians, had no knowledge of the political issues surrounding the Palestinian conflict, and the absence of any counter movement or argument against the Zionist claims helped Zionists in formulating American public opinion in their favor. There were no Palestinian lobbyists in this era attempting to counter the sophisticated work of Zionist lobbyists. There was no Palestinian block to influence American politicians and no articles or books explaining the Palestinian point of view in the conflict.

³⁵ Ibid, 47-49.

By the end of WWII, the idea that Jews had the right to possess Palestine was deeply rooted in the minds of Americans, so deep that it became difficult to be refuted. Ever since Wilson's endorsement of the Balfour Declaration, the commitment towards Zionism has never changed. The horrific events that took place in Europe during the Nazi regime and the spreading news about the holocaust and the persecution of Jews reinforced American sympathy with Zionism and deepened the notion that Jews had to have their own country to be safe. American Zionists were very organized in their campaign during this time. They used their well established connections with high level officials, congressmen, and their monopoly over the media to convince the American public of their case. Zionist action groups were organized with more than 400 local committees all over the U.S. The White House and State Department received a huge amount of letters from volunteers asking for American support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Millions of pamphlets were distributed along with books, articles and academic studies.³⁶

B. Role of Zionist Organizations:

Between 1945 and 1948, Zionist organizations played a very important role in shaping American public opinion. They worked on projecting their program into the minds of Americans, ignoring the Palestinian perspective regarding their own future. Zionists did not only depend on Jewish organizations, they also made sure to have supporters from various Christian organizations. In 1946, the American Palestine

³⁶Donald Neff, *Fallen Pillars: U.S. Policy Toward Palestine and Israel since 1956* (Washington: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1995), 23.

Committee, a Protestant group, was revitalized with secret Zionist funds. The aim of resorting to Christian organizations was to crystallize the sympathy of Christian Americans for the Zionist goal. The growth of Zionist influence was clear in a memorandum sent by Secretary of State Edward Stettinius to the newly elected president Harry Truman, warning him against the pressure he would get from the Zionists if he did not recognize the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.³⁷

One of the greatest examples of the way Zionists used literature and movies to influence American thoughts towards Palestinians was a novel that was widely read in the U.S.. The novel was titled *Exodus* and was published in 1958. This novel did not mention Palestinians, only Arabs. No special identity was given to the former. As Arabs, they were portrayed as lazy, violent, uncivilized, and religiously intolerant. The novel became a movie that witnessed the same success as the novel.³⁸ Polls conducted on the eve of the 1948 war showed that Americans were unaware of the situation in the region. Only 20% thought that they had enough knowledge of the situation, and most supported the Israeli claims. Those 20% thought of the conflict as an Arab-Jewish conflict, without mentioning Palestinians as a distinct people.³⁹

Zionists gained preference inside the different American administrations largely due to the fact that new presidents mostly came to office with no previous knowledge of the conflict. They received their knowledge through their advisers and

³⁷ Ibid, 23-27

³⁸ Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*, 103-104

³⁹ إبراهيم أبو لغد، "سياسة أمريكا تجاه فلسطين." *المستقبل العربي*. العدد ٢٠٣. بيروت: مركز دراسات الوحدة العربية. ١٩٩٦. ص. ٨٢

bureaucrats. The presidents' advisers, most of whom were pro-Israel, usually got more attention from the president than the bureaucrats, as they were mainly perceived as being overwhelmingly pro-Arab in their approach towards the region.⁴⁰

C. Role of Arab and Muslim Organizations:

An important force in the U.S. that could have countered the Zionist monopoly in American policy making was the Muslim community. It was estimated that the number of American Muslims outnumbered American Jews. In spite of that, Muslim influence over American foreign policy making was marginal.⁴¹ Despite the fact that the Muslim community in America today is growing constantly, it still faces the same problems due to the fact that immigrant Muslims form the majority of the Muslim community in the U.S. In 1965, the Immigration Act opened the door for Muslim immigrants to come to the States, and most of them were well educated. In the 1950s, black Americans gave strength to this community. However, most Muslim Americans were perceived as radicals.

One of the undermining factors that give preference to the Jewish lobby is the fact that American Jews usually act first as Jews and second as people of national origin. In contrast, Muslim Americans respond to four principle identities in themselves. First, they are attached to their national origin; second, they are attached to their racial origin, which is mostly important to Black Muslims who constitute 42

⁴⁰ Christison, "Blind Spots," 53.

⁴¹ Ibid., 493.

percent of the community; third, they try to influence policy as Muslims “per se”, which makes them work on a variety of issues; finally, they act like Americans, holding a variety of ideas concerning different aspects of policies just like other Americans from other religious groups.⁴²

The rise of the Palestinian *Fedayeen* in the 1960s did not only affect American politics towards Palestinians in Palestine or in refugee camps; it also affected Arab Americans and Arabs living in the U.S. Arab Americans were subjected to organized campaigns by a number of federal agencies. Motivated by security concerns, as a U.S. official claimed, the government became engaged in legal and illegal exercises designed to determine the amount of support given by domestic Arab organizations to Palestinian or pro-Palestinian organizations abroad. Such policies restricted the scattered and limited attempts made by Arab Americans to counter the influence of the Zionist lobby in the U.S.⁴³ Due to such governmental actions and out of fear of Zionist extremists, many Arab Americans decided not to be outspoken about their ideas and beliefs about Middle East policies.⁴⁴

The long denial of the origin of the Palestinian problem, the overwhelming monopoly of the Jewish lobby over American policy making towards the Middle East, the negative perception Americans held towards Palestinians, and strategic

⁴² Ali Mazuri, “Between the Crescent and the Star- Sprang led Banner: American Muslims and U.S. Foreign Policy,” *International Affairs*, 77, Issue 3 (July 1996): 494.

⁴³Michael R. Fischbach, “Government Pressure Against Arabs in the United States,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 14, Issue 3 (Spring 1985): 87.

⁴⁴ Mazuri, 496.

considerations concerning the Cold War were the most important factors that affected American policy making process towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

D. Wall of Defiance:

After the fighting ceased in 1948, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, said that the U.S. was aware that the creation of the Israeli state “involved injustice to the Arab States”.⁴⁵ Clearly Dulles’s statement showed that Palestinians were not involved in the American perception of the conflict. The ultimate concern of U.S. policy makers was Arab states, not Palestinians. For American policy makers, Palestinian refugees were a problem because they were seen as a disenchanting group with a potential for upsetting the status quo. Since the U.S. perceived it as a refugee problem, their approach towards Palestinians focused on refugee relief. This policy was an effort to provide tangible evidence of the American willingness to have friendship with Arabs. By providing Palestinians with relief, they thought they promoted regional stability but, instead, established and contained an important source of friction in the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁴⁶

As time passed by and Palestinians kept depending on Arab states as their political voice, the U.S. lost interest in the Palestinians, even as refugees. Palestinians

⁴⁵ Kathleen Christison, “Bound by a Frame of Reference, Part II: U.S. Policy and the Palestinians, 1948-1988,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 26, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 20.

⁴⁶ Dan Tschirgi, *The American Search for Mideast Peace* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1991), 5.

did not reemerge on the political agenda until late 1960s when they forced themselves into the world through armed struggle, which was and is still called terrorist activity. The armed struggle, especially the high-jacking of civilian airplanes, brought the Palestinian issue into the minds of people all over the world.

Chapter II

From Nixon to Bush

Frustrated by the failure of Pan Arabism to take any tangible actions in their favor, Palestinians concluded that they must take the lead in their conflict. After the 1967 war, the Palestinian resistance movement became a significant factor in Middle Eastern politics.

Before 1967, the U.S. was not interested in the activities conducted by the PLO. From the American perspective, as long as Israel saw PLO actions as no more than an irritant, there was no need for the U.S. to be concerned about the scattered news of its actions. However, by early 1967, raids by members of *Fatah* and other resistance groups pushed Israel to complain to the UN about Palestinian military actions.⁴⁷ The outbreak of the 1967 war did not change the fundamental American perspective towards Palestinians. The war brought up another category of Palestinians, along with refugees, which was “civilians under occupation”. The U.S. also did not change its attitude despite the fact that international consensus had recognized the Palestinians as a separate people, deserving all the rights enjoyed by other peoples of the world.⁴⁸

Although the PLO formulated its own political agenda, America failed to see this and still regarded the Palestinian problem as merely a refugee problem. At the same time, as Palestinians were becoming more politically active, the U.S. felt closer

⁴⁷ Robert Kumamoto, *International Terrorism & American Foreign Relations: 1945-1976* (Boston: Northeastern University press, 1999), 116.

⁴⁸ Neff, *Fallen Pillars*, 113.

to Israel, increasing the tendency to ignore Palestinian claims and rights. In the years after 1967, the PLO-American relationship was generally antagonistic, as well as complex and contradictory. Shocked by the Palestinian armed struggle and distrusting the PLO as a radicalizing influence in the Middle East, Washington never accepted the organization as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.⁴⁹

The American attitude towards the PLO as a nationalist movement was also derived from a long history of American support to Western states against similar movements. America supported France in its war against the Algerian movement, and Portugal against the liberation movements in Africa. It was, hence, logical to pursue the same policy towards the PLO.⁵⁰

Liberation movements using armed struggle against their occupiers were seen by the U.S. as terrorist organizations. The State Department defines terrorism as “the threat or use of violence for political purposes by individuals or groups, whether acting for, or in opposition to, established government authority, when such actions are intended to shock, stun or intimidate a target group wider than the immediate victims”⁵¹

The Palestinian image in this period was like a double-edged sword. Airline high-jackings and hostage-takings brought the Palestinian issue into the consciousness of Americans, making people understand that their problem was more than a refugee problem, but it gave at the same time a negative perception of

⁴⁹ Tschirgi, 29.

⁵⁰ ابراهيم أبو لغد، مصدر سابق ذكره، ص. ٨٤.

⁵¹ Kumamoto, 3.

Palestinians. The Palestinians had been labeled as terrorists, aimed at the destruction of the only democratic Western-like state in the Middle East: Israel.

A distinct factor in the American involvement in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was that it isolated itself from the international consensus on this issue. It created its own approach and kept it for decades. The international consensus was based on the exchange of territory for peace, which is based on UN resolutions 242 and 338. The American approach did not ignore UN resolutions 242 and 338; the U.S. thought of them as a foundation for a reasonable settlement but also endorsed the concept of direct bilateral negotiations between states in a step-by-step process which would eventually lead to a comprehensive settlement. The concept of territory for peace remained unclear and seemed to allow Israel to keep some parts of the occupied territories.⁵²

⁵² Naser Aruri, "The United States and Palestine: Reagan's Legacy to Bush," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 81, no. 3 (Spring 1989): 4.

1. The Nixon Era:

Nixon was inaugurated as president in January 1969. Only days after he came to office, Nixon displayed his interest in the Middle East. He described the area as a “powder keg”, capable of leading to a confrontation between the two super powers. He promised to provide new initiatives and policies to bring peace to the region.⁵³

A. Policy Makers:

Nixon appointed William Rogers as his Secretary of State and gave him considerable freedom in Middle East policy so that Nixon could concentrate more on East-West affairs and the Vietnam War.⁵⁴ Despite his intention, a prominent member in his administration fought his way into the Middle East affairs. Henry Kissinger, the National Security Adviser, became involved in Middle East policy making in 1971 and soon gained the reputation of being the official who shaped the U.S. policy towards the Middle East in general, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular, not only during Nixon’s tenure but also for many years after. As he told the Egyptian National Security Adviser Hafez Ismail in 1971, Nixon was against the involvement of Kissinger in the Middle East policy making process since he thought that being a Jew would affect Kissinger’s decisions, which would be disadvantageous in any Middle East negotiations.⁵⁵

⁵³ Tchirgi, 55.

⁵⁴ Rogers had no experience in international politics and was chosen for this post because Nixon thought of him a better negotiator than a policy maker, the kind of a man Nixon was looking for. See Tchirgi, P.57.

⁵⁵ Mohamed Heikal, *Secret Channels: The Inside Story of Arab-Israeli Peace Negotiations* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1996), 150.

Within the Nixon administration there were two camps concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict. The first one thought that peace in the Middle East was essential to U.S. interests and wanted to seek a comprehensive Arab-Israeli agreement. The other group, led by Kissinger, perceived the conflict in the context of superpower relations, which meant that the U.S. should dictate the policies in the region. The latter group thought that Israel was the best and only U.S. ally in the region, as Arab states were more affiliated with the Soviet Union.⁵⁶ Both Nixon and Kissinger were globalists in thinking. They may have had differences on minor issues, but they were on the same side when it came to interpreting the Palestinian issue. They were interested in the way the conflict could affect the American Soviet relations and uninterested in the issues themselves that were involved.⁵⁷

Nixon was so unaware of the Palestinians that he mentioned them only twice in his memoirs, referring to them only as guerrillas or extremists. Kissinger did not know much about Palestinians either, nor about the Arab-Israeli conflict, as he did not mention Palestinians in his memoirs even once. Although Kissinger was not well informed about the conflict, he was a strong supporter of Israel. Those who worked with him tended to describe him as a friend or advisor to Israel more than a statesman.⁵⁸

Nixon's perception of Palestinians as terrorists was crystallized very early in his career. Less than a month after he took office, the Popular Front for the Liberation of

⁵⁶ Heikal, 150.

⁵⁷ Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*, 126.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 129.

Palestine (PFLP) attacked an El Al airliner as it prepared to take off from Zurich. The new administration condemned the attack and began immediate consultations with other governments to seek international cooperation to halt future attacks. During Nixon's tenure, the U.S. was a direct target outside of the Western hemisphere for the first time when, on 29th August 1969, the PFLP hijacked an American airliner. The PFLP attributed this attack to the American veto of a UN resolution that criticized Israel for violating the UN Charter, breaking the cease-fire resolutions of June 1967 and the American delivery of Phantom jets to Israel.⁵⁹

It is worth mentioning that during Nixon's years in the White House, the first major organized campaign against Arabs and Arab Americans was launched. During that period, it was noticed that Arabs started to disseminate information, especially on university campuses, to introduce the Arab and Palestinian perspective to Americans. Some officials believed that this was a great security concern; moreover, Zionists started to spread propaganda that Palestinian organizations, especially Fatah, were trying to seek help to start communications with radical American organizations, such as the Black Panther Party, the Students for Democratic Society, and various communist parties.⁶⁰

B. Palestine within the Context of the Middle East:

Unrest in the region was a disturbing factor to American officials because of the complex and interrelated nature of its problems. Palestinian armed resistance

⁵⁹ Kumamoto, 123-124.

⁶⁰ Fischbach, 89.

brought back the dilemma of supporting Israel in its fight against Palestinians whilst preserving its interests in the Arab states. The U.S. believed that the growing number and power of Palestinian *fedayeen* in Jordan were a threat to its ally, the Hashemite Kingdom. In Lebanon, the presence of *fedayeen* was believed to halt any efforts to form an effective government. Another source of concern was the Soviets' massive military sales to Arab regimes with nationalistic ideology, states that resisted American involvement in the region, such as Egypt, Syria and Iraq.⁶¹

C. Palestine within the Context of the Cold War:

As part of its *détente* policy, the Nixon administration made an attempt in its early months to coordinate Arab-Israeli policy with the Soviet Union. Frequent meetings were held between U.S. officials and Soviet counterparts to produce joint U.S.-Soviet principles for a peace agreement. The most important difficulty that faced Americans and Soviets, was Arab insistence on preconditioning Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories of 1967 before conducting negotiations with Israel. At the same time, Israel insisted that a peace agreement should be a condition for withdrawal. The meetings led to a dead end, and the two parties were incapable of reaching any progress.⁶²

D. The Roger Plan:

As a result, William Roger, then Secretary of State, decided to introduce his own ideas, which became known as the "Roger's Plan". The aim of the plan was to

⁶¹ Kumamoto, 125.

⁶² Heikal, 150-151.

achieve peace between Egypt and Israel from one side, and Jordan and Israel from the other. Palestinians were only mentioned as refugees, and nothing was mentioned about the right of self-determination. The Roger's Plan did not make any progress due to Israeli rejection.

Israel felt that the Roger's Plan was against its interests and that the U.S. was sacrificing Israeli interests to improve its situation in the Cold War and to improve its relationships with Arab states. On the 22nd of December 1969, the Israeli ministerial council declared its refusal, using harsh language. At the very time when Roger was criticizing the language used by the Israelis, the Soviets submitted a memo declaring their refusal of the plan.⁶³

The Administration was divided over the content of the plan. Nixon was afraid of the negative public reaction, which led him to meet with American-Jewish leaders, telling them that the plan did not have his full backing. Moreover, Kissinger actively opposed the plan. From his point of view, the plan was rewarding Egypt for its links with the Soviets and punishing Israel for being loyal to Washington. Kissinger was in favor of delaying any settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict to make sure that Arab states realized that the Soviet Union was incapable of securing an Israeli withdrawal and that only the U.S. was capable of doing so.⁶⁴

In the spring of 1970, Roger admitted that one of the four major mistakes that the U.S. had made in its approach to the Middle East was that they "assumed that the

⁶³ William B. Quandt, *Peace process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967* (Washington: Brookings Institute Press, 2001), 68.

⁶⁴ Heikal, 151-153.

Palestinians could be dealt with in a settlement purely as a refugee problem. Instead, they had become a quasi-independent force with veto power over policy in Jordan and perhaps even Lebanon.”⁶⁵

E. Black September:

Despite the fact that the Roger plan neglected Palestinians, they had now forced themselves into the U.S. agenda. The U.S. was threatened by the *fedayeen*, especially in Jordan. The U.S. was afraid that the growing power of the *fedayeen* in Jordan would undermine the King’s ability to achieve peace, and worse they feared that he might be replaced by a radical government affiliated with the PLO, which was in turn seen as being an agent for Soviets.

The events of Black September materialized American fears as they threatened a wide-spread unrest in the region. On September 16 and 1970, the Jordanian army engaged in heavy fighting with Palestinian *fedayeen* to undermine their presence and power within the Kingdom. The King of Jordan, afraid that Iraq and Syria may step in to help the PLO, asked the U.S. for help. The fighting started to escalate in a way tantamount to civil war. Syria sent its troops to Jordan and engaged in military actions against the Jordanian army.⁶⁶ The United States did not interfere militarily in the conflict, though American troops in the Mediterranean were deployed. This deployment was not for military reasons, however, but rather a

⁶⁵ Helena Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organization: People, Power and Politics* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 253.

⁶⁶ Christinson, *Perceptions of Palestine*, 128

political maneuver.⁶⁷ The U.S. felt it was in a very uncomfortable situation as it was almost impossible to send American troops to Jordan. It was also aware that Jordan would not directly seek Israel's help.

The fighting ended in favor of King Hussein as the Syrian troops withdrew from Jordan without really escalating the conflict. The Palestinian *fedayeen* were defeated, leaving Jordan to settle in Lebanon for many years to come. The defeat of the Palestinians in that conflict was perceived as a victory over the Soviets as they refrained from taking any military actions after the U.S. threatened to intervene directly.⁶⁸

F. The 1973 War:

The 1973 war marked a new stage in American involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The war was a surprise and was interpreted as a confrontation between the two super powers, especially in terms of arms supplies. Despite that, the war did not change the American perspective concerning Palestinians.

The same year brought a disaster to Nixon: the Watergate scandal. With Nixon caught up in that, Kissinger became more involved in formulating American policy towards the Middle East. As the Palestinian image was not very favorable in the minds of Americans, it was hard for policy makers to believe that Palestinians were willing to come to terms with Israel.

⁶⁷ Camille Mansour, *Beyond Alliance: Israel, U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Colombia university Press, 1994), 103.

⁶⁸ Quandt, 79-80, 83.

Kissinger rejected four proposals from the PLO after and during the 1973 war, indicating acceptance of Israel and willingness to participate in peace negotiations. Kissinger thought that the PLO was incapable of showing any kind of flexibility. He clearly indicated that, saying of the PLO that “even should it change its professed aims, it would not likely remain moderate for long.”⁶⁹

In response to one of PLO leader Yasser Arafat’s proposals, Kissinger sent the CIA deputy director to meet a close associate of Arafat in Rabat in November, 1973. The meeting did not go anywhere in terms of bridging the gape between the PLO and America. For Kissinger, however, the meeting was successful because it achieved his goals, which were to gain time and to prevent any assaults during the early peace talks.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*, P.26.

⁷⁰ Cobban, 236.

2. The Ford Era:

In August 1974, Nixon resigned and was succeeded by his vice president Gerald Ford. Ford had limited experience in the field of foreign policy making. He never thought he would be president and never worked for it. He was well known, however, for being close to Israel and being in favor of a strong defensive policy. Other than that, no one knew what he had in mind concerning the Middle East.⁷¹

A. Kissinger in Charge:

Ford's lack of experience kept Kissinger in charge of Middle East policy for some time, keeping his step-by-step tactic. The Ford years did not bring any change in American policies towards the Palestinians. Kissinger kept his policy of isolating Palestinians from any peace agreement as he noticed the growing power of the PLO in the world. In June 1975, in a meeting with American Jewish leaders, he clearly stated that he "left the Palestinian question alone in order to work on frontier questions hoping eventually to isolate Palestinians."⁷²

B. U.S.-Israeli Secrete Pledge:

A few weeks later, in September 1975, during the Sinai II Agreement and specifically in the Memorandum of Understanding called "U.S.-Israeli Assurance", a secret pledge was added that would restrict any later administration in its quest for peace. In this secret agreement, the U.S. committed itself not to conduct any form of negotiations or direct official contacts with PLO officials until the latter recognized

⁷¹Quadt, 156-157.

⁷²Cobban, 236.

Israel's right to exist and accepted Security Council resolutions 242 and 338.⁷³ Although the statement prohibited negotiations, it was later understood as prohibiting negotiations and all kinds of communication. Israel insisted on issuing this MOU because it had become aware of the increasing recognition of Palestinians as a people all over the world.⁷⁴

Kissinger was successful in marginalizing the Palestinians and isolating them during the peace negotiations between Egypt and Israel. After the signing of the second peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, U.S. interest in the Middle East subsided and Kissinger became more involved in East-West relations.⁷⁵

C. Recognizing the Political Aspect of the Palestinian Issue:

Ironically, and obviously because of Kissinger's occupation with East-West relations in 1975, Harold Saunders, the then Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, was the first American policy maker to publicly announce that the Palestinian issue had a political aspect. Saunders stated that

We have also repeatedly stated that the legitimate interests of the Palestinian Arabs must be taken into account in the negotiation of Arab-Israeli peace. In many ways, the Palestinian dimension of the Arab-Israeli conflict is the heart of that conflict. Final resolution of the problems arising from the partition of Palestine, the establishment of the State of Israel, and Arab opposition to those events, will not be possible until agreement is reached defining a just and permanent status of the Arab people who consider themselves as Palestinians...in addition to meeting the human needs and responding to legitimate personal claims of the refugees, there is another interest that must be taken into account. It is a fact that many of the three million or so

⁷³Tschirgi, 95.

⁷⁴Neff, 115.

⁷⁵Heikal, 243.

people who call themselves Palestinians today increasingly regard themselves as having their own identity as a people and desire a voice in determining their political status. As with any people in this situation, there are differences among themselves, but the Palestinians collectively are a political factor which must be dealt with if there is to be a peace between Israel and its neighbors.⁷⁶

Saunders' statement did not have any profound effect on American policy making. An important factor behind that was the timing of the speech. By late 1975, Washington was preparing for the 1976 presidential elections. Being caught in the middle of election rhetoric, the statement was forgotten. Moreover, it was reported later that Kissinger played a role in undermining and marginalizing the statement and its importance.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Prepared statement of Harold Saunders, Deputy Assistance for Near Eastern and South Asian affairs, before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East (November 12, 1975). In Walter Laqueur & Barry Rubin, *The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle east Conflict* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 385.

⁷⁷Tschirgi, 97.

3. The Carter Era:

As soon as Jimmy Carter had reached office, his foreign policy making team started an assessment process of the possibility of a peace process in the Middle East and the importance of such a step for the U.S. They thought that the time was appropriate to conclude a comprehensive peace initiative in the Middle East, wherein the U.S. should play a primary role.

Later they started to examine the priority level of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The memory of the 1975 war was still fresh in the American mind, along with its consequences. The oil embargo and its effect on the American economy, as well as the confrontation between the two powers during this war, made the new administration realize that to avoid such a war, peace would have to be achieved and it would have to be comprehensive. On the 4th of February 1977, the National Security Council recommended that Carter consider the Arab-Israeli conflict a high priority. President Carter approved the recommendation.⁷⁸

A. Policy Makers:

Carter was surrounded by an idealist team in his administration, sharing the same vision of solving the Arab-Israeli conflict. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance shared his commitment to human rights. Before coming to the office of National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski had supported inclusion of Palestinians in peace talks, and even the establishment of a Palestinian state. Unlike other presidents, who tended to be suspicious of bureaucracy and depend solely on their advisers in

⁷⁸Quandt, 178-179.

forming foreign policy towards the Middle East in general and the Palestinian issue in particular, Carter depended on senior experts from the bureaucracy, such as Saunders and Quandt, as well as career ambassadors, in his policy making process.⁷⁹

B. Palestinians in the Mind of Carter:

Carter was the first U.S. president to try to change the U.S. behavior towards Palestinians. He was able to overturn decades-old misconceptions about the Palestinian marginality, but he was ultimately defeated by the persistence of the old negative perceptions. Carter regarded Palestinians as the Blacks he had struggled for in battles against desegregation in the South. He was an idealist trying to make a difference in the world. He was the first American president to break the old established conventions, calling Palestinians by their names or using PLO interchangeably.⁸⁰ He believed that the Palestinians should be involved in the negotiations, with the PLO as their representative. One of the essential points of the Carter administration's concept of peace was that "Palestinians would have to participate in the formulation of peace. Overall peace must include the creation of a Palestinian political entity, or "homeland", preferably in association with Jordan."⁸¹

C. Journey Towards Peace:

In his first year in office, Carter was against the step-by-step policy taken by the previous administration. In an attempt to understand the Arab vision of peace, he sent Secretary of State Vance to the Middle East. This step also attempted to present

⁷⁹ Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*, 162

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 159

⁸¹ Tschirgi, 102.

the American vision for peace, trying to build a bridge between the two sides. From the beginning, he faced obstacles that hindered his attempts.

One obstacle was the commitment made previously by Kissinger not to negotiate with the PLO until it recognized the right of Israel to exist, UN resolutions 242 and 338, and the Israeli position towards the PLO involvement in the Geneva peace conference. On his first trip, Vance did not meet any PLO officials, though he was optimistic because of the hints given by the PLO about compromise.⁸² After his trip, Vance declared in a meeting of the National Security Council that all parties he negotiated with were willing to achieve a peace treaty. All of them agreed to go to Geneva in September and to discuss the essential issues before the negotiations commenced.

Those issues were the nature of peace, the Israeli withdrawal, and the Palestinian issue. The most difficult issue facing Vance was the inclusion of a Palestinian delegation in the Geneva conference. Israel made it clear that there was no way it would accept the presence of a PLO delegation unless it declared its acceptance of UN resolution 242 and the right of Israel to exist.⁸³

After Vance's trip, a sequence of meetings was held between Carter and the parties involved. Carter was hoping that the PLO would accept resolution 242, and Prince Fahd of Saudi Arabia promised him to work with the PLO on this matter. Arab

⁸² Tschirgi, 104.

⁸³ Quandt, 185.

leaders, except President Hafez Assad of Syria, were willing to compromise for the sake of a peace treaty, which made Carter more enthusiastic and optimistic.

D. Carter's Vision:

On March 16th Carter gave a speech in which he declared his vision of peace. In this speech, he stated that Palestinians should have a "homeland". As soon as that word came out, reactions spread fast. He faced overwhelming criticism among Israel's supporters for using such a term, while others asked him to specify the meaning of the word "homeland". Arabs were happy hearing Carter using this word, and the PLO conveyed a message to the American administration through Russia, saying it was willing to accept Israel's right to exist in exchange for Israel's endorsement of a Palestinian "homeland". Going a step farther, Carter called on Israel to accept this in return for PLO acceptance of its right to exist. The PLO asked the administration to define the boundaries of the envisaged Palestinian "homeland."⁸⁴

E. The Hard Road towards Peace:

The American enthusiasm of pursuing an Israeli-Palestinian agreement was undermined by events in Israel. On 21st of June 1977, Menachim Begin was elected Israeli prime minister. Although Carter was not enthusiastic about Begin's election, in a meeting between Carter and Begin, attended by Vance, Begin did not seem reluctant to discuss vital issues with the American president. Begin was convinced that direct talks between Israel and the Arabs were the best way to achieve peace. The U.S. role was to be limited to getting the two parties together, leaving them to decide

⁸⁴Tschirgi, 105-106.

the terms of peace. He thought that the Arabs depended heavily on America to pressure Israel.

Unlike previous Israeli prime ministers, Begin thought that he did not need American consultation and that the U.S. should stop presenting peace plans. But it was too late for him, as the U.S. already had a plan.

The U.S. administration came up with five principles that Carter presented to Begin. The first stressed the importance of having a comprehensive peace; the second declared that UN resolutions 242 and 338 had to be the base for any agreement; the third was related to the normalization of relations among parties; the fourth was related to the Israeli withdrawal, in stages, to the line it had held before the June 1967 war, subject to border adjustment; and the final one was related to Palestinians and their right to be involved in deciding their own future.

Begin had reservations on two points of the five. He did not agree that border adjustment should be minor. Secondly, he was against involving Palestinians in determining their own future.⁸⁵ During these negotiations, Carter tried to convince Begin to moderate his plans of constructing more settlements, but he did not make any progress on this issue.⁸⁶

Facing the new Israeli government and its rigid mentality, as well as internal pressure, Carter tried to create a peace formula that could be accepted by all parties. Despite his sincere desire to involve Palestinians in peace talks, he was not willing to

⁸⁵ Quandt, 184.

⁸⁶ Heikal, 252.

pressure Israel to recognize the PLO. His fear of exerting any real pressure on Israel was clearly stated in a conversation that took place between him and the Egyptian Foreign Minister in 1977. In that conversation, he asserted that exerting major pressure on Israel would be personal political suicide for him.⁸⁷

Failing to have a Palestinian recognition of resolutions 242 and 338, as well as the acceptance of Israel's right to exist, made his mission impossible. On October 1st 1977, the U.S. and the Soviet Union issued a joint statement on the Middle East. The statement did not mention resolution 242 and further declared that a settlement should ensure "the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people." The joint statement was welcomed by the PLO, but was heavily denied by Israel and pro-Israel Americans. Trying to ease the tension caused by the joint statement, Carter issued a statement with Moshe Dayan and a "working paper" that included resolutions 242 and 338 as the bases for negotiations at Geneva. The working paper was negatively perceived by the Arab leaders, which put Carter in an uneasy situation.

In November 1977, the Egyptian President Anwar Sadat made his historic trip to Jerusalem as a sign of peace. This visit caused major frictions in the Arab world, though it was perceived as a brave move and a real step towards peace by the Carter administration.

⁸⁷ Neff, *Fallen Pillars*, 118.

F. The Aswan Formula:

Carter's new vision of peace contained three principles that he expressed in a speech delivered in Aswan on January 4th of 1978. Carter's statement became known as the Aswan Formula. These principles were:

- "First, true peace must be based on normal relations among the parties to the peace. Peace means more than just an end to belligerency.
- Second, there must be withdrawal by Israel from territories occupied in 1967 and agreement on secure and recognized borders for all parties in the context of normal and peaceful relations in accordance with UN Resolutions 242 and 338.
- Third, there must be a resolution of the Palestinian problem in all its aspects. The problem must recognize the legitimate rights of all Palestinian people and enable Palestinians to participate in the determination of their own future."⁸⁸

The wording of the statement showed that the U.S. gave up the concept of self-determination in the Palestinian issue. As Seth Tillman puts it: "The Palestinian people were by this means put in notice that although they might 'participate' in deciding their own future, Israel and perhaps others would participate as well, guaranteeing that there would be no Palestinian state. The Wilsonian postulate was thus amended so as to retain most of its language while being divested of most of its meaning."⁸⁹ At this stage, Carter seemed to be willing to undermine his approach to the Palestinian factor to promote peace between Egypt and Israel.

⁸⁸ President Jimmy Carter: Statement on Palestinian Rights. January 4, 1978. In *The Israel-Arab Reader*, 403.

⁸⁹ Tschirgi, 123.

The agreement turned out to be a bilateral pact that Begin had sought all along. There was no serious plan on how autonomy would be achieved, and the words “self-determination” and “inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war” were not mentioned anywhere in the agreement.⁹⁰ Noam Chomsky criticized Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem and the Camp David accord, saying that it did not open the door for a comprehensive peace. On the contrary, he believed, it completed Kissinger’s earlier efforts. The result of this accord was the continuation of the Israeli occupation of the territories, apart from Sinai.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Neff, *Fallen Pillars*, 118.

⁹¹ Noam Chomsky, *Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel & Palestinians*, Updated ed. (Cambridge: South End Press, 1999), 71.

4. The Reagan Era:

As soon as Ronald Reagan came to office, his disagreement with Carter's ideas towards Palestinians and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict were obvious. He criticized the Carter approach harshly, arguing that "no administration had ever deluded itself that Israel was not a permanent strategic interest to the United States."⁹² Reagan openly contradicted Carter on the settlement issue, declaring that he disagreed with the Carter administration when it referred to settlements as illegal.

A. Policy Makers:

His administration was filled with neo-conservatives, who were known for being pro-Israel, especially since he was very suspicious of the State Department's Middle East officials. Even when George Shultz became Secretary of State, he was restrained by the short period he served and the heavy campaign launched against him by pro-Israel activists. Shultz was the only one inside Reagan's administration showing interest in the Palestinian issue.⁹³ Moreover, the Reagan administration established a very strong relationship with American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) which former congressman Paul Findley described as "of unprecedented intimacy"⁹⁴

⁹² Tschirgi, 144-145.

⁹³ Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*, 198-99

⁹⁴ Paul Findley, *They Dare to Speak Out: People and Institutions Confront Israel's Lobby*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2003), 32.

B. The Situation in the Middle East:

When Reagan came to power in 1981, the situation in the Middle East was not an easy one. He had more than one challenge to deal with. On his inauguration day, the Iranian hostage crisis was over; in spite of that, American-Iranian relations were at a very critical and deteriorating stage.

At the same time, Soviet intervention in Afghanistan threatened the pro-Western Gulf regimes. The Arab world was divided; Egypt was under an Arab boycott because of its peace treaty with Israel. The Iraqi invasion of Iran was another source of Arab division. Moreover, Europe took advantage of the American preoccupation with elections and came closer to the PLO. During a summit in Italy in 1980, Europe recognized the Palestinian right of self-determination and statehood, as well as improving the political status of the PLO.⁹⁵

Many who followed Reagan's campaign thought that he came to office without a clear policy towards the Middle East, but time proved them wrong. The great threat to the Middle East was the Soviet Union. Reagan believed that protecting the oil-rich Persian Gulf was the primary goal. To achieve that goal, certain requirements had to be pursued; these requirements were that "priorities of U.S. interests in the Middle East must be made plainly evident; Arab regimes in the Gulf must be convinced of Washington's active commitment to their security; available U.S. resources, both its own and those of proxies, should be visibly marshaled in

⁹⁵ Quandt, 245249.

support of U.S. resolve; the firmness of U.S. opposition to “radicalism” throughout the area should not be doubted.”⁹⁶

The Reagan administration did not include the Arab-Israeli conflict in its priority agenda. It never perceived it as important in facing the Soviet threat in the region, which was its dominant concern at the time. Even when the conflict escalated after the Israeli bombing of a nuclear reactor and the bombing of a PLO complex in Beirut, causing the death of 300 civilians, the administration did not change its mentality.⁹⁷

C. Reagan and Israel:

Reagan did not owe the Jewish community much for his election. His strong commitment towards Israel came from his belief in the strategic importance of Israel, especially in the face of the Soviet threat. Ever since he took office, officials talked about the special strategic importance of Israel and the help it could provide the U.S. within the region. Israel fit perfectly in the third category of the American requirements that Reagan and his team drew in regard to the Middle East.

D. The Israeli Invasion of Lebanon:

The Reagan presidency witnessed two major events related to the Palestinian issue. The first was the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the result of which was the expulsion of the Palestinian leadership from Lebanon. The PLO lost its battlefield, and, for the first time since its creation, it had to work from a distance. Its

⁹⁶ Tschirgi, 146.

⁹⁷ Ibid.,151-153.

new host country became Tunisia, a country far away from the Israeli borders. U.S. policy makers were well aware of the Israeli intentions from the beginning. In early September 1981, Minister of Defense Ariel Sharon discussed the possibility of the invasion with U.S. officials. In October, Begin told Secretary of State Alexander Haig that Israel might enter Lebanon to rearrange the situation there. By the end of the year, Sharon had told US ambassador to Israel Samuel Lewis and former undersecretary of State Philip Habib the Israeli plan. In early 1982, the director of Israeli military intelligence, General Saguy, informed Haig of the Israeli plans for a large-scale invasion of Lebanon. Moreover, Sharon talked to American officials about the invasion on the eve of the invasion.⁹⁸

Despite internal opposition in the U.S. to the Israeli invasion, especially the fact that Israel used U.S. weapons, the American attitude did not change. The ultimate fear the administration had was the outbreak of the war before Israel completed its withdrawal from the Sinai on the 25th of June according to the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty. Ever since the assassination of Sadat in October 1981, the U.S. had been trying to avoid anything that could have been used by Israel not to fulfill its obligation, because it feared that such a move would jeopardize the peace process and disturb the situation in the Middle East. General Saguy was told in his meeting that Israel should not make any move before its withdrawal from Sinai. The U.S. also

⁹⁸ Tschirgi, 162.

made sure that the PLO would not make any provocative move before that date in exchange for rewards that would improve their situation in any future settlement.⁹⁹

The American support of Israel in its war in Lebanon was motivated not only by the special relationship between Israel and the U.S., but also by the three American factors behind this support. First, Israeli aims in the war were not incompatible with American ones. Kissinger and Nixon thought that the PLO was a Soviet surrogate. Evacuating PLO forces from Lebanon was seen in the context of the Cold War. Once again, the U.S. was capable of marginalizing a Soviet client in the region. Second, the political map in Lebanon after the invasion was believed to be in favor of the U.S.. A pro-American regime would be installed in Lebanon. Third, the U.S. thought that defeating a radical force in the region would give moderate forces the chance to get closer to the U.S. while the U.S. got closer to Israel.¹⁰⁰

The American media coverage of the invasion became more hostile to Israel as time passed. Reagan felt the growth of internal pressure and started to make some measures to distance himself from Begin. The senior members of the World Zionist Congress went to Jerusalem to meet with the prime minister, telling him that the invasion was an embarrassment to the Jewish lobby in its relationship with the White House.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Qandt, 250-51.

¹⁰⁰ Aruri, 7.

¹⁰¹ Heikal, 255.

E. The Aftermath of the Invasion:

The end of the Lebanon crisis and the departure of PLO forces from Lebanon made Reagan think that the U.S. should formulate its policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict by adopting a two-track approach. Reagan thought that the U.S. should work on a settlement that would assure Israel's legitimate security concerns and the Palestinians' legitimate rights.

Reagan was against both the establishment of a Palestinian state and Israeli permanent retention of the occupied territories. His favorite choice was the Jordanian option: "It is the firm view of the United States that self-government by the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza in association with Jordan offers the best chance for durable, just, and lasting peace."¹⁰²

F. The Palestinian Intifada:

The second important event was the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1987. The Palestinian uprising, or *Intifada*, brought the Palestinian issue into the homes of Americans through their television sets. For the first time, Israel was seen as an occupying power, fighting children with heavy arms. The American public became more aware of the Palestinian aspect of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Palestinian uprising sparked the largest amount of polling on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. The outcome of these polls showed that the American public 1) was closely divided over whether the Israeli reaction to the uprising was too harsh, 2) remained considerably more pro-Israel than

¹⁰² Tschirgi, 176-77.

pro-Arab or pro-Palestinian in its sympathy, 3) was inclined to approve a Palestinian homeland as long as it did not threaten Israel's security, and 4) supported an active American role in the Middle East.¹⁰³

In spite of the shock the Intifada brought the American public, the Reagan administration did not change its attitude towards Palestinians. Shultz himself thought that Israel had the right to restore order in the occupied territories. He differed, however, with the Israeli government on the level of oppression it was using against Palestinian civilians. This difference was due to Shultz's awareness of the growing negative image of Israel amongst the American public.

Richard Schifter, Shultz's assistant secretary for human rights, told a congressional panel that "Israel clearly has not only the right, but the obligation, to preserve or restore order in the occupied territories and to use appropriate levels of force to accomplish that end."¹⁰⁴ The U.S. did support a UN resolution condemning the Israelis' use of harsh measures, contrary to its previous behavior when the U.S. either vetoed or abstained from UN resolutions critical of Israel. Moreover, the Intifada made the Reagan administration think that it should do something to end the conflict.

The widespread opposition in America of the Israeli actions and the Arab support of it made the U.S. fear that the conflict might escalate into a regional war. Moreover, after five years of political inactivity in the region, the U.S. feared that it

¹⁰³ Alvin Richman, "A Report: American Attitude Toward Israeli-Palestinian Relations in the Wake of the Uprising," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 53, no.3 (Autumn 1989): 415

¹⁰⁴ Aruri, 10.

might lose its fifteen-year monopoly of the peace process. During all these years, the U.S. was not willing to hand Europe or the Soviet Union any important role in the peace process.¹⁰⁵ Shultz, traveled twice to the region, looking for new ideas and producing a package which became known as the Shultz Initiative: the first American initiative after the Reagan plan in 1982.

G. The Shultz Initiative:

The Shultz initiative was based on the idea of freezing all Israeli settlements and the ending the Intifada, given that negotiations would start in the same month (March 1988) to achieve Palestinian self-rule by February 1989. Shultz thought that once the Intifada was over, the PLO would not be able to gain its status as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Palestinians living in the occupied territories would have a major role in determining their political future.¹⁰⁶

This was seen as a great opportunity, especially since the PLO was perceived as a terrorist organization and the U.S. was not willing to negotiate with it. Just like the Roger plan, the initiative excluded the option of an independent Palestinian state and favored the Jordanian option. Moreover, both of them were hindered by Israeli opposition. In both cases, the administration put some pressure on Israel to accept the American terms, but in both cases it did not push hard enough to jeopardize the Israeli-American relations.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. P.10.

¹⁰⁶ Heikal, 385.

H. Starting Political Dialogue with Palestinians:

On 14 December 1988, the U.S. announced its decision to start a dialogue with the PLO. This sudden announcement was a by-product of two separate initiatives. The first was made by William Quandt in July 1988. This initiative involved a document outlining what the U.S. and the PLO should say in exchange for accepting the other's conditions for starting the dialogue. The second one was taken by the Swedish government, with the aim of establishing an Israeli-PLO dialogue.¹⁰⁷

One of the reasons that led the U.S. to take such a step was the growing political influence of the PLO in Europe. In September 1988, Arafat was invited to give a major address on the Palestinian perspective on peace in front of the European Parliament. The speech he gave made European leaders, Margaret Thatcher among them, believe and they soon announced that Arafat's statements made the PLO qualified to take part in the peace process.¹⁰⁸

Moreover, Arafat's famous speech that took place in Geneva on December 13, 1988, in which he renounced terrorism, made the U.S. willing to start a dialogue with the PLO. In his press conference, he stressed that conducting a dialogue with the PLO did not mean an American acceptance of a Palestinian State. The future of the West Bank and Gaza was to be determined in a process of negotiations.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Mohamed Rabie, "The U.S. PLO Dialogue: The Swedish Connection," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 23, Issue 3 (Spring 1994): 54-55.

¹⁰⁸ Aruri, 9.

¹⁰⁹ Neff, *Fallen Pillars*, 125.

5. *The Bush Era:*

When George Bush came to power in 1989, the situation in the world and the Middle East was different from the one Reagan faced. Internationally, the Cold War was over, the Iran-Iraq war had ended, and the American-PLO dialogue was in process. Bush was among the very few American presidents that came to office with a record on international affairs. But despite that, his views on the Middle East were not clear when he first came to office. However, he was generally perceived as a pragmatic politician.¹¹⁰

A. Policy Makers:

Most of the people, if not all, who worked with Bush in his policy making process towards the Middle East were deeply involved in this region. Before joining the Bush administration, they were involved in promoting American-Israeli relations from their positions within and outside the government.

Donald Ross, who became the director of the State Department's policy planning staff, and Richard Hass, director of Middle East affairs on the National Security Council, participated at a middle level of the State Department to promote strategic cooperation with Israel. Most of Bush's personal advisers' had religious and family ties with Israel, and some even lived there. Aaron David Miller, a policy planning staff analyst who was perceived as the most unbiased in the Bush

¹¹⁰Quandt, 290.

administration, said that he did not know where the line between professional and personal involvement in the peace process was drawn.¹¹¹

In early 1989, Yitzhak Rabin and Yitzhak Shamir were told that the new administration was ready to hear Israeli ideas about reviving the peace process. Shamir went to Washington, presenting a four point proposal. The most important point was conducting elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to form a negotiation team that did not consist of PLO members. At the time, Bush showed sympathy to Rabin's proposal.

Starting in mid 1989, the Bush administration worked on convincing the PLO not to include its members in the negotiation team. The main force behind this effort was the belief that the Israeli government was not willing to negotiate with the PLO. During that time, Palestinian-American relations started to witness some tension. The spreading of news reports concerning the meetings that were held between the American ambassador and Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyad) were one of the reasons behind this tension, as Abu Iyad was widely perceived as a terrorist by the U.S. The second factor was the hard line declaration issued by the Fatah movement. Palestinians believed that the meeting held between the PLO and the U.S. gave them a last warning that their delegation could not include any member from outside the occupied territories.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*, 251-52

¹¹² Quandt, 296-97.

B. Five-point Plan:

In October 1989, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker presented his Five-Point Plan:

- 1- The United States understands that because Egypt and Israel have been working hard on the peace process, there is agreement that an Israeli delegation should conduct a dialogue with a Palestinian delegation.
- 2- The United States understands that Egypt cannot substitute itself for the Palestinian delegation and Egypt will consult with Palestinians on all aspects of that dialogue. Egypt will also consult with Israel and the United States.
- 3- The United States understands that Israel will attend a dialogue only after a satisfactory list of Palestinians has been worked out.
- 4- The United States understands that the Government of Israel will come to the dialogue on the basis of the Israeli Government's May 14 Initiative. The United States further understands that Palestinians will come to the dialogue prepared to discuss elections and the negotiating process in accordance with Israel's initiative. The U.S. understands, therefore, that the Palestinians would be free to raise issues that relate to their opinion on how to make elections and the negotiating process succeed.
- 5- In order to facilitate this process, the U.S. proposes that the Foreign minister of Israel, Egypt and the U.S. meet in Washington within two weeks.¹¹³

The Five-Point Plan turned out to be a failure, as Israel rejected it. The American criticism of Israeli policies concerning settlements and the continuous harsh language used by the administration gave the hard-line members of the Israeli cabinet the chance to undermine the American plan.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Secretary of State James Baker: Five-Point Plan October 1989. In *The Israel-Arab Reader*, P.556.

¹¹⁴ Quandt, 298-299.

C. Confronting Complications from the Israeli Side

The Bush administration was alarmed on the 11th of July 1990, when Shamir formed a new government that excluded the Labor party. Shamir and most of his cabinet were in favor of annexing the West Bank, even though they did not say it in public. At the same time, Moscow relaxed its emigration restrictions over Soviet Jews, which caused a new wave of immigration into Israel.¹¹⁵ The Bush administration knew that it had a new challenge. It had to deal with a hard line government whose policies included the annexation of the West Bank, building settlements and recruiting new immigrants.

On the 30th of May, a group from the Palestine Liberation Front attempted to attack a military target near Tel Aviv. The operation failed and no civilians were killed in this incident. Despite that, the Israeli government considered the operation as a violation of Arafat's previous commitment and asked the U.S. to halt its talks with the PLO. The Bush administration asked Arafat to condemn the attack, but due to internal difficulties, Arafat did not adhere to the American request. Thus, on the 29th of June 1990, Washington decided to halt talks with the PLO.¹¹⁶

On the 2nd of August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait and started the second Gulf War. The U.S., heading an international coalition, launched a war against Iraq. During the time of the war, the Palestinian issue moved down on the American

¹¹⁵ Heikal, 401.

¹¹⁶ Quandt, 300

priority agenda. Palestinian-American talks were not resumed until after the end of the war.¹¹⁷

D. Bush's Vision of Peace:

In March 1991, Bush stated his vision of peace for the region in Congress. He said, "A comprehensive peace must be grounded in...Resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of territory for peace. This principle must be elaborated to provide for Israel's security and recognition, and at the same time for legitimate Palestinian political rights."¹¹⁸

The situation was ripe for the Bush administration to push for a peace conference. Bush was interested in conducting the peace conference soon after the war because of its disastrous effects on Iraq and its people.

Moreover, he saw opportunities that should not be wasted. The opportunities derived from "the forceful assertion of unilateral U.S. power over the region, the demoralization of the Arab world,...the abdication of Europe, and the collapse of the Soviet Union."¹¹⁹ Arafat was weakened after the second Gulf War, and Israel was put under pressure by the Bush administration's refusal to grant Israel a loan to accommodate the new Soviet immigrants and the continuous harsh American statements regarding settlements.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*, 264.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, P.405.

¹¹⁹ Chomsky, 527.

¹²⁰ Quandt, 310

E. Madrid Conference:

The Palestinians finally agreed that the PLO would not attend the Madrid conference. A delegation of Palestinians, known for having ties to the PLO, was chosen by the PLO and was part of a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation. To bypass the Israeli condition not to involve Palestinians from Jerusalem in the negotiation team, the Jordanian delegation included members whose families lived in Jerusalem. The PLO preserved its right to participate in any future peace talks.¹²¹

The aim of the talks between Israel and the joint delegation was to reach an agreement within a year about arrangements for a five-year interim period of Palestinian self-government. In the third year, negotiations were to begin on a permanent status solution based on resolutions 242 and 338.¹²²

Despite the previous declaration Bush had made in Congress, the invitation to the conference referred to UN resolution 242, but it did not mention the principle of territory for peace. Moreover, the U.S. adhered to the Israeli demands not to have a unified Arab delegation and to limit the UN's role in the conference.

The conference took place on the 30th of October 1991. For the first time, Palestinians and Israelis would sit together in public around a negotiation table. The Palestinian delegation got the chance to work separately from the Jordanian delegation only in the third round of the talks. As the conference ended, a series of unilateral talks was expected to follow. The Arab states tried to convince Bush to

¹²¹ Ibid, 310.

¹²² Heikal, 407.

intervene more in the coming negotiations, something he refused to do. He thought that the Arabs must adjust their positions towards Israel first. At the same time, Bush and his administration did not have a clear picture of how things were supposed to be solved.¹²³ By the time Bush left the White House, nothing tangible had been achieved from the talks. It would take two more years before anything real would happen.

¹²³ Quandt, 311.

Chapter III The Clinton Era

Despite the fact that Clinton did not orchestrate the peace process, he became the American president most involved in the peace process. Having his smiling face in the center of the historic picture that documented, until then, the unthinkable handshake between the two arch-enemies, Arafat and Rabin, was not enough for him. On a personal level, Clinton felt that concluding a peace agreement between Palestinians and Israelis would place his name with the great leaders of the world. During his tenure, Clinton intervened personally when negotiations reached a dead end. Furthermore, Clinton was the first American president to welcome Arafat constantly to the White House, speaking of him positively as a peace partner, and was the first U.S. president to visit Palestinian land under Palestinian rule.

All these formalities and his eagerness to reach a final agreement did not bring him closer than his predecessors to Palestinian aspirations. In many ways, Clinton caused more harm than good to the Palestinian people that may never be repaired.

1. Middle East Policy Makers:

The most influential policy makers working on the peace process in the Clinton administration were mostly known for their pro-Israel views. Criticizing

Israel harshly on some occasions made them believe that they were even-handed in their dealing with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.¹²⁴

These officials were Martin Indyk, head of the Middle East desk at the National Security Council, Samuel W Lewis, head of the State Department's Policy Planning staff, and Dennis Ross, chief U.S. negotiator in the Arab-Israeli peace talks. These three "blended their personal and professional goals to such a degree" that Indyk said he could not think about life without the peace process. For him "life is the peace process."¹²⁵

They believed that the way to achieve security for Israel was not through territorial expansion but by a deal with the Arab and that achieving such a deal should not be through pressuring Israel, but through convincing it to take baby steps, or an "instrumentalist" approach.¹²⁶

As for his two Secretaries of State, Warren Christopher and Madeline Albright, they were boxed in between a chief executive and a bureaucracy that shared the same biases favoring Israel. This should not be understood as if they were not pro-Israel themselves, because they were. Albright discovered her Jewish roots just after she came to office and was certainly pro-Israel.¹²⁷

The Vice President, Albert Gore, was no different than the others in the Clinton administration. Gore was a strong supporter of Israel. He was known to be a

¹²⁴ Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*, 276

¹²⁵ Laura Blumenfeld, "Three Peace Suits for these passionate American Diplomats, a Middle East Settlement if the Goal of a Lifetime," *Washington Post*, D1, Feb. 24, 1997.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Jim Haogland, "Mideast Mix," *Washington Post*, C 7, Aug. 10, 1997.

close friend of Martin Peretz who influenced his views on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Moreover, as a Senator, Gore was well known for his extremist pro-Israel position.¹²⁸

2. General Policies:

With an administration full of pro-Israel members, the Clinton administration proved to be one of the closest to Israel. The ultimate goal of the administration was reaching a peace agreement that served the security needs of Israel. The commitment of this administration towards Israel's security was frequently outlined in the speeches presented by its members and by President Clinton himself. He reaffirmed the American commitment after the signing of the Wye Agreement, saying that "the United States will always stand with Israel, always remember that only a strong Israel can make peace. That is why we were, after all, your partner in security before we were partners for peace; our commitment to your security is ironclad – it will not ever change."¹²⁹

Since 1993, the Clinton administration had advertised its role in the peace process as an honest mediator. This stand prevented the U.S. from supporting a position on substantive issues. This attitude was in favor of Israel. To hold to its position, the Clinton administration backed away from key positions that had featured in U.S. policy for decades and isolated itself entirely from international consensus regarding Palestine. First, it deserted UN resolution 242 as the base for negotiation.

¹²⁸ Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*, 276.

¹²⁹ Speech presented by President Clinton , Ussishkin Hall, Jerusalem Convention Center, Jerusalem, dated 13 Dec. 1998, <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/interl/clintsr.htm>

Second, it accepted the Israeli notion that land captured in the 1967 war are disputed rather than occupied. Third, it openly allowed use of U.S. funds to finance Jewish settlements. Fourth, it worked on depriving Palestinian refugees from their internationally recognized legal status and right of return.

In his first year in office, Clinton hinted that he was ready to abandon the previous American interpretation of resolution 242; the determination of the meaning of the resolution would be left to the parties themselves.¹³⁰ As the parties held different interpretations of the meaning and as the Clinton administration was pro-Israel, this was a catastrophe for the Palestinians. The administration's willingness to desert resolution 242 was presented in the two draft papers on the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles submitted during the peace talks on the 14th of May and the 30th of June 1993. In the drafts, the U.S. made no mention of the occupation, Israeli withdrawal, or the exchange of land for peace.¹³¹ The administration's attempts to desert the resolution were not only restricted to making its components shallow, it also made sure to isolate it from other relevant UN resolutions that give meaning to 242.¹³²

Furthermore, the U.S. changed its position on the ultimate disposition of the occupied West Bank and Gaza. In June 1993, Ross authored a statement of principles that left the sovereignty of the territories to be decided in final-status negotiations.

¹³⁰ Donald Neff, "The Clinton Administration and UN Resolution 242," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 23, no. 2 (Winter 1994): 28.

¹³¹ Neff, *Fallen Pillars*, 105.

¹³² Chomsky, 538.

The Clinton administration started to use the term “disputed” rather than “occupied” territories when referring to the land taken by Israel in the 1967 war. Moreover, his administration changed the concept of “full territory for full peace” to “some territory for full peace”. The concept of territorial compromise used by previous administrations implied full withdrawal by Israel in return for full peace from the Arabs. Under the Clinton administration, it meant territorial compromise by the Arabs in order to guarantee Israeli security. In short, the official approach could be characterized as autonomy without land, for security for Israel.¹³³

In his 1992 campaign, Clinton rejected describing Jerusalem as occupied and took the position that the city’s final status should be resolved through negotiations.¹³⁴ When Congress passed a law in 1995 regarding moving the American embassy to Jerusalem, Clinton pushed for a clause that would allow the president to determine the date of such a move. Clinton’s ultimate goal was not to prevent the movement of the embassy out of respect to the internationally recognized status of Jerusalem as occupied land, but because of his awareness that such a move at the wrong time would harm the peace process and even put an end to it.¹³⁵ In a letter of assurance dated 24 October 1991 presented to the Palestinians, it was stated that “The United States is opposed to the Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem and the extension

¹³³ Christison, *Perceptions of palatine*, 279

¹³⁴ John Goshko, “U.S.-PLO Impasse Could Foil UN Vote Washington Wants Arafat Commitment to Return to Peace talks,” *Washington Post*, A15, March 14, 1994.

¹³⁵ Stephen Zunes, “Palestinians and Israel,” *Foreign Policy in Focus* 6, no.4 (Feb 2001), <http://www.fpif.org/briefs/vol6/v6n04israel.html>

of Israeli law on it and the extension of Jerusalem's municipal boundaries..."¹³⁶

Clinton's attitude towards Jerusalem showed that he was not only willing to ignore international consensus but also any promises he provided to Palestinians as soon as they were asymmetric with Israeli demands and wishes.

On the issue of settlements, the Clinton administration went further than the Reagan administration in undermining their illegal status. The Clinton administration labeled them as merely "complicating factor," and refused to debate Israeli construction of settlements in the UN on the grounds that it was "unproductive to debate the legalities of the issue." Moreover, it openly allowed for the first time the use of U.S. funds to finance the growth of settlements in East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied territories.¹³⁷

Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, Edward Djerejian, testified before Congress on the 9th of March 1993 that the Clinton administration approved the use of the \$10 billion in loans guaranteed to Israel in 1992 to finance the "natural growth and basic, immediate needs" of existing settlements in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem.¹³⁸ Providing funds for Israeli settlements placed the U.S. in direct violation of UN Security Council

¹³⁶ Phyllis Bennis, *Before & After: U.S. Foreign Policy and September 11th Crisis* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2003), 201.

¹³⁷ Donald Neff, *Fallen Pillars*, 127

¹³⁸ Documents and Source Material, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 22, no. 4 (Summer 1993): 157-58.

resolution 465 which, “calls upon all states not to provide Israel with any assistance to be used specifically in connection with settlements in the occupied territory.”¹³⁹

On the issue of refugees, the Clinton administration took a strategy that aimed at downgrading the refugees from the international status awarded to them through the UN to a strictly bilateral concern between Israel and the Palestinians. Trying to implement this approach, the administration made attempts to dissolve the UN Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) and to transfer its responsibilities to the Palestinian Authority.¹⁴⁰ While the administration offered \$100 million to the PA, it cut by \$17 million the U.S. contributions to UNRWA. The administration voted against all General Assembly resolutions pertaining to the Palestinian refugees in 1993 and 1994 on the grounds that they “pre-judge the outcome of the ongoing peace process and should be solved by direct negotiation.”¹⁴¹

3. The Oslo Accord:

Despite the fact that the Clinton administration was not a key partner in the making of the Oslo Accord, negotiations and their results reflected the U.S. orientation of what the Middle East peace should look like; stability rather than justice would be its key component. The U.S. was happy about the peace process because it was hoping that it would provide stability to the region, which meant that

¹³⁹ Zunes, “Palestinians and Israel.”

¹⁴⁰ Neff, *Fallen Pillars*, 81

¹⁴¹ Chomsky, 553.

the U.S. would be able to pursue its interests. The sponsorship of Oslo also provided a great diplomatic and public relations boost to American policymakers.¹⁴²

The administration became intensively involved in the peace process in its early stages. When news started to spread about the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in Oslo, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres went to the White House to inform the Americans about the negotiations and their status. Secretary of State Warren Christopher was surprised by the scope of the accord and the method through which it was being achieved. Up till that moment, Christopher had thought that America had monopoly over the Middle East peace process.¹⁴³ Ross was happy about the agreement, but at the same time he feared that such an agreement would “pump life” into the PLO, which he thought was fading away.¹⁴⁴

The Oslo Accord had two parts. The first was mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO, taking the form of two letters. The second part, the Declaration of Principles, set an agenda for negotiations on Palestinian self-government in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, beginning with Gaza and Jericho.¹⁴⁵ The first part was a historical breakthrough and a major transformation of the relationship between the two parties. The second part of the accord, the Interim Agreement, was an agenda for negotiations, rather than a full agreement.

¹⁴² Bennis, *Before & After*, 64.

¹⁴³ Avi Shlaim, “The Oslo Accord,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 23, Issue 3 (Spring 1994): 33.

¹⁴⁴ Heikal, 455.

¹⁴⁵ Shlaim, 24.

The accord was based on the notion that the problems between the two parties could be divided between easy ones and hard ones. The easy ones, to be negotiated over a five-year period, included: prisoners, the creation of the Palestinian Authority, economic assistance, and the creation of seaports and airports, among others. Oslo avoided nearly all the key issues, such as final borders, the future of Jerusalem, the status of refugees, sovereignty, and the military status of the Palestinian territories. These issues were supposed to be discussed after improving the level of confidence between the two parties.¹⁴⁶ The nature of the accord caused a problem for the U.S. in dealing with the peace process since with the passage of time after the signing of the agreement, the internal politics of the two parties grew to be at odds. At the same time, the Oslo Accord failed to provide both sides with the security the peoples of the two sides thought they would get.¹⁴⁷

The first task the Clinton administration took was limiting opposition towards the Oslo agreement. Towards that end, Christopher called King Hussein of Jordan to guarantee his support for the agreement. When Asad of Syria started using fiery words while criticizing Arafat for accepting the peace agreement, he received a call from Christopher. The aim of it was to assure the Syrians that they would not be left out and to convince Asad to lower the tone of opposition in his speeches. Moreover, Christopher played the role of mediator between Arafat and Abu Lutof. The latter was against some aspects of the agreement and, because of that, his relationship with

¹⁴⁶ Bennis, *Before & After*, 63.

¹⁴⁷ Kissinger, 173-174.

Arafat was negatively affected. While in Washington to attend a UN General Assembly meeting in Washington, Abu Lutof was approached by Christopher. To the surprise of Christopher, Abu Lutof told him that he was willing to do whatever necessary to advance the agreement.¹⁴⁸

Another approach the Clinton administration adopted was financial aid. The administration believed that if Palestinians did not feel tangible changes on the ground, opposition towards the peace agreement could have reached a dangerous level. Before the signing ceremony, Clinton talked to Arafat and the Palestinian delegation about America's strong commitment to providing economic support for the Palestinians. The same day, Christopher told Palestinian officials that the U.S. would contribute to aid efforts to make Palestinians feel the benefits of peace. The U.S. went even further by assuring that Palestinians would get aid not only from the U.S. but also from the international community. Two weeks after the signing of the Oslo agreement, the U.S. organized a multilateral donors' conference for the Palestinians in Washington. Christopher declared that the aim of the conference was to mobilize "resources needed to make the agreement work." More than \$2 billion were pledged over five years. The U.S. contributed \$500 million and was the largest single donor.¹⁴⁹

The first sign of bias and lack of interest in the Palestinian demands came during the tenth round of the Washington talks. As the Palestinian and Israeli

¹⁴⁸ Heikal, 459-460, 474.

¹⁴⁹ Scott Lasensky, "Underwriting Peace in the Middle East: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Limit of Economic Inducement," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 6, no. 1, (March 2002): 93-94.

delegations were moving towards a dead end, the State Department presented a compromise paper at the end of June. The administration's paper was a synthesis of ideas raised by the two delegations and the American coordinator. At this point, the administration shared the approach adopted by the previous one: the two parties should agree on a Declaration of Principles to guide negotiations with the aim of achieving the agreement in two phases. An analysis prepared by President Arafat showed that 65 per cent of the synthesis was taken from the Israeli paper, 28 percent from the American paper and only 7 per cent from the Palestinian paper.¹⁵⁰

4. The Hebron Massacre:

The first major crisis the United States had to deal with was the Hebron massacre. On the 25th of February 1994, an Israeli militant entered the Ibrahimi mosque in Hebron and shot at praying Palestinians, murdering 30 people and wounding more than 70. Outrage throughout the occupied territories was widespread, especially after the leaking of the news confirming the involvement of Israeli soldiers in the massacre.¹⁵¹

The Hebron massacre presented a new shift within the American public towards the conflict. For the first time, Americans were exposed to the fact that Palestinians were not only terrorized by the Israeli army but also by fanatical settlers.

¹⁵⁰ Heikal, 449.

¹⁵¹ Al-Khalili mosque has a special religious significance to Muslims and Jews. The mosque was built over the cave of Machpelah. For Muslims the cave was the burial place of prophet Ibrahim. Being holy for both Muslims and Jews, the Tomb of the Patriarchs became a place of maximum sensitivity and dispute. See Mohamed Heikal, P.493.

To associate the word “terrorist” with Jews had not been possible before the massacre. The Hebron massacre received widespread coverage in the American media for two full weeks. Despite this coverage, however, the American attention was shifted to another pro-Israel media event. This event was the launching of the famous film “Schindler’s List”. The movie got huge advertising and media coverage.¹⁵² Talking about the Nazi regime and the suffering of Jews during that period made people once again sympathize with Israelis and Jews, distracting their attention from the conditions Palestinians still lived under.

Before the massacre, the U.S. was concentrating on the Syrian-Israeli peace process. The administration thought that the Syrian track was very crucial and of high priority after the signing of the peace agreement between Palestinians and Israelis. U.S. officials had been thinking of sending Christopher to the Middle East at the end of March or early April to try to accelerate the Syrian-Israeli track. As a sign of protest against the Hebron massacre, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan suspended the ongoing peace talks held in Washington. The American interpretation of the suspension was that it was symbolic more than real. The talks were scheduled to recess just a couple of days away from the day they announced their suspension. A date had not been set for the next round of the talks.¹⁵³ Being aware of the catastrophe that might occur if talks were not resumed, the U.S. decided to step in, trying to limit the damage. Despite the American condemnation of the massacre, the U.S. kept to its

¹⁵² David Broder, “Schindler’s List—And Hebron,” *Washington Post*, A17, March 2, 1994.

¹⁵³ John Goshko, “Syria, Jordan, Lebanon Halt Talks to Protest Massacre,” *Washington Post*, A14, Feb. 28, 1994.

policy of isolating itself from international consensus and remained the only country that did not perceive the massacre as a consequence of the Israeli settlement policy.¹⁵⁴

Immediately after the massacre took place, Clinton urged both Arafat and Rabin to leave their negotiation teams in Washington and accelerate their effort to reach an agreement on steps to implement Palestinian self-rule.¹⁵⁵ For the first time, Clinton called Arafat personally to express his condolences and to urge him not to suspend negotiations. On the day of the massacre, Christopher called Arafat five times to secure an agreement to continue negotiations in Washington. Both of them urged Arafat to look at the massacre as an aggression directed towards the peace process, not the praying Muslims.¹⁵⁶ Being subjected to extreme criticism from both the Palestinians and Arabs, Arafat decided not to adhere to the American request. The administration was aware of the pressure Arafat was exposed to, not only from Palestinians but also from the Arab world in general. “The intensity of Arab world reaction and prominence of the question of the protection of Palestinians make it very difficult for the Palestinian negotiators to just come back to the table,” testified Robert Pelletreau Jr., assistant secretary of state for Mideast affairs, before House of Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Europe and Middle East.¹⁵⁷ However, this understanding did not change the American attitude towards the problem. The U.S. kept on putting pressure on Arafat to go on with the peace process.

¹⁵⁴ Heikal, 494.

¹⁵⁵ Goshko, “Syria, Jordan, Lebanon Halt Talks,” A14.

¹⁵⁶ Heikal, P.495.

¹⁵⁷ John Goshko, “Christopher Sees Arafat as a Key PLO Head Due to Resume Talks,” *Washington Post*, A24, March 2, 1994.

Three main points of disagreement arose between the U.S. and the Palestinians during this crisis. The first and second were related to the UN resolution to be issued to condemn the massacre. The third one was on the timing of the resumption of peace talks. Attempts to issue a UN resolution condemning the massacre started on the same day of the occurrence of the shooting. The U.S. blocked the resolution. Christopher told Arafat on the 26th of February that a Security Council resolution would complicate matters. The U.S. perceived the resolution as part of the peace process, not something that stood by itself.¹⁵⁸ The U.S. position towards the resolution was not surprising given the U.S. history with resolutions condemning Israel and the many letters of assurance given to Israel after the signing of the Oslo agreement about limiting the role of the UN.

The first issue the U.S. opposed was a paragraph in the preamble that described the Security Council as “gravely concerned of the consequent Palestinian casualties in the occupied Palestinian territory as a result of the massacre, which underline the need to provide protection and security for the Palestinian people.”¹⁵⁹ Arafat insisted that the peacekeeping force to be deployed be of military nature, while the Israelis insisted that such a presence should mean civilian observers. The U.S. opposed Arafat’s demand, pointing out that UN forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina had been unsuccessful in maintaining peace and protecting Muslims.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Heikal, 497.

¹⁵⁹ Phyllis Bennis, *Calling the Shots: How Washington Dominates Today’s UN* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2000), 224.

¹⁶⁰ Heikal, 498.

The second issue of disagreement on the UN resolution was over mentioning East Jerusalem in the resolution as occupied territory. The U.S. objected to the part saying that the Council was “reaffirming its relevant resolutions, which affirmed the application of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949 to the territories occupied by Israel in June 1967, including Jerusalem, and the Israeli responsibilities there-under...”¹⁶¹ Consistent with its policy towards the disposition of the occupied territory, the U.S. refused such a claim, justifying its position by stating that the issue of Jerusalem was to be left to the final talks.

The clauses that were supposed to describe Jerusalem as occupied were strongly opposed by the American Jewish community that intervened to make sure that the administration would not allow the passing of the resolution. The Jewish community was afraid that Clinton was ready to offer concessions to the Palestinians to assure the Palestinian approval to resume the peace talks. AIPAC’s President Steven Grossman visited Clinton at the White House and then reported to the members of his organization that he had warned Clinton about the emotional consequences in the American Jewish community if the U.S. were to allow the passage of the resolution. Grossman said that Clinton assured him that the American policy towards Jerusalem was “still right”.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Bannis, *Calling the Shots*, 224.

¹⁶² Goshko, “U.S.-PLO Impasse Could Foil UN Vote,” A15.

Arafat was annoyed that the Clinton administration was taking the Israeli side on this issue: “They’re supporting the Israeli point of view,” he said.¹⁶³ In an unusual precedent, the U.S. insisted that the resolution be voted on paragraph by paragraph. This way the American delegation could abstain from voting on the paragraphs disputed. Christopher announced that if the Jerusalem reference had been made in the body of the resolution, rather than in the preamble, the U.S. would have vetoed it. Madeline Albright, then U.S. ambassador to the UN, said that the Clinton Administration allowed the resolution to pass “with great reluctance” because of the need to reactivate the peace process.¹⁶⁴

The last point of disagreement was about Arafat’s commitment to resuming peace talks. The Palestinians said that it was necessary to wait until the resolution was passed and the provisions concerning the peacekeeping force were actually implemented before the resumption of the peace talks. Moreover, without a strong UN resolution, it would be very likely that the people in Gaza and West Bank would turn against the peace process. The Americans insisted that Arafat give his word to resume talks as soon as the resolution passed.¹⁶⁵

On the 18th of March, the Security Council passed Resolution 904, condemning the massacre and calling for the presence of temporary international observers in the occupied territory. 160 observers, who were not part of a UN force,

¹⁶³ Lally Weymouth, “For The First Time, The Furious Masses Smash My Photo,” *Washington Post*, A19, March 9, 1994.

¹⁶⁴ John Goshko, “Mideast Talks Get Boost From UN Resolution Condemns Hebron Massacre,” *Washington Post*, A1, March 19, 1994.

¹⁶⁵ Goshko, “U.S.-PLO Impasse Could Foil UN Vote...,” A15

were sent to Hebron. Most of them had been involved in various NGO-related work. Soon they were called “ice cream soldiers” because of their ineffectiveness and limited role.¹⁶⁶

Syria, Jordan and Lebanon agreed to resume the peace talks just after the signing of the agreement. On the next day, the Israeli state radio announced that Arafat and Rabin had spoken over the phone. Although there were further incidents reported in Gaza and the West Bank, peace talks were resumed on the 29th of March in Cairo.¹⁶⁷

5. The Hebron Agreement and the Tunnel Crisis:

The Hebron agreement came about as a result of intensive efforts led by the U.S. to save the Oslo accord. The peace process was threatened after the assassination of Rabin and after the conclusion of the 1995 interim agreement known as Oslo II. The election of a new anti-Oslo Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, in 1996 furthered the complications. The advent of Netanyahu did not only constitute a challenge and threat to the Palestinians, it was also a challenge to the Clinton administration due to several factors. First, the Clinton administration was not in favor of the election of Netanyahu. It was outspoken about its desire to have Peres as the Israeli Prime Minister. The administration feared that its position during the Israeli elections would affect its relationship with the new Israeli government.

¹⁶⁶ Bennis, *Calling the Shots*, 225.

¹⁶⁷ Heikal, 504.

Netanyahu expressed his disappointment with the Clinton administration, believing it did not give him the respect he deserved as the Likud leader. In order to break the ice, Clinton called Netanyahu after the elections to congratulate him on a great campaign. Moreover, Ross invited Netanyahu to brief him on the status of negotiations. Netanyahu declined Ross's invitation, saying that it was premature to meet U.S. officials before he formed his cabinet.¹⁶⁸

Second, Netanyahu was strongly supported by the American Congress. To make sure that Clinton understood this fact clearly, Netanyahu addressed the Congress during his first visit to Washington, giving a speech that stressed the similarities of Israeli and American values. His speech was very effective in strengthening his popularity inside the Congress.¹⁶⁹ Clinton got the message and, being himself close to elections, decided to be careful in his dealing with the Palestinian issue, keeping his previous policy as a guideline for the future.

Third, Netanyahu approached the elections with a strong anti-Oslo platform. He and his team were not willing or prepared to make the concessions to Palestinians required to achieve an agreement.¹⁷⁰ In order to create facts on the ground in favor of Israel, Netanyahu started a series of provocative actions. Those actions increased the disappointment felt amongst the Palestinians with the Oslo agreement and the resulting situation on the ground that reached its peak during what came to be known

¹⁶⁸ Elaine Sciolino, "With Netanyahu, Can Allies Be Friends?" *New York Times*, late ed- final, sec A, June 7, 1996.

¹⁶⁹ Thomas Freedman, *From Beirut to Jerusalem*, 2nd ed. (London: Harbor Collins, 1995), 56.

¹⁷⁰ Herbert C Kelman, "Building a Sustainable Peace: The limits of Pragmatism in the Israeli-Palestinian Negotiations," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 28, no. 1, (August 1998): 36.

as the Tunnel Uprising. Consistent with his provocative policy, Netanyahu approved the opening of an old tunnel which ran alongside the Haram al-Sharif (Temple Mount) area. Believing that such an action affected the safety of the Haram, demonstrations erupted all over Palestine. These demonstrations escalated to direct clashes between Palestinians and the Israeli army. For the first time since the Oslo Agreement, Palestinian police joined the angry crowds, shooting at the Israeli army.¹⁷¹

The Tunnel Crisis was a problem to the U.S. as it was hoping to maintain a peaceful political life in Palestine until the upcoming presidential elections were over. Clinton had two alternatives concerning how to deal with this shift in the Israeli government. He could have kept his previous policy of investing a great deal of time and effort keeping his position as a facilitator; or he could treat the peace process as a high priority issue and try to put pressure on both sides, especially the Israelis as the stronger party, to make concessions needed to conclude an agreement.¹⁷²

Clinton decided to merge the two alternatives. On the one hand, he considered the peace process to be a high priority issue. The Hebron agreement was a turning point in the American approach to the peace process. For the first time, the U.S. began playing a direct role, discussing details of the agreement and offering compromise suggestions. On the other hand, Clinton decided not to exert real pressure on Israel to accept any of the Palestinian demands. Exerting real pressure on

¹⁷¹ Quandt, 343.

¹⁷² Ibid., 341.

Israel would have affected Clinton's position in the coming elections, keeping in mind the strong relationship and support Netanyahu had in Congress.

Both parties were in favor of the new American approach. According to American officials, Netanyahu suggested that the U.S. be present at the negotiations. Netanyahu was in favor of having a more direct American role because of his fear that the collapse of the peace agreement would lead to the isolation or alienation of Israel. Moreover, it was better for Israel to make concessions to the U.S. than to Arafat himself.¹⁷³ The Palestinians were hoping for the internationalization of the process, hoping that the international community would act as a guarantor for the agreements to be concluded. Arafat called on the Europeans and Russia to be involved along with the U.S., but his wish faced Israeli and American rejection. The Palestinians hoped that American involvement would increase their chances during the talks. Contrary to what they had hoped, American involvement turned out to be in favor of Israel, not the Palestinians.¹⁷⁴

To limit the political damage of the crisis, State Department officials worked around the clock to try to bring Netanyahu and Arafat together. They hoped that such a meeting would produce calm in the streets. Their efforts did not, however, produce the result they had hoped for. Netanyahu refused to listen to the American demand to close the tunnel; his main concern was his conservative domestic constituents.

¹⁷³ Jonathan Rynhold, "Israeli-American Relations and the Peace Process," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 4, no.2, (June 2000),

<http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/meria/journal/2000/issue2/jv4n2a3.html>

¹⁷⁴ Lamis Andoni, "Redefining Oslo: Negotiating the Hebron Protocol," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Issue 103, (Spring 1997): 20.

Furthermore, he rebuffed American suggestions to send Ross or Christopher to the Middle East. Knowing that Netanyahu was not going to change his position, U.S. officials thought that bringing him and Arafat together would calm things down. The main idea behind that meeting was to get a “move on other issues that the Palestinians really want, like Hebron.”¹⁷⁵

In an attempt to get the two parties together, Clinton invited both Arafat and Netanyahu to Washington. In the Washington meeting, Clinton did not intervene in the negotiations between the two parties; he hosted a lunch in the White House and then left Arafat and Rabin along with King Hussein, who was in the States for medical treatment, to settle their problems.¹⁷⁶ But the meeting in Washington did not lead to any concrete results. Netanyahu refused to give any concessions to the Palestinians. As expected, he refused to close the tunnel and turned down an American request to set a firm date to resume talks on the future of Jerusalem. On the issue of Hebron, with which U.S. officials were hoping to make progress, Clinton was unable to get Netanyahu to agree to a firm deadline of 60 days for concluding an agreement concerning Israeli redeployment in that city. Palestinians were so disappointed by the outcome of the meeting that President Arafat canceled a scheduled press conference and refused to say a word to the press. At this point, the Clinton administration lost hope of reaching an agreement on Hebron before the

¹⁷⁵ Steven Erlanger, “Limits on U.S. Leverage: The Need of Both Sides,” *New York Times*, Sep. 28, 1996.

¹⁷⁶ Quandt, 343.

presidential elections. Despite that fact, Clinton thought that getting both leaders together was a success in itself.¹⁷⁷

The initial round of negotiations started in Taba, Egypt during the first week of October. Netanyahu acknowledged the fact that certain elements of the Oslo accord were irreversible; therefore, he presented himself to the Israeli and American public as ready to pursue the peace process. For example, he did not want to reoccupy the West Bank and Gaza, but he remained committed to keeping as much land as possible and giving Palestinians a territory that lacked geographical contiguity.¹⁷⁸ Negotiations took place in the presence of Ross and his deputy Aaron Miller. During these negotiations Americans started to use a more direct and active role.¹⁷⁹ The U.S. reaffirmed its commitment towards Israeli security; in fact, both Israel and the U.S. reaffirmed the primacy of Israeli security. They both agreed that the security arrangement in Hebron should not be short term; rather they were looking for an agreement that would prevent friction between settlers and Palestinians in the long term. The U.S. supported the Palestinians demand of linking the Hebron redeployment and the unfulfilled interim arrangements, especially the opening of the Gaza airport and seaport, and safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank. The American support came mainly out of its eagerness to conclude an agreement before the presidential elections and partly because of the North Africa and Middle East

¹⁷⁷ Steven Erlanger, "Clinton Says Talk Failed to Resolve Issues in Mideast," *New York Times*, late ed.-final, sec A, October 3, 1996.

¹⁷⁸ Kelman, 41.

¹⁷⁹ Andoni, 20.

Economic Summit scheduled for November. The U.S. was hoping that reaching an agreement would increase the opportunity for Israel to achieve economic benefits from the summit and promote normalization between the Arab states and Israel.¹⁸⁰

The Hebron agreement was finally concluded on the 15th of January 1997. The Hebron protocol did not constitute a new agreement but rather the steps required to implement part of an agreement, “The Guidelines on Redeployment in Hebron,” annexed to the Interim Agreement. Hebron was left to be the last city in the West Bank for the Israeli redeployment to work on security issues arising from the presence of 450 militant Israeli settlers in the city’s center.¹⁸¹

In documents accompanying the Hebron accord, the U.S. assured Israel that the key element in the U.S. approach to peace “has always been recognition of Israeli’s security requirements.” These security requirements were to be identified by Israel. Moreover, those documents showed that the U.S. approved of any Israeli withdrawals to be decided by Israel alone and not in negotiation with the Palestinians.¹⁸²

One of the papers included in the agreement was a “Note for the Record” that was written by Ross. The essence of this note stated that Israel was still committed to Oslo II “on the basis of reciprocity.” The Israeli interpretation of the concept “reciprocity” intended to delay any further redeployment and put pressure on the Palestinians. Netanyahu used the term to push the Palestinians to take certain steps as

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 20.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 18.

¹⁸² Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*, 298,

a precondition to any future Israeli steps. This way, he thought the breakdown of peace talks would be blamed on the Palestinians.¹⁸³ Using the same term as Ross clearly illustrated the American continuous consent to the Israeli approach and interpretations throughout the peace process.

In this letter, Ross delineated Israel's responsibilities under Oslo II:

- Further redeployment of Israeli forces from parts of Zones B and C would begin during the first week of March 1997.
- Prisoner release issues would be dealt with according to the provisions of Oslo II.
- Negotiations would be resumed on a variety of outstanding issues, including safe passage from Gaza to the West Bank, and airport and seaport for Gaza, and a basket of economic and security issues.
- The negotiations on final status, which would resume "within two months, in other words, sometime in March 1997."¹⁸⁴

Ross's "Note for the Record" and Christopher's "Letter of Assurance" were very much in favor of Israel's interests. Those accompanying letters gave Israel the chance to undermine the essence of the "linkage" of issues which the Palestinians were hoping to gain from. For example, in the "Note for the Record" under "Palestinian Responsibilities," it was stated that the "size of Palestinian Police will be pursuant to the Interim Agreement." This allowed Israel to force the Palestinians to cut back the numbers of their police forces, which the Labor government had allowed to be expanded.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Kelman, 41-42.

¹⁸⁴ Quandt, 346.

¹⁸⁵ Andoni, 25.

6. The Road to a New Agreement:

Having been reelected, Clinton wanted to leave office with an outstanding personal victory. It is generally believed that presidents in their second term are more free to exert policies that they would not have thought about during their first term. But this was not the case with Clinton's second term. His reluctance to achieve permanent peace between Palestinians and Israelis was still hindered by his inability and unwillingness to exert real pressure on Israel. In the case of the peace process, an important phenomenon affected his flexibility, which is called "a lame duck presidency". Usually during the second half of a president's second term, foreign presidents start to focus on who will be the successor. Trying to envision that makes them less reluctant to compromise, hoping that the next president will bring with him a better deal.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, Clinton faced the possibility of impeachment just after his reelection as a consequence of a sexual scandal, publicly known as "Monica Gate", involving a young White House intern named Monica Lewinsky. The situation in the Middle East did not favor his efforts either. During the first months of his second term, Syria started to build ties with Saddam Hussein, and American pressure to contain Iraq, Libya, and Iran was being resisted by usually friendly Arab regimes.¹⁸⁷

The conclusion of the Hebron Accord did not put an end to the American troubles in the region. Still American officials had a long way to go. Just one month after the signing of the agreement, hopes of peace started to fade away. A few weeks

¹⁸⁶ Quandt, 349-350.

¹⁸⁷ Hoagland.

after his inauguration, Clinton held a meeting with Netanyahu, trying to convince him to take further steps in the Oslo process. Being criticized by some members of his party for giving up land to Palestinians and unwilling to go any further, Netanyahu started to put more obstacles in the way.¹⁸⁸

In March 1997, Netanyahu gave his approval to build a new settlement in East Jerusalem. The new settlement was built on a mountain named by Palestinians as Jabal Abu Ghunyam. This land overlooking Bethlehem was mainly owned by Palestinians. The purpose behind building a settlement on this land was to close a ring of settlements around Jerusalem. This way “the last gateway to a prospective Arab capital would be blocked.”¹⁸⁹ As part of its continuous policy towards undermining the role of the UN and supporting the Israeli settlement policy, the U.S. vetoed a UN resolution condemning the building of the settlement. The American argument at that time was that it was inappropriate for the UN to get involved in an issue that was supposed to be settled between the two parties themselves. The administration thought that the Israeli-Palestinian peace treaty made previous resolutions “obsolete and anachronistic.”¹⁹⁰ The language used in the resolution was much simpler than that used in previous resolutions vetoed by the U.S.. The resolution did not go any further than demanding that Israel “immediately cease construction of the Jabal Abu Ghneim settlement in East Jerusalem as well as all

¹⁸⁸ Quandt, 350.

¹⁸⁹ Nicholas Guyatt, *The Absence of Peace: Understanding the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (New York: Zed Books, 2001): 40-41. The Israelis refused to grant Palestinian owners of Jabal Abu Ghneim building permits on the ground of protecting “green areas”. See same source P.130.

¹⁹⁰ Neff, *Fallen Pillars*, 127,165.

other Israeli settlement activities in the occupied territories.”¹⁹¹ To make things worse, on the 14th of September, the planning commission of the Jerusalem district approved the construction of a Jewish settlement in the Palestinian quarter of the old city, Ras el-Amud.¹⁹² At this point, the peace process came to a halt. From his side, Arafat suspended talks with Netanyahu and diminished the security cooperation between the Palestinian police and the Israeli army.

In early August 1997, the new Secretary of State, Madeline Albright, decided to break the silence towards the Middle East and get involved in the peace process to try to end the deadlock. Albright did not offer any American views of substance but suggested an active mediating role for America. Trying to address Palestinian concerns, she spoke of accelerating talks on interim issues. To satisfy the Israelis, she talked about moving fast into the issues of a final settlement. Albright made several trips to the Middle East, meeting both Arafat and Netanyahu, trying to break the ice between the two parties; her efforts did not, however, reach any viable results.¹⁹³ Addressing Palestinian concerns did not mean that Albright was capable of understanding the realities under which Palestinians lived. As a matter of fact, she thought that Arafat had limited security cooperation and halted peace talks to politically blackmail Netanyahu. She was incapable of seeing the despair.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Paul Lewis, “U.S. Again Vetoes a Move By UN Condemning Israel,” *New York Times*, March 22, 1997.

¹⁹² Charles Enderlin, *Shattered Dreams: The Failure of the Peace Process in the Middle East, 1995-2002*. Trans. Susan Sairfield. (New York: Other Press, 2003): 72.

¹⁹³ Quant, 350.

¹⁹⁴ Hoagland.

On the 20th of January 1998, Clinton held a meeting with Netanyahu. Before meeting with Clinton, Netanyahu was informed by the pro-Israel leader of the Republican opposition and Speaker of the House of Representatives Newt Gingrich and Jerry Fallwell, a far-right preacher, about the scandal the president was involved in and he was also notified that the president was going to be preoccupied by the public scandal. Knowing that, Netanyahu decided to resist any American demands and to stress his own.¹⁹⁵ Netanyahu was expected to bring a plan that included Israeli withdrawal from 10 percent of the West Bank; however, he wanted to have five months before the Israeli Cabinet would vote on the Israeli withdrawal. During that period, Palestinian actions concerning Israeli security and the halting of anti-Israeli rhetoric would be tested. If the Cabinet thought that the Palestinians had met Israel's demands, the Cabinet would approve the withdrawal plan; if not, it would veto it.¹⁹⁶ Clinton also held a meeting with Arafat, but the meeting was not successful at all, as he was so occupied with the "Monica Gate" scandal that he was not capable of conducting the meeting in a proper way. This was evidenced by the fact that Clinton kept leaving the meeting every now and then, and his mind clearly was not focused on the peace process.¹⁹⁷ During Arafat's visit, Arafat informed the Americans that the Israeli proposal of withdrawing from 10 percent of the West Bank was insufficient. Moreover, he said that the Palestinian side insisted that Israel perform three

¹⁹⁵ Enderlin, 80

¹⁹⁶ Thomas Friedman, "Foreign Affairs; Reciprocity for Reciprocity," *New York Times*, sec. A, Jan. 13, 1998.

¹⁹⁷ Enderlin, 81.

withdrawals, not one as they proposed, and that the Palestinians should be consulted about any future withdrawals Israel intended to perform.¹⁹⁸ Despite that, Clinton presented a detailed American plan in March which talked about improving the Palestinian performance on security and the Israeli withdrawal. The U.S. suggested that Israel would be expected to withdraw from an additional 13.1 percent of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, including territories in both zones C and B.¹⁹⁹ When the two parties were ready to talk about the issue, the U.S. asked Netanyahu to refrain from mentioning the exact percentage before meeting with Arafat in Clinton's presence. They knew that announcing the percentage would lead to immediate rejection by Arafat and would delay or cancel a future agreement.²⁰⁰

Albright held meetings with Arafat and Netanyahu in London in May. She was capable of gaining Arafat's approval to the American peace plan, but Netanyahu did not grant her his approval. As a result, Albright decided to pressure the Israelis to approve the proposal. In a press conference on 5 May 1998, she announced that she wanted the Israeli response to the proposal by the 11th of May. Albright threatened that if Netanyahu rejected the American proposal, she would publicize the American disagreements with the Israeli Prime Minister and that the U.S. would "reexamine our approach to the Middle East peace process."²⁰¹ This harsh attitude towards Israel did

¹⁹⁸ Steven Erlanger, "Arafat Tells Clinton Israel's 10% Pullback is Short," *New York Times*, late ed., Sec. A, Jan 23, 1998.

¹⁹⁹ Quandt, 352.

²⁰⁰ Steven Erlanger, "Albright Quest: A Silver Lining in the Middle East," *New York Times*, late ed., Sec. A, Dec. 20, 1997.

²⁰¹ Leon T. Hadar, "Letter From Washington: The Mouse That Roared," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 28, no.1 (Autumn 1998): 78.

not last longer than two weeks. Albright soon changed her hostile attitude to a friendly one, affirming that the U.S. could never dictate that Israel does anything and that only Israel should be in charge of its security. At first the deadline was extended, then removed altogether. Later, the administration announced that it was not against the Israeli opposition to the plan. In her next visit to London, Albright exerted pressure on the Palestinians.

Internal concerns were mainly behind that shift in attitude. The Clinton administration was facing scandals that threatened and weakened Clinton's position and ability to concentrate on foreign policy. By the time the Monica Lewinsky story began to emerge in public, some members of the pro-Israel community were already debating whether a possible resignation of Clinton would be good for them and Israel. The Jewish lobby started a heavy campaign against Clinton and his administration as soon as they heard Albright's words. Clinton was accused of selling Israel for the sake of Arafat and other Arab countries. Congress launched a heavy campaign along with the pro-Israel lobby against both Clinton and Albright. A letter was sent to the president, signed by the majority of the House, saying that Israel should not accept the White House's counterproductive plan. Making things worse for the administration was the statement made by Hillary Clinton one day before Albright's London press conference. Mrs. Clinton declared that the establishment of a Palestinian state would be "very important for the broader goal of peace in the Middle

East.” Her statement was interpreted as part of a strategy by Clinton to push Israel to go on with the peace process.²⁰²

American efforts continued throughout the summer. During that summer, the U.S. focused on closing the gap between Palestinians and Israelis. To do so, the U.S. linked the Palestinian demand of Israeli withdrawal from 13 percent of the West Bank to the Israeli demand of combating so-called Palestinian “terrorism”.²⁰³ As talks were not going anywhere, Arafat started in July to declare that if an agreement was not reached, he would unilaterally declare a Palestinian State on the 4th of May 1999. Arafat justified his position of declaring a Palestinian State on that day as it marked the end of the five-year transitional period stipulated in the Oslo accords.²⁰⁴ To make things worse for the Americans, a UN General Assembly resolution was passed, upgrading the status of Palestinians in the United Nations. This resolution was strongly condemned by the U.S. at all levels, State Department, Congress and the White House. James Rubin, the States Department’s spokesman, said that such a resolution would lead Israel to take unilateral actions. Rubin said that the resolution was unnecessary and untimely.²⁰⁵

On the 28th of September, Albright met Arafat and Netanyahu as a sidebar to a session of the UN General Assembly. The meeting did not lead to any development.

²⁰² Ibid, 83-84.

²⁰³ Freedman, *From Beirut* 59.

²⁰⁴ Serge Schmemmann, “Arafat Likely to declare Statehood in '99,” *New York Times*, late ed., sec. A, July 8, 1998.

²⁰⁵ Barbara Crossette, “Palestinians’ UN Role Widened; A U.S. ‘No’ Veto is Overwhelmed,” *New York Times*, late ed., sec. A, July 8, 1998. This resolution was sponsored by a group of Arab states, joined by Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cuba, Malaysia, Vietnam and several African countries. The resolution passed by 124 to 4, with 10 abstentions and 26 not present.

In another meeting at the White House, Netanyahu insisted that he was going to accept the concept of 13 percent withdrawal from the West Bank only after a security agreement was concluded. Moreover, Netanyahu agreed on the 13 percent only on the condition that 3 percent of that area would be a “nature reserve” on which Palestinians could not build.²⁰⁶

7. The Wye Agreement:

While Clinton was facing the possibility of impeachment and the electoral campaign for Congress was going on, Clinton and Albright decided to hold a summit in which an agreement would be reached and signed by the two parties. Due to “Monica Gate”, Clinton faced a problem of credibility from the Palestinian side. Ziad Amer, a Palestinian lawmaker, stated, “Before the scandal, at least [Clinton] had some credibility. He could send an envoy or Secretary of State and people would take it seriously. I don’t think he can be taken seriously. He also has no ability to do anything about the peace process. It is not even a realistic option.”²⁰⁷ Another disadvantage Clinton faced was that both Arafat and Netanyahu were aware of the fact that he was more reluctant to achieve a result during these negotiations than they were and that both of them were willing to use this fact to their advantage.²⁰⁸ Publicly, Clinton was in better condition since public opinion polls surprisingly showed that most Americans blamed Congress and the special prosecutor for

²⁰⁶ Freedman, *From Beirut*, 59.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁰⁸ Barton Gellman, “U.S. Barely Averts Walkout by Israel Summit Work Continues on Security Plan,” *Washington post*, A1, 22 October, 1998.

exaggerating the Monica Lewinsky scandal and using it for political purposes against Clinton.²⁰⁹

On the 15th of October, Netanyahu and Arafat landed in Washington, and after a short ceremony in the White House, they were both taken to the Wye Plantation. Clinton and his team wanted to make sure that Netanyahu would not have time to visit his friends in Congress as he usually did.²¹⁰ Moreover, the media was not allowed to cover the details of the negotiations. As the *Washington Post* put it, the administration did not want participants to negotiate “through the news media”.²¹¹

At the heart of the negotiations was the Palestinian security plan. George Tenet, director of the CIA, headed most security discussions. The Wye negotiations consolidated one key aspect of U.S. involvement in the conflict: the centrality of the CIA as Washington’s key instrument in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.²¹² The involvement of the CIA was consistent with the American commitment to Israeli security that guided the administration’s efforts to resolve the conflict throughout the previous and upcoming agreements.

The first major crisis that faced the summit was the Israeli insistence on receiving a detailed written Palestinian security plan, something the Palestinians refused to submit. As a consequence, Netanyahu threatened to leave the Wye Plantation, suspending peace talks. To calm things down, the Americans told the

²⁰⁹ Quandt, 353.

²¹⁰ Enderlin, 85.

²¹¹ Thomas Lippman. “President Shuttles to Eastern Shore Talks: Palestinian, Israeli Leaders’ Progress Remains a Secret,” *Washington post*, A27, October 18, 1998.

²¹² Bennis, *Before & After*, 69.

Israelis that the plan existed and that they would be receiving it the following day. Chairing the security meeting, Tenet was capable of bypassing the crisis, but the next day brought another crisis: a Palestinian carried out a grenade attack in Beersheva, wounding sixty-four Israelis. Netanyahu suspended all talks except on security. Trying to save the summit, Clinton came back to Wye, canceling his appearance for a fundraising campaign. The incident did not have real effect on the summit as the attacker was found to be working individually. On the 20th of October, King Hussein joined the negotiation teams.²¹³ At this point, Clinton called for an “inventory” of all issues. Addressing Ross, he said, “Let’s see if there’s groups of issues that we can settle now and then reserve the harder issues for later.” According to Ross, Clinton’s instructions were fruitful and helped in keeping negotiations going.²¹⁴ The very next day, Aviv Bushinsky, Netanyahu’s spokesman, announced that “since there is no Palestinian security plan, the prime minister is leaving the conference.” Half an hour after that announcement, Rubin stated in a press conference that “in the security area, we think serious work has been done and we think there is a sufficient basis to proceed, and it would be very unfortunate if one or the other party were to leave while we are ready, willing and able to help provide security for their people.”²¹⁵ Clinton decided to cancel his return to the conference. Albright went to see

²¹³ Enderlin, 86-87.

²¹⁴ John F. Harris, “Clinton Sees Accord as Part of His Own Path to Redemption,” *Washington Post*, A1, October 24, 1998.

²¹⁵ Gellman.

Netanyahu, telling him that he was free to leave. In the evening, Netanyahu decided to stay although his maneuver did not give him the results he was hoping for.²¹⁶

On the 22nd of October, Clinton returned to the Wye Plantation determined this time to reach an agreement. Twenty-one hours later, an agreement was reached. The last crisis that might have canceled the signing of the agreement was due to a political maneuver Netanyahu made at the last minute. Netanyahu claimed that Clinton had promised him to release Jonathan Pollard, an American found guilty of spying for Israel. U.S. officials denied Netanyahu's claim, and under heavy pressure from the U.S. intelligence community, Clinton said that Pollard was not going to be released, but he promised to initiate a review of his case.²¹⁷ Netanyahu's maneuver had backfired. He was not only incapable of releasing Pollard, but he also damaged his strong relations with the Republicans.²¹⁸ On the 23rd of October 1998, the agreement was signed by Arafat and Netanyahu.

As he had expected, the conclusion of the Wye agreement benefited Clinton himself. First, he was capable of demonstrating to Americans and the rest of the world that despite the problems he was facing, he was still a leader with international influence. Second, he was capable of removing Arab and Palestinian pessimism concerning his ability to exert pressure on Israel and to limit the damage caused by the American attacks on Iraq. Third, his position vis-à-vis Netanyahu was

²¹⁶ Enderlin, 88.

²¹⁷ Jim Lobe, "Politics-Mideast: Clinton Salvages Peace Process- For Now," *World News*, October 32, 1998.

²¹⁸ Freedman, *From Beirut*, 60.

strengthened due to the deteriorating relations between Netanyahu and Congress.²¹⁹ The signing of the agreement was seen as a victory achieved by the “indispensable man”, Clinton. He was portrayed in the news as the man who “preached accommodation to immutable realities.”²²⁰

8. Clinton in Gaza:

Clinton was aware that his victory at the Wye Plantation did not put an end to the conflict; the peace process was not over yet. As part of the Wye agreement, Clinton promised Arafat to visit Gaza to witness the meeting of the Palestinian National Council, in which the PA would null all clauses in the Palestinian Charter calling for the destruction of Israel.²²¹ Ironically, the most pro-Israel American president would be the first American president to make an official visit to a Palestinian controlled territory.

The situation on the ground was not what Clinton hoped for. In the American arena, Clinton was planning for a new assault on Iraq. The impeachment process was at its height, and Clinton was worried since many senators, even Democrats, did not reveal their position on the matter. Clinton’s aides saw the situation in Congress as “not positive for Clinton”. A senior aide told Clinton, “You’ve got guys that we thought we could get that have come out against us”²²²

²¹⁹ Ibid., 60.

²²⁰ Chomsky, xviii.

²²¹ Harris.

²²² James Bennet, “Clinton in the Mideast: The President; In Mideast, Clinton Appears to Put the Issue Out of Mind,” *New York Times*, late ed. Sec.1, December 16, 1998.

The situation in Palestine was also tense. Netanyahu, after performing a very modest redeployment and releasing some prisoners, announced the freezing of the implementation of the Wye Agreement. For him, Arafat had not fulfilled his part of the deal satisfactorily. Before the visit, many Israeli ministers suggested that Clinton should postpone his visit since visiting the Palestinian territory at this point would seem to be a great conciliation to Arafat.

Netanyahu announced that the implementation of the agreement on the Israeli part would remain halted until Palestinians fulfilled five demands:

- 1- Give up the unilateral proclamation of the Palestinian State;
- 2- Give up the demand for the release of Palestinian prisoners guilty of violent crimes;
- 3- Mount an operation, under American control, to seize illegal weapons;
- 4- Furnish a list of Palestinian police. Cut this police force back to 30,000 men;
- 5- Furnish the first report of the commission against incitement to violence.²²³

Palestinian streets were filled with demonstrations organized by the families of the political prisoners in Israel. Disappointed by the outcome of the agreement, some Palestinians believed that despite the symbolic importance of Clinton's visit, he was not going to offer Palestinians anything tangible. The popular Palestinian newspaper Al-Quds commented on the visit, saying, "After Clinton's [helicopter] lands at the Gaza airport, and after we blink our eyes in astonishment between believing and

²²³ Enderlin, 98.

disbelieving, we will ask the president if his visit is the beginning of a new era following decades of U.S. alignment with Israeli aggression.”²²⁴

Despite all these tensions, Clinton decided to take the trip to Gaza. He was warmly welcomed, then witnessed the meeting of the Palestinian National Council and declared, hand in hand with Arafat, the opening of Gaza International Airport.

9. Sharm El-Sheikh:

Two events occupied Clinton after coming back from his historic trip to Gaza and the West Bank. The first one was the Israeli elections, which he hoped would bring a more moderate Israeli Prime Minister; the second was the approaching date of Arafat’s promise to declare a Palestinian state. Being uncertain about the real Palestinian intentions and fearing that such a declaration would result in a confrontation between Israel and the Palestinians that might help Netanyahu in the upcoming elections, Clinton sent a letter to Arafat on the 26th of April.²²⁵ The letter represented a clear example of the continuous American policy towards Palestinians. Throughout the peace process, the U.S. kept asking Palestinians to fulfill their part of the agreements, even though Israel never fulfilled its part. The letter said, in part: “The first phase was implemented. Unfortunately, the second and third phases have not been. The Palestinians have implemented many of their commitments for the second phase....It is important that you continue these efforts and fulfill all of your

²²⁴ Lee Hockstader & Howard Schneider, “Clinton faces Skepticism on Mideast Trip,” *Washington post*, A33, December 13, 1998.

²²⁵ Quant, 357.

commitments. We will continue to work actively for implementation by Israel..”²²⁶ Moreover, knowing that Palestinians were always hopeful to gain some preference over Israelis in their relations with the U.S., he promised Arafat that the U.S. would do all it could to strengthen Palestinian-American relations. Clinton got what he hoped for on the 29th of April. Palestinian leaders decided against declaring statehood on May 4th. The Palestinian Central Council decided that it would resume its discussions on that matter in June after the Israeli elections were concluded. If Netanyahu stayed in power, they could still announce the state; if not, they would give negotiations a chance.²²⁷

The 17th of May brought great news for Clinton. Ehud Barak became the new Israeli Prime Minister. Barak belonged to the same realist school of thought as Rabin. From their perspective, “the balance of power in the Middle East cast the United States in a central role.” Despite this perspective, once in power, Barak criticized the American role in the Wye Plantation agreement. Barak was against the intensive negotiating role America played and the involvement of the CIA in determining whether or not the Palestinians were fulfilling their security commitments.²²⁸ Clinton decided to adhere to Barak’s request and announced that the U.S. would be only a facilitator, helping the parties to reach an agreement without imposing its own

²²⁶ Enderlin, 108.

²²⁷ Deborah Sontag, “Palestinian Leaders Decide Not to Declare Statehood Next Week,” *New York Times*, late ed. sec.1, April 30, 1999.

²²⁸ Rynhold.

views.²²⁹ The American commitment towards this approach was clear when Albright decided to postpone her trip to the Middle East in August. The purpose of this visit was to get the stalled Wye agreement back on track and also to revive the Syrian-Israeli peace talks. Albright's decision came after Barak requested that delay to sort out problems with the Palestinians over the timing of the next pullout of Israeli troops from the West Bank.²³⁰ Another point of agreement between Israel and the U.S. was the prioritizing of the Syrian track over the Palestinian one. During his first visit to the U.S., Barak told Clinton that from a strategic point of view, the Syrian track was more important to Israel than the Palestinian one at that time.²³¹

The new strengthening of the American-Israeli relations caused a threat to the Palestinians. Their hopes of taking advantage of previously deteriorating American-Israeli relations faded away. The situation on the ground was also alarming. Palestinians started to lose patience as they needed to see something real implemented on the ground. The Wye agreement was still on hold, and the advent of Barak did not produce any improvement; on the contrary, new settlements were being built. The new emphasis on Syria made them feel left out.

The stalled peace process was revived by the signing of a new agreement in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt on the 4th of September 1999. During the last phase of negotiating the new agreement, Albright delayed her trip to the Middle East. Most of

²²⁹ Quant, 357.

²³⁰ Philip Shenon, "To Help Israel, Albright Delays Visit to Mideast," *New York Times*, late ed., sec 1, August 10, 1999.

²³¹ Enderlin, 117.

her trip was dedicated to the Syrian-Israeli peace process. Despite Albright's announcement during her visit to the Middle East that she was not going to mediate in those negotiations,²³² she intervened in the last two days to solve the Palestinian-Israeli differences. The breakthrough came after she held a meeting with Arafat, where she presented to him the latest Israeli positions and sealed his acceptance of a bargain. Albright did not present any ideas from the American side, and she called her role during these negotiations as a "handmaiden."²³³ The central part of the agreement was a plan to negotiate a framework for a permanent settlement between the two parties by the 15th of February 2000 and the conclusion of detailed talks by September.²³⁴

10. Camp David:

After the signing of the Sharm El-Sheikh agreement, Israel and the U.S. decided that it was time to concentrate on the Syrian-Israeli peace agreement. Their efforts did not reach any advancement, which again made them direct their attention to the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. Clinton knew that he had only a few months left as President of the United States, and reaching a final status agreement between Palestinians and Israelis would be a great personal achievement. The administration knew that it had limited time to conclude an agreement, not only because of the limited time left for Clinton in the White House, but also because of the upcoming

²³² Lee Hockstader, "Israel, Palestinians Draw Closer to Revived Accord," *Washington post*, A1 September 2, 1999.

²³³ Lee Hockstader, "Palestinians and Israelis Reach Accord: Albright Helps Clinch Deal Signing Scheduled for Tonight," *Washington Post*, A1, September 4, 1999.

²³⁴ Jane Perlez, "Israel and PLO, With Help of U.S., Reach an Accord," *New York Times*, September 4, 1999.

Israeli elections, which would delay the implementation of any agreement for at least 90 days.²³⁵

When Clinton announced the Camp David summit meeting, he said that he was hoping that the summit would resolve the deepest matters dividing Israelis and Palestinians. He also said that these issues were so well-known that the solutions should be within sight.²³⁶ The American attitude showed a complete disregard of the Palestinian way of thinking and total harmony with Israel's. Arafat was clear from the beginning that the timing was not right to hold the summit. He insisted that further preparations were needed before starting the summit.²³⁷ The issues to be discussed were known, just as Clinton had said, but solutions were not within sight as he had predicted.

The summit was surrounded by a high level of confidentiality. Before the summit started, the U.S. team refused to give any details about the role they were going to play or the type of the negotiations. It was not clear whether the issues were going to be discussed as a whole or issue by issue, and the Americans did not say if they were going to present their ideas or not.²³⁸

After the eventual collapse of the summit, Clinton refused to take any responsibility for the failure of the negotiations. Clinton broke his promise made to

²³⁵ Eugene Bird, "Camp David Negotiators Fail to Resolve 'Core Issues' of Jerusalem." *Washington Report On Middle East Affairs* (Aug/Sep 2002): 6,18.

²³⁶ Jane Perlez, "Moment of Truth on Tough Issues," *New York Times* July 11 2000.

²³⁷ On the 15th July, Arafat told Clinton himself during a meeting at the White House about his worries, and later on he repeated his point to Albright when he met her in Ramallah. See Enderlin, 162, 169.

²³⁸ Perlez, "Moment of Truth"

Arafat before the summit that Arafat would not be blamed if talks failed²³⁹ and clearly criticized Arafat, though he denied it. He praised Barak over and over for making what he described as “bold decisions”. Clinton said that “Barak was ready to step up to something that President Arafat wasn’t yet ready to step up to.” Clinton stated that the Camp David talks were not a complete failure, as “significant progress was made on the core issues.” An agreement was not reached despite this progress. In fact, the only agreement made was the agreement between the two parties that “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.”²⁴⁰

Blaming Arafat for the failure of the summit further demonstrated the American insistence on siding with Israel and the American failure to understand the Palestinian perspective and realities. The administration was incapable of and unwilling to comprehend the dramatic realities that would have resulted if the Palestinians accepted the Israeli proposal. Moreover, the U.S. had two reasons behind its criticism of Arafat. First, it wanted to improve Barak’s political situation in Israel. During a phone call between Saeb Erekat and Dennis Ross after the failure of the summit, Ross clearly answered Erekat’s question about the reason behind blaming Arafat: “Barak needs this so he can face his internal difficulties in Israel.”²⁴¹ The second reason was justifying the American policy of supporting the oppressive Israeli occupation, politically as well as economically. The U.S. House of Representatives, with only 30 dissenting votes, adopted a bipartisan resolution praising Barak and

²³⁹ Enderlin, 165.

²⁴⁰ Editorial, *Washington Post*, A23, July 26, 2000.

²⁴¹ Enderlin, 260.

condemning President Arafat for rejecting the proposal. The resolution was seen as a message to both the Israeli and the American public that an overwhelming consensus of U.S. lawmakers believed that the Palestinians were not really committed to the peace process and that even stronger U.S. backing of the Israeli occupation and its right wing government was necessary.²⁴²

The shortsighted vision of the Clinton administration could not be described better than the way former Special Assistant for Arab-Israel Affairs, Rob Malley, put it once he left office:

[W]e often hear about Ehud Barak's unprecedented offer and Yasser Arafat's uncompromising no. Israel is said to have made a historic, generous proposal, which the Palestinians, once again seizing the opportunity to miss an opportunity, turned down. In short, the failure to reach a final agreement is attributed, without notable dissent, to Yasser Arafat. As orthodoxies go, this is a dangerous one...[I]t fails to capture why what so many viewed as a generous Israeli offer, the Palestinians viewed as neither generous, nor Israeli, nor, indeed, as an offer. Worse it acts as a harmful constraint on American policy by offering up a single, convenient culprit – Arafat – rather than a more nuanced and realistic analysis.²⁴³

The American and Israeli announcement about the great Israeli compromises made by Barak did not reflect the truth. What the Israelis offered during the summit was more than what other Israeli governments had offered, but still what was offered to the Palestinians was far less than international law and the international community granted them. Americans and Israelis announced that Israeli negotiators offered

²⁴² Stephen Zunes, "The U.S. Role in the Breakdown of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, Special Report (May 2002), <http://www.fpif.org/papers/ispal/index.html>

²⁴³ Phyllis Bennis, *Before & After*, 79-80.

Palestinians control over 90-95 percent of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, a demilitarized Palestinian state, the return of a number of Palestinian refugees. They claimed that the main issue of disagreement was Jerusalem.²⁴⁴

However, the truth is that the 90-95 percent of the land offered to the Palestinians was a trap. This land would have been divided and surrounded by Israeli settlements and bypass roads that would have divided the Palestinian state into cantons that would have been strategically controlled by Israel. On the issue of refugees, the main disagreement was on refuting the right of return. Barak refused to acknowledge the fact that Israel bore responsibility for the creation of the problem of Palestinian refugees. Moreover, the number of refugees that were going to return would only be allowed to return as part of a family reunification program, not as a Palestinian right.²⁴⁵ On the issue of Jerusalem, Israel refused to give Palestinians real sovereignty over the eastern part of the city. The Americans presented different proposals whose aim was to break down the notion of sovereignty so that each side could claim to exercise some degree of control over the areas that mattered the most to each party. None of the American proposals was applicable on the ground, which made Arafat refuse them all.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ Quandt, 364.

²⁴⁵ Jermone Slater, "What Went Wrong: The Collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process," *Political Science Quarterly* 116, Issue 2 (2001): 171

²⁴⁶ Quandt, 365.

11. The end of Peace

Despite the failure of the Camp David Summit, contacts between Palestinians and Israelis were not suspended. Between August and September 2000, more than 50 meetings were held in Jerusalem between the two parties. The total collapse of the peace came after Ariel Sharon, the then right-wing opposition leader, visited Haram Sharif in September 2000. Sharon's visit was approved by Barak, who sent along with him hundreds of soldiers for protection, which led to massive Palestinian demonstrations. The Israeli response was violent as they suppressed those demonstrations with an extensive use of force.

During the escalation of the Israeli aggression, the Clinton administration approved the largest ever sale of military helicopters to Israel. Those helicopters were repeatedly used against Palestinian civilians and civilian facilities. Despite the fact that U.S. laws forbid the use of American military equipment against civilians, the administration kept its eyes closed. A Pentagon official was reported saying that the U.S. would not "second-guess" an Israeli commander who gave his orders to use these helicopters against civilian targets.²⁴⁷

The attitude of Congress towards the second Intifada helped the administration in supporting Israel and its aggressive behavior. Despite the growing number of human rights reports criticizing Israel for its aggression, American senators signed a letter to Clinton on the 12th of October, urging him to "express solidarity with Israel at this critical moment" and "condemn the Palestinian campaign

²⁴⁷ Zunes, "The U.S. Role in the Breakdown of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process."

of violence.” On the 25th of October, the House passed a non-binding resolution, expressing its solidarity with Israel and condemning the Palestinian leadership for encouraging the violence. The resolution also urged the administration to veto any UN Security Council resolution dealing with the Intifada.²⁴⁸

Barak encouraged Clinton to propose an American peace plan. Throughout the peace process, Clinton did intervene on some occasions personally, but proposing a comprehensive peace plan had been a precedent not only to him but also throughout the years of American involvement in the conflict.²⁴⁹ On the 23rd of December 2000, Clinton presented his proposal to both sides. Being so eager to reach an agreement, Clinton asked all friendly states to intervene in persuading Arafat to accept the proposal.²⁵⁰ However, the proposal was rejected by both sides. Even Barak backed away from it and strongly announced that he would not “sign any document that will transfer sovereignty over Temple Mount to Palestinians.” On the Palestinian side, the proposal was perceived as a “trap” more than an opportunity. It was perceived as an Israeli plan aimed at canceling Palestinian national rights and the right of return granted to Palestinians by international law and UN resolutions.²⁵¹ At this point, the American role in the peace process became marginal, and negotiations were held between Palestinians and Israelis without American intervention.

²⁴⁸ Shirl McArther, “House of Representatives Condemns and Threatens Palestinians.” *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* (December, 2000): 17-18.

²⁴⁹ Kissinger, 179.

²⁵⁰ Enderlin, 343.

²⁵¹ John Kifner, “All Sides Resist Plan by Clinton for the Mideast,” *New York Times* 31 December 2000.

Conclusion

After identifying and evaluating the elements of continuity and discontinuity of American foreign policy towards Palestine, the author has reached the conclusion that there have been constant variables that have governed American approach towards Palestine between the Nixon and the Clinton administrations. These variables played a key role in undermining and liquidating Palestinian interests and rights, and they will continue to do the same in the future.

These constant variables are the direct result of the special relation between the United States of America and Israel. Even the change in American general behavior from realism to neo-liberalism, and the change in the international arena after the end of the Cold War, did not shack or alter the nature of this relationship.

The US tends to adopt the Israeli interpretation of the conflict, thus neglecting the Palestinian perspective. The US has refused to admit that the root of the Palestinian problem is the creation of the state of Israel on Palestinian land. For the United State, the existence of the state of Israel in the Middle East is a de'facto reality and that Palestinian and Arab attitude towards Israel as derived from unreasoned hate and prejudice

During decades of American involvement in the conflict, the U.S. has committed itself to serve Israeli interests and security with the attempt to achieve political gains on behalf of Israel. To help Israel in acquiring Palestinian recognition, the U.S. committed itself, through the secret pledge it gave to Israel in September

1975, during the Sinai II Agreement, not to start any political dialogue with the P.L.O. until it recognized the state of Israel and its right to exist.

After achieving this goal, through the Oslo Accord, the U.S. went a step further in serving Israeli interests as it kept on exerting power on Palestinians to sign agreements that are way far from their lawful political aspirations. Hence, the U.S. rarely exert power on Israel when it is not complying with the agreements it signed with Palestinians or when it violates International Law to undermine Palestinian rights. The U.S. has been willing to exert power on Israel only when its interests contradicted with those of Israel.

The United States generally does not respect or value the United Nations or international law. For the US, international law and the UN are mere tools to serve its interests as well as a weapon against those states that defy its power and interests. Having the power of veto in the Security Council, the U.S. has repeatedly isolated itself from international consensus on the question of Palestine, vetoing any UN resolution Israel does not accept by using lame excuses to justify its position. Claiming that the resolution is not balanced is one of the most used excuses by the U.S.

Furthermore, the U.S. during the Clinton era in particular, worked on liquidating Palestinians rights granted by international law through manipulating legal terms and evacuating UN resolutions related to the question of Palestine from their essence by adopting the Israeli interpretation of these resolutions.

As an example the US has changed the status of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip from "Occupied Territory" to "Disputed Territory" in adherence to Israeli claim that the rules of the fourth Geneva Convention could not be applicable there. Moreover, the US focused on resolution 242 and 338 to be the base for any peace talks between Palestinians and Israelis. This way the US intentionally bypassed a number of UN resolutions whereby, if referred to they would have strengthened Palestinian position during the peace negotiations.

Adopting Israeli interpretation of the conflict and having the Israeli-American relations as the starting point for the Palestinian-American relations, made the US administrations blindfoldedly blame any escalation of the conflict on the Palestinians. This fact was best shown when the second Palestinian Intifada started in the year 2000. The U.S. interpreted the Intifada as a maneuver Arafat used to force his demands on Israel after the failure of the Camp David disregarding Arafat's repeated warnings that Sharon's visit to the Haram Sharif would be catastrophic.

For decades the U.S. administrations have supported Israel in creating facts on the ground unilaterally, prejudicing the outcome of negotiations in any peace settlement. The US went all the way in its support to Israel violating international law through providing financial aid to Israeli illegal settlements. The myth of "natural growth" of settlements was the main excuse the US used to justify its support. Kissinger's comment on the Rabat meeting which took place November 1973 between the CIA deputy director and Arafat during the Egyptian-Israeli peace talks gives a clear example of this strategy. For Kissinger, the meeting was successful

because it achieved his goals, which aimed at gaining time and preventing any assaults during the early peace talks.

The American intervention in the conflict is mainly derived from its concern over the escalation of the conflict into a regional unrest. The U.S. has vast interest in maintaining and protecting the pro-American Arab governments. This is true for the U.S. as the escalation of the conflict may cause national unrest in neighboring Arab states. As a result, any escalation of the conflict will cause the Arab public to condemn Israel and ask their governments to cut its diplomatic relations with it. After the signing of the peace agreement between Palestinians and Israelis the U.S. concentrated on the Syrian-Israeli track. The Hebron massacre and the major unrest it caused drove back the U.S. to the Palestinian track. While, as soon as an agreement was reached, the Palestinian issue became a less priority on the American priority list.

As a consequence of these variables, Palestinians should no longer perceive the United States as the sole option for resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as it is not a reliable and honest broker. Never-the-less, the fact that the U.S. is the major power in the world, it is imperative for Palestinians to consider reevaluating their approach towards the U.S., and look upon other options that will be presented in the recommendations below.

Recommendations:

Palestinians have to depend on a reliable third party, capable of understanding their problem from their own point of view and have the political power and will to serve Palestinian interests. This reliable third party is the European Union. It should

be targeted by diplomatic means to play that role. There are several factors that make the E.U. capable of being a broker of peace in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. First the fact that Europe shares a long history with the Middle East and Palestine makes it more capable than the U.S. to defend the Palestinian perspective on the conflict. European states did realize Palestinians as a separate people giving them their lawful rights through the United Nations opening political dialogue with the P.L.O. While the U.S. defied these rights.

It is true that at this time the U.S. is the major power in the international arena, but since the creation of the E.U., Europe is trying to spread its influence in the world and at some occasions defy U.S. dominance. Palestinians should use this fact to serve their interests and use the contradictions between the U.S. and the E.U. to persuade the E.U. to defy the U.S. when working against Palestinian interests.

Strengthening the political ties with the E.U. should be accompanied by a strong social movement. It is recommended to work with the Arabs and Palestinians holding European citizenship in order to create a network among them to be responsible for presenting the Palestinian issue to the European public from a Palestinian point of view. Moreover, Palestinian universities should work on improving their student exchange programs with the European universities to enhance cultural dialogue and interaction between the two people. The European Neighborhood policy is an excellent platform to be used for social exchange and for presenting the Palestinian issue to the European public.

On the American front, Palestinians should use civil society institutions for their benefit by strengthening their ties with Palestinian-Americans. Despite the fact that changing America mentality towards Palestinians and mobilizing that force for their benefit may take decades, still Palestinians should not give up on this front. The tremendous public response against the Israeli army within the American society after the Hebron massacre is a great example of how sensitive the American society is towards the Israeli violations in Palestine. Ignorance is a major factor behind American public support towards Israel and if this point is well managed by Palestinians, a tremendous change within the American public opinion would be achieved in favor of Palestine. Two steps should be taken to introduce the Palestinian issue to the American public: first, hiring a public relations company to work on improving the Palestinian image within the American society; second, using Palestinian-Americans to create pressure groups solely interested in the issue of Palestine, to undermine the role of AIPAC and other pro-Israeli lobbyists.

Moreover, Palestinians should work with Arab states to give up the unilateral track of peace negotiations with Israel. Using a multilateral track would help in strengthening the Palestinian position against the Israeli's by depriving Israel from the political gains it achieved in the past on the expense of Palestinian interests.

Internally, reforming Palestinian institutions should be a priority to the Palestinians. Reforming and strengthening institutions would help improving Palestinian political performance on all levels, nationally as well as internationally.

Being seen as credible and trustworthy, Palestinian arguments would be spread internationally to a greater level gaining credibility and trust.

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