4-25-2018

The Changing Geopolitical Dynamics of the Middle East and their Impact on Israeli-Palestinian Peace Efforts

Daniel Bucksbaum

*Western Michigan University*, danielbucksbaum@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/honors_theses

Part of the Comparative Politics Commons, International Relations Commons, and the Other Political Science Commons

Recommended Citation

https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/honors_theses/3009

This Honors Thesis-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Lee Honors College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.
The Changing Geopolitical Dynamics of the Middle East and their Impact on Israeli-Palestinian Peace Efforts

By

Daniel Bucksbaum

A thesis submitted to the Lee Honors College

Western Michigan University

April 2018

Thesis Committee:

Jim Butterfield, Ph.D., Chair

Yuan-Kang Wang, Ph.D.

Mustafa Mughazy, Ph.D.
# Table of Contents

I. Abstract ........................................................................................................................................3

II. Source Material ..............................................................................................................................4

III. Introduction ..................................................................................................................................4

IV. Historical Context for the Two-State Solution ...........................................................................6
   a. Deeply Rooted and Ideological Claims to the Land .................................................................7
   b. Legacy of the Oslo Accords .....................................................................................................9
   c. Israeli Narrative: Why the Two-State Solution is Unfeasible .............................................19
   d. Palestinian Narrative: Why the Two-State Solution has become unattainable ..............22
   e. Drop in Support for the Two-State Solution; Negotiations entirely ............................27
   f. Alternatives to the Two-State Solution ..................................................................................30

V. Regional Dynamics Changing, Mutual Threats Creating New Alliances ...............................34
   a. Impact of the JPCOA .............................................................................................................35
   b. Increase in Saudi-Israeli Cooperation ..................................................................................38
   c. Increase in Israeli-Egyptian Cooperation .............................................................................45
   d. Critical Israeli-Jordanian Cooperation ...............................................................................47

VI. The Trump Administration, Israeli, and Palestinian Leadership ...........................................48
   a. The Trump Administration ...................................................................................................49
   b. Implications of the Jerusalem Decision .............................................................................51
   c. Future of Israeli Leadership ..................................................................................................53
   d. Future of Palestinian Leadership ..........................................................................................56
   e. Hamas-Fatah Reconciliation ................................................................................................62
f. Responsibility for the Crisis in Gaza ................................................................. 63

VII. Components of the American-Saudi Proposal .............................................. 66

   a. Land Swaps and Settlements ........................................................................ 67
   b. Gaza-Focused Palestine .................................................................................. 72
   c. The Right of Return ....................................................................................... 74
   d. The Capital of Palestine .................................................................................. 75
   e. Demilitarization and Security in the Jordan Valley ........................................ 76

VIII. Conclusion ..................................................................................................... 77

IX. Bibliography ...................................................................................................... 79
Abstract

In this thesis the status and feasibility of the two-state solution, the primary and most widely-accepted potential resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be analyzed. It considers aspects such as physical challenges (geography and topography of the land), regressive and damaging actions to the peace process by Israelis and Palestinians, and the newly developing changes in regional alliances and interests in the Middle East. The status of the traditional two-state solution, due to its history, obstacles, and current regional developments, has implications for future negotiations and have changed the direction of peace talks. Dramatic shifts in regional interests and the balance of power in the Middle East have caused the Saudi-led Gulf states to increase their strategic cooperation with Israel, permanently changing the direction of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. This is clear especially when considering the significant changes in the regional dynamics of the Middle East, amid a growing relationship between Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the other Sunni Gulf states. Other factors – the future of the Iran nuclear deal and the future of Israeli and Palestinian leadership – will affect peace talks and will likely influence the components of a peace deal potentially proposed by the Trump Administration. Among these factors, the Arab states’ relatively new and substantial signs of gravitation towards Israel to create an anti-Iranian alliance is the biggest indicators of serious change in Arab policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
Source Material

The literature and source material which was used for this thesis report consists of books, scholarly journals, and other articles related to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. This paper focuses primarily on the peace process following the 1993 Oslo Accords. Information was also gathered from Israeli, Palestinian, American, and other government documents, the United Nations, and Israeli, Palestinian, and other international NGO reports and documents, including various human rights groups which monitor and collect data on the conflict. Most of the statistics and survey data collected is from Israeli and Palestinian non-profits and think tanks, and Israeli and Palestinian census reports for analyzing demographic information and public opinion polls. Much of the more recent information regarding the peace process and its up-to-date developments is sourced from Israeli, Arabic, and Western media sources. Lastly, information regarding the past, and future of the peace process was collected through previously recorded interviews and speeches given by American, Israeli, Palestinian, and Saudi officials. After analyzing this data, a determination was made about the status of the two-state solution, and the future of the conflict and peace process given modern circumstances. A variety of sources, including media reports, data collections, and interviews with government officials were used to assess the potential outcomes of the conflict and peace process.

Introduction

The two-state solution was an idea to partition the Israelis and Palestinians, creating two states for two-peoples, in a very small land. Many have worked tirelessly over the last fifty years and many worked tirelessly to ensure is infeasibility. Israeli settlements have been constructed with the purpose of strategically dividing the West Bank and hindering the chance
of any future Palestinian state. Israel’s increased terror threat on all sides, compounded by the direct result of its disengagement from Gaza in 2005, have disproven the ideal “land for peace” narrative. Today the question remains: Is the two-state solution still a feasible option? Have the obstacles of the last fifty years changed the status of the two-state solution and effected its feasibility? A two-state solution with borders defined by the 1949 Armistice lines has become impractical with increased settlement activity and threats to Israel’s security.

However, most significant to the future of the peace process, due to recent shifting relationships and dynamics between regional powers in the Middle East, Israel is no longer forced to accept the traditional two-state solution. Because of the changing relationships and realities in the Middle East, Israel is getting more bargaining power from the support it is receiving from powerful Arab states and the Trump Administration. Palestinians are losing bargaining power as Arab countries are finding it to be in their interest to align with Israel. Due to the resulting change in direction of the negotiation process, the best solution which is still attainable is a lesser version of a two-state solution; a solution that doesn’t call for one sovereign state or two, but one state and one with limited sovereignty. A watered-down two-state solution which does not meet all the Palestinians’ demands. It is an unconventional thought in considering a fair and just peace deal, but it is the most practical and in the best interest of Israel, the current American administration, and the neighboring Arab countries. The information present and the status of the two-state solution and the changing regional dynamics of the Middle East will be used to determine the components of a potential peace deal proposed by the Trump administration.
Historical Context to the Two-State Solution

The most widely accepted solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict among the international community is a two-state solution based on U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. Resolution 242 was unanimously passed by the Security Council following the Six-Day War of 1967, during which Israel conquered the formerly Jordanian-occupied West Bank and Egyptian-occupied Gaza strip (in addition to the Syrian Golan Heights and Egyptian Sinai Peninsula.) The resolution called for an Israeli withdrawal from all the territories it occupied in the conflict.¹ This concept was reaffirmed by the adoption of Resolution 338, which called for a cease fire to the 1973 Yom Kippur, launched by Egypt and Syria to regain the territory they had lost in the previous war. The resolution also called for the full implementation of Resolution 242.² The foundation for a practical two-state solution and the establishment of a future Palestinian state was laid out in 1993 with the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements. Also known as the Oslo Accords, they were signed by then Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, with U.S. President Bill Clinton as mediator. The Oslo Accords laid the foundation for a two-state solution based on the 1949 armistice lines, or the Green Line, inferring that a future Palestinian state be established in the West Bank and Gaza, the territories which Israel occupied in the 1967 war. However, in the 25 years after the signing of the Oslo Accords, the long sought after two-state solution has become more impractical due to changing realities on the ground, severely hindering the feasibility of a two-state solution. The reality of what a long-

A term peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians would look like is changing dramatically.

**Deeply Rooted and Ideological claims to the land**

Many Israelis and Palestinians believe that a two-state solution is unattainable due to the opposite side’s perceived refusal to live alongside the other in any circumstance. For the Palestinians, historic Palestine, the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, is the land of their ancestors, unquestionably. There had been continuous Muslim and Arab presence in the land for centuries prior to with the establishment of Israel or the “Nakba” (catastrophe in Arabic) in 1948. For many Palestinians and their supporters, agreeing to two states in the land is already compromising enough, given the great injustice that has been done unto them. What is seen as the most acceptable by the world (the two-state solution) would mean a state in only 22% of their historic homeland and excluding the thousands of their ancestral towns and villages in Israel, many of which no longer exist. During the great expulsion and exodus of Palestinians from Palestine and the newly created Israel in 1948, an estimated 700,000 Palestinian residents were forced to flee or were expelled. The remaining of those refugees and their descendants today, now totaling around five million, believe the land in the state of Israel is rightly theirs, and they should be allowed to return to it. This is known as the right of return, a crucial Palestinian demand to any peace deal.

Because of the nature of the establishment of Israel and the Nakba, many Palestinians are unwilling to settle for a two-state solution, as their ancestral land is in Israel. Many Palestinians have never and will never be willing to accept any Jewish state living beside them. A common practice in Palestinian propaganda is to flatly reject and deny any Jewish connection
to the land of Israel, denying them any legitimacy or rights to live in the land of the Jewish patriarchs. Palestinian opposition to the establishment of any Jewish homeland or state Jewish state in the land goes back to the former Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Haj Amin al-Husseini.

Fearful of an establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, Al-Husseini encouraged his Muslim followers to fight alongside Nazi units, and to contribute to the Nazis’ annihilation of world Jewry. Proposed settlements for two-states in historic Palestine were proposed by the Peel Commission in 1937, the UN Partition plan of 1947, and offers to the PLO made by Israeli Prime Ministers. All offers to accept two-states have been rejected by the Palestinian Arab population.

In all, Israelis view the idea of two-states as an idea of the past, which has been repeatedly rejected by the Arabs, as a sign of rejection to any Jewish state in the land. Israelis view a withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza to establish a Palestinian state would sooner or later bring about Israel’s demise. There are too many Palestinians who would not stop short of reclaiming all historic Palestine back, and will continue to wage war against Israel indefinitely. In addition, the conquering of the West Bank, or Judea and Samaria, the Biblical heartland of Judaism, as well as historic Palestine for Palestinians, in the 1967 war has changed Israeli views on ceding territory. Many Israelis view the acquisition of this land as a divine act and a sign that the Jews were truly meant to return to this land, as it is stated in the Bible. Because of the religious aspect of acquiring this land, many Israelis will continue to refuse to give up any territory to another sovereign. It is even written in the Likud party charter that

---

3 “Statement on Hajj Amin Al-Husayni.” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Israel shall not recognize any Palestinian state or relinquish power to any foreign entity in the biblical land of Israel. Specifically, “between the Sea and the Jordan there will only be Israeli sovereignty.” The refusal to make any land concessions to the other side is shared by both Israelis and Palestinians, however in the most extreme circles.

**Legacy of the Oslo Accords**

Prior to the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, Israel and the PLO needed public attention in diplomacy. They both needed to showcase their desire to move forward with peace talks to the international community. Israel was facing scrutiny for its handling of the first intifada, a major uprising of Palestinians that began in 1987 that went on until the agreement was reached in 1993. In all, more than 1,000 Palestinians were killed in clashes with Israeli security forces, and Israel came under fire for then Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin’s “broken bones” policy, instructing security forces to break demonstrators’ arms and legs to squash the rebellion.

The first Intifada was beneficial to the Palestinians in many ways, primarily paving the way for the Oslo Accords and relative autonomy. It gave the Palestinians a greater sense of national unity, empowerment, and self-confidence, and gave them more favorable international media coverage, after an era of largely one-sided media reports of PLO-orchestrated plane hijackings and other terrorist attacks. It also changed the narrative of Palestinian resistance from violence and terrorism to non-lethal, popular resistance in the occupied territories. It increased awareness and polarized Israeli society on the Palestinian

---

question and empowered the peace camp of the Israeli left. It also forced Israel to dispatch large numbers of forces and turned the occupied territories into serious economic liabilities for Israel. As violence continued, it gave the Palestinians leverage in the coming negotiations.

Jordan’s King Hussein felt pressured to relinquish all Jordanian ties and claims to the West Bank, allowing for the PLO to become the dominant party in future negotiations. Through the first Intifada, the Palestinian message to Israelis of desire for separation and self-determination was delivered clearly.⁶

Amid the first Intifada, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in the first Gulf War. Yasser Arafat isolated himself and the PLO from the Arab states by openly supporting Saddam’s mission, empowering the PLO’s main rival Hamas. Hamas, or the Islamic Resistance Movement, grew out of the first Intifada and received financial support from Iran. It gained popular support during the first Intifada by branding the PLO as too secular, and ineffective in reclaiming historic Palestine from Israel. At a time when it was bankrupt, politically isolated from the Arab states, and challenged by rival Palestinian militant groups, the PLO needed decisive action to maintain its legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of the Palestinian people as well as the international community and the Arab states.⁷

Israel and the PLO began conducting secret negotiations in 1992 in Oslo, Norway. A year later in Washington D.C., Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat signed the Oslo Accords, formally titled the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government.

---


Arrangements. This was meant to be an interim agreement, to establish a framework for a permanent settlement, to be later established by the two parties based on Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. By signing the agreement Israel accepted the Palestinian Liberation Organization as the legitimate representative body of the Palestinian people. In exchange, the PLO renounced terrorism and recognized Israel’s right to exist. As part of the plan for limited Palestinian autonomy, the Palestinian Authority was created to assume governing control over parts of the West Bank and Gaza over a five-year period, upon Israel’s withdrawal from Gaza and the West Bank city of Jericho. The most contentious, such as permanent borders, settlements, Jerusalem, and refugees, were set aside for future negotiations.

The arrangements and the road to an eventual two-state solution hit a series of obstacles in the years following the Oslo Accords. In February of 1994, after the signing of the Oslo Accords, Israeli right-wing extremist and Jewish Defense League (JDL) member Baruch Goldstein entered the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron and massacred Palestinian worshippers. He murdered 29 and injured 125 Palestinians before he was disarmed and killed by survivors of the massacre. In retaliation, a series of terrorist attacks against Israelis in the occupied territories and in Israel followed, beginning the era of suicide bombings in Israel. Despite the outbreak of reciprocal violence and Goldstein’s blatant attempt to “end the Oslo Accords,” as he told he told friends he intended to do, the peace negotiations continued. The two parties signed the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, or “Oslo II” in September 1995. Oslo II

---

divide the West Bank into three administrative regions, or areas, and security and administrative responsibilities were to be transferred over from Israel to the Palestinian Authority in certain degrees in each region, or area.\textsuperscript{10} Area A, in total 19\% of the West Bank, was to be placed under total security and administrative control of the Palestinian Authority. Area B, 21\% of the West Bank, was to be under mixed control of Israel and the PA, with the PA controlling administration and governance with Israel managing security. Of the 2.6 million Palestinians living in the West Bank, most of them live in the urban population centers in Areas A and B. However, these areas are a series of 165 noncontiguous islands, separated and surrounded by the much larger Area C, comprising the remaining 60\% of the West Bank. Israel controls all administrative and security responsibilities in Area C.\textsuperscript{11}

Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated in November of 1995 by Yigal Amir, Jewish extremist who opposed surrendering any land to the Palestinians on grounds of religious and ideological views. Rabin’s signing the Oslo Accords, his subsequent assassination, the Hebron Massacre and the following riots and terror attacks, all influenced Israel’s May 1996 elections, in which the right-wing Likud party was elected, led by Benjamin Netanyahu. As outlined in the Likud Party Charter, the party opposes the establishment of a Palestinian state or the relinquishing of any territory to foreign forces between the Jordan River and Mediterranean Sea. It also sees settlement expansion as vital to the Zionist vision.\textsuperscript{12} However, even under this leadership, Prime Minister Netanyahu signed further agreements to make more territorial concessions, including

\textsuperscript{10} Ariel Center for Policy Research, The Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement (Oslo II) September 28, 1995
\textsuperscript{11} Nelson, 102
\textsuperscript{12} Bickerton and Klausner, 258
the Hebron Protocol and the Wye River Memorandum. These concessions led to party infighting in Likud which eventually brought the government down in January 1999.  

For Israelis and Palestinians, expectations brought by the Oslo Accords were unfulfilled and misaligned, resulting in a stalling out of the peace process. Palestinians believe Israel undermined the Oslo Accords with continued settlement-construction in the occupied territories. The continued expansion of settlements was not specifically prohibited by the interim agreements of 1993 and 1995, but the Palestinians assumed this to be self-evident as part of further cooperation. The Israelis, in turn, expected the Oslo Accords to give them a partner with which to conduct security cooperation and fight terrorism within its territory. However, to avoid being collaborators or enforcers of Israel, the PA had to tread lightly and maintain its credibility among the Palestinian people. The PA violated the terms of Oslo nearly immediately due to the excessive shipment of arms to what was meant to be a strong police force. Israel feared that the numbers of Palestinians in arms and types of armaments being brought into PA territory significantly exceeded the limits established by the agreements and were fit for an offensive army than a police force. In some cases, Palestinian police officers turned their arms on their Israeli counterparts. Israel was also angered by the PA’s lack of cooperation in preventing terrorist attacks, disarming terrorist militias, and arresting high profile terrorists. 

The Labor Party, led by Ehud Barak, defeated Likud in May of 1999, leading to some regained hope in the peace process. Barak vowed to reengage in peace talks with both Syria

---

13 United States, Department of State, “The Oslo Accords and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process.”  
14 Nelson, 248
and the Palestinians and to withdraw Israeli forces from Southern Lebanon. In July of 2000, President Clinton invited Barak and Arafat to Camp David to reach a final-status agreement on the future of the West Bank and Gaza. The most contentious issues remained the largest obstacle for agreement: Borders, Jerusalem, and a right of return for refugees. Clinton, Barak, and Arafat failed to reach an agreement, and released a trilateral statement reflecting on shared values and ambitions of the negotiations and future of the peace process.\(^\text{15}\)

At the Camp David Summit, Ehud Barak offered Arafat a deal which included a Palestinian state on 100% of Gaza and more than 95% of the West Bank and the adjoining land. While accounts differ as to why the Camp David Summit failed, most of the blame, including by President Clinton, fell onto Arafat for refusing this offer, as it didn’t include the right of return.\(^\text{16}\)

The offer made by Ehud Barak was undeniably unprecedented in its concessions to Palestinian demands. Israel would only annex a small amount of land in the West Bank to include the largest settlement blocs, and all others would be dismantled. East Jerusalem would be the Palestinian capital, and the Old City would be divided. The Palestinians would have total sovereignty over the Christian and Muslim quarters and custodianship (not sovereignty) of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. There would be a right of return for refugees to the newly established Palestine but not to Israel. Arafat refused this offer, and according to Barak, he never made any counterproposals of his own. Chief American Middle East Negotiator Dennis Ross recorded that President Clinton lashed out at Arafat, yelling that he had “been here \(^\text{15}\) Israel, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Trilateral Statement on the Middle East Peace Summit at Camp David-25-Jul-2000.”

fourteen days and said no to everything.”\textsuperscript{17} At one point, near the end of the summit after Arafat’s final rejection, Clinton reportedly banged on the table in anger, and said: “You are leading your people and the region to a catastrophe.”\textsuperscript{18}

In response to Barak’s willingness to cede the highly contested Temple Mount to the Palestinians, then opposition leader Ariel Sharon provocatively visited the complex in the Old City of Jerusalem, symbolically asserting Israel’s control over it. It is commonly believed that this provocative act sparked the second Intifada, or the ‘Al-Aqsa Intifada.’ However, testimony from many PA officials and Yasser Arafat’s wife shows that the second intifada had indeed been meticulously planned by Arafat as an alternative to engaging in peace talks.\textsuperscript{19} All momentum in the peace process was brought to a halt with Bill Clinton’s leaving office and the second Intifada, characterized by near-daily shootings, stabbings, and suicide bombings, rather than rock throwing, tire burning, and otherwise nonviolent resistance that characterized much of the first Intifada.

The peace process in the decade following the Camp David Summit was defined by the second Intifada and growing international involvement in the peace process. The Arab Peace Initiative, the Roadmap for Peace established by the “Quartet” (U.S., U.N., E.U., and Russia,) and the Geneva Accords were all attempts for international players besides the U.S. attempt to restart meaningful peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians and recover from the major setback that had been from the second Intifada. All these initiatives continued to establish

\textsuperscript{17} Ross, Missing Peace: the inside Story of the Fight for Peace in the Middle East, 705
\textsuperscript{19} Marcus, Itamar, and Nan J Zilberdik. “Arafat Planned and Led the Intifada: Testimony from PA Leaders and Others.” Palestinian Media Watch
precedents and introduce new, creative ideas into the peace process, but all failed to manage the most tenacious issues and bring the two sides to an agreement. The Arab League, led by Saudi Arabia, introduced the Arab Peace Initiative (API.) The API called for Israel to withdraw from all territories it occupied in the 1967 war, in addition to Southern Lebanon, establish a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza with East Jerusalem as its capital, and achieve a just solution to the refugee problem. This proposal was never truly welcomed by Israel.

The last round of negotiations to come as close to obtaining a two-state solution as the Camp David Summit was the series of meetings and negotiations between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Arafat’s successor Mahmoud Abbas in 2008. These talks were different from previous rounds of discussion because they included more creative thinking in negotiating the most contentious issues like Jerusalem. Olmert had learned from his time as mayor of Jerusalem (1993-2003) that maintaining control over the Arab neighborhoods was a futile policy. This influenced his decision as Prime Minister to offer Abbas the Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem as the capital for a Palestinian state. He also believed that the Old City and areas consisting of Christian and Muslim holy sites should be managed by a committee of advisors from five countries (Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the U.S., Israel, and Palestine)-an unprecedented and imaginative idea. Olmert’s offer to Mahmoud Abbas consisted of the following points:

- The establishment of a Palestinian state in 100% of Gaza and 93% of the West Bank with East Jerusalem as its capital.

---

• Israel annexing 6.3% of the West Bank, (to include the settlement blocs Gush Etzion, Ma’ale Adumim, Giv’at Ze’ev and Ariel), as well as all the settlements in East Jerusalem (with Har Homa), in exchange for the equivalent of 5.8% of Israeli territory, in areas directly surrounding Gaza and the West Bank and parts of the Judean desert.

• A territorial link by way of tunnel connecting Gaza and the West Bank would be under Israeli sovereignty with Palestinian control and is not included in the above percentages.

• East Jerusalem would be divided territorially along the lines of the Clinton Parameters, based on ethnicity except for the “Holy Basin.”

• The “Holy Basin,” and all Christian and Muslim holy sites in the areas surrounding Jerusalem to be managed by a committee of five countries.

• Israeli withdrawal from the Jordan Valley.

• Israeli acknowledgment of the suffering but not responsibility for- Palestinian refugees, and the absorption of 1,000 refugees per year for a period of 5 years on “humanitarian” and “family reunification” grounds.2122

Many hailed this proposal by Olmert as unprecedented in its generosity on issues like Jerusalem, refugees, and the size of the Palestinian state in the West Bank. However, Abbas and his team believed the territorial exchanges to be unfair and thought the proposals on Jerusalem and refugees to be “unacceptable.” 23 As in previous negotiations, Israel’s annexation of the Ariel and Maaleh Adumim settlements was a major source of tension, due to the settlements’ depth inside the West Bank, complicating the contiguity of a Palestinian state. Abbas countered

Olmert’s land swap proposal with his own map, in which he allowed Israel to annex only 1.9% of the West Bank. Following the negotiations, a spokesman for Abbas said: "The Palestinian side will only accept a Palestinian state with territorial continuity, with holy Jerusalem as its capital, without settlements, and on the June 4, 1967 boundaries."\textsuperscript{24}

After failing to reach an agreement, Abbas claimed that he did not agree to Olmert’s proposal because he did not allow him to keep the map with the proposed borders, and apparently pressured him to sign it on the spot. Abbas, feeling pressured and overwhelmed, Abbas copied the map down on a piece of paper and brought it to Amman to discuss with the Jordanians and Egyptians. He never responded to Olmert. It is widely believed that Abbas rejected this deal because he believed he could get a better deal with future Israeli and American leaders. George Bush was nearing the end of his second term as American president, and Olmert himself was near the end of his political career due to allegations of corruption, for which he later served prison time. The peace talks were also derailed by the outbreak of conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, leading to Operation Cast Lead. Also, like the case of the Camp David Summit, the subsequent election of 2009 brought a Netanyahu-led Likud government. The meetings of Ehud Olmert and Mahmoud Abbas were the last time Israeli and Palestinian leaders came close to agreeing on a peace agreement. Negotiations facilitated by President Obama and his secretary of state John Kerry, ended due to the PA’s attempt to reunify with Hamas, appearing to be “choosing Hamas over choosing peace” and the outbreak of Operation Protective Edge in the summer of 2014.

\textsuperscript{24} Benn, Aluf, and Reuters. “PA Rejects Olmert’s Offer to Withdraw from 93% of West Bank.” Haaretz.com, 12 Jan. 2018
Israeli Narrative: Why the Two-State Solution is Unfeasible

Most Israelis believe that the two-state solution is either unattainable or not ideal today due to the increased threat of terror in an age of advanced weaponry and increased military capabilities. Israelis believe that the territorial concessions required for a lasting peace agreement by means of a two-state solution no longer guarantee their safety. Israel’s contemporary wars fought with Hamas and Hezbollah in the 21st century have proven that due to Israel’s small size and its geographic and topographic features, relinquishing the West Bank and Gaza for a Palestinian state would leave Israel strategically vulnerable to attack.

The threat of terrorism is compounded by the geography and topography of Israel and the West Bank. Israel proper is a state the size of New Jersey and is 8.7 miles wide at its narrowest point (from the coastal city of Netanya to the Palestinian city Tul Karem on the edge of the West Bank). Cities like Tel Aviv, Hadera, and Netanya in Israel’s coastal region represent the lifeblood of the country. This region is home to 70% of Israel’s civilian population and 80% of its industrial capacity, and crucial infrastructure targets like Ben Gurion Airport, the Trans-Israel Highway, and high voltage electric powerlines. In addition, other strategic assets are located in this small strip of land such as the Ashdod Port, Israel’s banking headquarters, arrays of computerized databases, vital military bases, and the main headquarters of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), the Mossad, and the General Security Service (Shin Bet). The distance from the Palestinian city Tul Karem, which lies east of the Green line and would be a major population center of a Palestinian state, is only 8.7 miles to the east of the Israeli coastal city of

---

25 Dayan, Uzi. “How Defensible Borders Remain Vital for Israel.” Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs,
26 Dayan, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs,
Netanya. These strategic threats to Israel’s security posed by the creation of a Palestinian state based on the Green line are compounded by the topographical difference between Israel and the West Bank, the territory of the proposed Palestinian state. This coastal plain is overlooked by the West Bank mountain range, which spans thousands of feet above sea level. Ba’al Hatzor, the highest point of the West Bank mountain range, stands at 3,609 feet above sea level. The entire coastal region, including Ben-Gurion airport and most of Israel’s industrial and communication hubs, would become under constant threat from above. Israel also considers control of the Jordan Valley to be crucial to maintaining its security, and it desires to maintain a military presence in the valley in the event of a partial-to-full withdrawal of the West Bank, even if temporarily.

The Oslo Accords were meant to mark the beginning of a gradual process of Israeli territorial withdrawal in exchange for Palestinian concessions and commitments to fight terrorism and establish a functioning state. The Israeli narrative cites the flaws of the concept of “land for peace”, the concept on which the Oslo Accords of 1993 were based, and the negative results of Israel’s previous military withdrawals from territory in exchange for peace; specifically, southern Lebanon in 2000 and Gaza in 2005.

Since Israel’s full withdrawal in southern Lebanon in 2000, Hezbollah, heavily armed and funded by Iran, has been able to firmly establish itself in the territory and amass over 100,000 rockets in the territory. In 2006 Hezbollah and Israel engaged in a disastrous war which saw rockets falling on homes and communities in northern Israel, causing the death of 55 Israelis.28

Since 2006 Hezbollah has repeatedly violated the terms of UN Security Council Resolution 1701.\textsuperscript{29} Today, the group has amassed a stockpile thousands of long and medium range munitions with sophisticated guidance systems, which could hit every city, town, or military installation in Israel. In a future conflict, Hezbollah could launch well over 1,500 rockets per day at Israel, compared to 120 per day in the 2006 war.\textsuperscript{30} Thus, the scope and severity of the next Israeli-Lebanese war has increased since the last conflict and military presence in the West Bank has repeatedly served as crucial to holding Israel’s strategic advantage against its enemies.

In addition, Israel withdrew all its military forces and 8,000 civilian settlers from the Gaza Strip in 2005, as part of then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s disengagement plan.\textsuperscript{31} Since the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, the territory has been used by the group Hamas, which came to govern the Gaza strip through elections and then a violent takeover. Hamas has used Gaza as a terror base from which to launch thousands of rocket attacks on communities in Southern Israel and dig underground tunnels into Israeli territory, for purpose of terror and kidnapping Israeli civilians and soldiers. Three wars between Hamas and Israel have ensued since Israel’s 2005 withdrawal: Operation Cast Lead in 2008, Operation Pillar of Defense in 2012, and Operation Protective Edge in 2014.

To summarize, many Israelis don’t support the idea of a two-state solution due to their becoming less safe and receiving more violence and terror upon relinquishing land to their Arab neighbors.

\textsuperscript{29}“Hezbollah’s Systematic Violation of UN Security Council Resolutions.” Israel Defense Forces
\textsuperscript{30}“Hezbollah.” American Israel Public Affairs Committee
\textsuperscript{31}“Disengagement.” Anti-Defamation League
neighbors in exchange for peace. For these reasons, Israelis are weary of the idea of a Palestinian state established in the West Bank and Gaza strip. History has proven that relinquishing land in exchange for peace has only been met with more war. It is reasonable to see the creation of a Palestinian state along the Green line, effectively carving Israel up to an indefensible strip, as suicide.

**Palestinian Narrative: Why the Two-State Solution has become Unattainable**

Many Palestinians and supporters of Palestinian ambitions for sovereignty and independence from Israeli occupation also believe the two-state solution to be unattainable, but for very different reasons than Israelis or their supporters. Many Palestinians believe that the two-state solution is no longer a viable option due to Israel’s policies throughout its 50 years of occupying the West Bank and Gaza strip. In the eyes of the Palestinians, the largest obstacle to obtaining a two-state solution over the years is the continued expansion of civilian settlements, which they, and most of the international community, deem illegal. From Israel’s capture of the West Bank from Jordan in 1967 until 2016, hundreds of civilian settlements have been established in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and the total number of settlers is now approaching 600,000. The Israeli government provides economic incentives for Israeli citizens and immigrants to move to the settlements and has historically used settlement expansion to justify increased military presence, checkpoints, and roadblocks throughout the West Bank. Land immediately surrounding settlements is often off-limits for Palestinians, even if it includes Palestinians’ private property or farmland. The separation barrier constructed by Israel extends beyond the Green line to absorb major settlements. The separation barrier, constructed during the second Intifada under the pretext of decreasing suicide bombings, includes sections of
fence and heavily fortified concrete wall. It is 450 miles long in total and swallows up 733 square kilometers, or 13% of the West Bank, beyond the Green line. The barrier also obstructs the movement of goods and labor, hindering a Palestinian economy from thriving. In 2004 the International Court of Justice in The Hague determined that the construction of the security barrier was in contravention to international law and ruled that Israel must cease construction. It was concluded that the security barrier violates Palestinian freedom of movement, freedom of occupation, the rights to health, education, and employment services, and a decent standard of living. Many in the international community also feared that the construction of the barrier would predetermined the future border between two states, rather than through negotiation between the two parties.

Today, there are 127 settlements officially recognized by the Israeli Ministry of the Interior, and around 100 which are not recognized by the government, known as “illegal outposts.” While lacking legitimacy from the Israeli government, these illegal outposts often still receive governmental support. Much of the land on which settlements sit today was seized by the army under the pretext of imperative military needs. Today, settlements comprise only 1.7% of the West Bank, and 75-80% of settlers live relatively close to the Green Line in settlements not extremely intrusive to the West Bank. 60% of all settlers live within five major settlement blocs- Maale Adumim, Modiin Ili, Ariel, Gush Etzion, and Givat Ze’ev. Due to the sizes and populations of these blocs, most of them would likely be annexed to Israel in

---

33 “The Separation Barrier.” Ir Amim, 1 Jan. 2007
34 “Settlements.” B’Tselem
mutually agreed upon land swaps as part of a two-state solution. This was an idea that was begrudgingly accepted by Yasser Arafat at the Camp David Summit.35

Some settlements are particularly problematic in that they have been strategically built deep into the West Bank or are otherwise more damaging to a potential two-state solution. Israeli plans to expand existing settlements and create entirely new ones, and to reroute and extend the security barrier well beyond the boundaries of existing settlements, will make the establishment of a contiguous Palestinian state nearly impossible. Ariel is a major settlement with a population of 25,000 and its own university. It lies 20 kilometers deep into the West Bank nearly halfway between the Green Line and the Jordan River. Annexation of the Ariel bloc would make the possibility of a contiguous Palestinian state nearly impossible and evacuating the settlement would cause unforeseen political upheaval in Israel.36

Hebron, while it is the most populated Palestinian city in the West Bank, it also holds more religious and cultural significance to the Jewish people than any other major settlement. It holds the Cave of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, the founding fathers and mothers of Judaism. Because Islam is also an Abrahamic religion, Hebron holds religious importance to Muslims, and the Ibrahimi Mosque, where Baruch Goldstein massacred Palestinian worshippers, is attached to the Tomb of the Patriarchs. Since Israel’s acquisition of the West Bank in 1967, settlers have flocked to Hebron and Kiryat Arba, to reestablish what they viewed as an indigenous community whose members were massacred in 1929. Kiryat Arba has less religious and cultural significance, but it holds a large population some of the most religious and

35 “Settlements.” Jewish Virtual Library
nationalistic settlers who wish to live close to Hebron. These settlements lie well beyond the boundaries of the Green Line and an envisioned future border. It would be nearly impossible for Israel to annex this settlement without severely cutting into major Palestinian municipalities.  

The E1 Plan is a plan to build a major settlement comprised of 3,682 housing units east of Jerusalem, adjacent to the settlement of Maaleh Adumim. If the proposed settlement is built, it will effectively bisect the West Bank, isolating East Jerusalem, which the Palestinians seek to be their future capital. The construction of E1 and the proposed security barrier route surrounding it, stretching to 15 kilometers from the Jordan River, would also hinder the viability and contiguity of a Palestinian state in the West Bank.  

While settlement homes have been built and settlers have moved into existing settlements, a new settlement had not been built in the West Bank from the 1993 Oslo Accords until March 30th, 2017. On this date the Israeli government approved a plan to begin construction of the “Ami Chai” (my people live) settlement. Ami Chai is not a part of any major settlement bloc and is planned to be an alternative home for the evicted settlers of Amona, a settlement deemed illegal and dismantled due to its being built on what the Israeli Supreme Court recognized as private Palestinian land. This is the first settlement formally established since 1992, excluding the retroactive legalization of formerly illegal outposts. The legalization of formerly illegal outposts is a measure which the Palestinians see as a continuation of theft of

37 Nelson, 193  
38 “The E1 Plan and its Implications for Human Rights in the West Bank.” B’Tselem, B’Tselem  
39 Settlements.” Jewish Virtual Library
their land, while the Israeli government disputes it. Increased settlement construction under the Netanyahu government in the West Bank and East Jerusalem has severely hindered the possibility of the establishment of a viable and contiguous Palestinian state, thereby damaging the possibility of a two-state solution. The continued construction of existing settlements and legalization of illegal outposts in area C has advanced a de facto annexation of area C.

Finally, President Trump’s decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel on December 6th, 2017, and the coinciding plans to move the United States Embassy there from Tel Aviv, was seen by many Palestinians as a “shot at the heart of the two-state Jerusalem.” East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state has been the cornerstone of the two-state solution. Trump’s declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel was seen by Palestinians as validating and normalizing Israel’s control over the entire city, including the eastern half, which conquered in 1967 and then annexed in 1980 via the Jerusalem Basic Law. No state has ever given recognition for this annexation. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas responded to the declaration with harsh rhetoric, spelling what he described as the end of the two-state solution, and the end to all security and other cooperation with Israel. Following the declaration, Abbas declared that the Oslo Accords had become irrelevant, and that Israel killed Oslo. “Today is the day that the Oslo Accords end. Israel killed them.” Even though it was the Oslo Accords which created the Palestinian National Authority and gave it legitimacy, he went on to say, “I am saying that Oslo, there is no Oslo.”

---

40 “Jerusalem: Is the Two-State Solution Dead?” Al Jazeera, Al Jazeera, 8 Dec. 2017
41 “Basic Law: Jerusalem, Capital of Israel.” Knesset.gov.il, Knesset
42 Israeli Leaders Slam Abbas Speech at the PLO, Say He Is ‘at the End of His Road’.” I24NEWS, 15 Jan. 2018
A confluence of four factors has led to both increased settlement activity and decreased viability of the two-state solution. These include an increase in influence by the settler movement in the Israeli government, perceived American support under the Trump Administration not previously available under the Obama Administration, the development of viable alternative solutions, and perhaps most importantly, surreptitious support for Israel from critical Arab states. Israel’s right-wing government has been emboldened by these factors, and many members of the current government have begun to push for a more nationalistic and right-wing agenda, with measures that threaten the viability of a two-state solution. Ministers of the Knesset (MKs) have pushed for legislation to legalize illegal settlements and outposts, of which some are on private Palestinian land, and some MKs are attempting to push forward legislation applying full sovereignty over the West Bank, effectively annexing it to Israeli territory. These efforts have been blocked for the time being by Prime Minister Netanyahu, for fear of jeopardizing Israel’s vital relationships with the United States and increasingly, Saudi Arabia.

Drop in support for two-state solution among Palestinians, Israeli Jews

The consequences of the Jerusalem decision include a drastic decrease in support for the two-state solution, by both Israelis and Palestinians. The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) conducts surveys among different demographic groups, demonstrating values and support for peace plans based on different conditions and ethnic groups. For example, it differentiates between Israeli Jews, Israeli Arabs, secular Jews, religious Jews, and settlers. Among Palestinians, the PCPSR distinguishes between Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank, secular and religious, and based on where they live (cities, villages,
and refugee camps), and their political affiliation, supporting Hamas, Fatah, third parties, or unaffiliated. According to the PCPSR, Palestinians and Israelis are moving away from support for a two-state solution and moving more towards supporting armed struggle or continued warfare. This trend was also emphasized by Trump’s Jerusalem decision.

Despite the Palestinian response, a plurality of Palestinians, 31.3%, believe that the situation has not changed at all following Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. It is followed by 30.5% “the situation has changed a lot.” According to a PCPSR survey, produced in January 2018, less than half and Palestinians and Israelis, 46% of both populations, support the two-state solution. The only demographic which remains strongly supportive of it is Arab citizens of Israel, of whom 83% still support the two-state solution. Jewish Israeli support has changed little since June of 2017 (it was 47%), but Palestinian support has dropped more substantially, from 53% in June of 2017.

The same poll determined that 48% of Israelis believe the two-state solution is still feasible, whereas 42% believe that it is not. Among Palestinians, belief that the two-state solution is no longer viable has increased substantially since President Trump’s declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. 60% of Palestinians believe it is no longer a viable option (62% in the West Bank and 56% in Gaza, with pessimism higher in the West Bank likely due to settlement expansion), opposed to 37% who believe it still is viable. In total, 73% of Israeli Jews and 75% of Palestinians do not believe that a Palestinian state will be established in the next five years. A mere 4% of Palestinians believe the chances of this are high or very high, and 75%, (increased from 71% last June), say the chances are low or very low. When asked the same
question, Israelis shared pessimism, with 70% believing the chances to be low or very low (considering the disparities in attitudes among Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs).

When weighing the options of reaching a peace agreement vs. continuing perpetual occupation and warfare with one another, attitudes of militancy have increased and support for reaching a peace agreement has decreased. Among Israelis, 38% chose to reach for a peace agreement (decrease from 45% June 2017), and between 18% and 19% called for “a definitive war with the Palestinians,” compared to just 12% in June 2017. Conversely, Israeli support for the option of one state with apartheid increased from 11% to 15% since June 2017. Within Israeli society, support for the two-state solution is the lowest among the lowest age group, and generally increases with age. Among 18-24-year-old Israeli Jews, support for the two-state solution was at 27%. That number increased to 37% among 25-34-year-olds Israeli Jews, compared to 54% support among those who are 55 years or older.

Last June 45% of Palestinians supported a peace agreement and 21% preferred armed struggle. Today, when given three options to choose from, more Palestinians (35%) chose armed resistance as the most effective means of establishing a Palestinian state next to Israel, whereas 31% chose negotiation and 25% chose non-violent resistance. 48% said they support a return to an armed intifada (67% in Gaza and 39% in the West Bank). In general, the belief that there will be an eventual peace is dismal among Palestinians. Only 9% of Palestinians believe there will be peace between Israel and a Palestinian state in 10 years, and the same for 100 years. Due to the perceive infeasibility of the two-state solution, different ideas to solve the

---

conflict are being considered. However, given a decrease in support of the two-state solution due to recent events, both Israeli and Palestinians support the two-state solution over possible alternatives to solving the conflict: one state with equal rights for all, and one state without equal rights, amounting to apartheid.

Alternatives to the Two-State Solution

Israelis and Palestinians have been looking towards other solutions to the conflict, considering the evident impasse of the two-state solution, such as a one-state or binational state solution, or more creative ideas, such as the “Palestinian Emirates” plan. One of the most commonly discussed ideas for resolving the conflict is the eventual establishment of one bi-national state in which all citizens live equally under the law and with equal rights. As of 2017, the number of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza is 4,952,168. This is split with 3,008,770 in the West Bank and 1,943,398 in the Gaza strip. Unlike Israeli authorities, the Palestinian Authority considers Palestinians in the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem as citizens of the West Bank. When added to the nearly 1.5 million Palestinians living in Israel, the total number of Palestinians in the entire land nearly approaches the slim Jewish majority. Israelis fear that absorbing the West Bank and Gaza strip, and all its inhabitants, will accelerate the demographic demise of the Jewish state. Jews would be outnumbered by Arabs near instantly. Arguing in favor of annexation of the territories without giving the Palestinians full rights would be inherently creating an undemocratic society. Either way, Israel would lose its Jewish or democratic character.

44 Palestinian Center for Bureau Statistics. (2017)
Palestinian opponents of the bi-national solution come from many sides of the political spectrum. Many prefer the two-state solution over this idea. Only 28% of Palestinians support a one-state solution in which Palestinians and Israelis have equal rights, of which 69% are opposed. Some Palestinian opponents to this solution also argue that recognizing the Jewish people as a nation, thus comparing them to the Palestinian people as a nation, is wrong. This is based on the argument that a religious group is not necessarily a national group, and the two in this case should not be treated as the same. Many Jews would dispute this, arguing that the Jewish people constitute a nation and are entitled to their right to independent identification and self-determination. Palestinian supporters of the bi-national state argue that the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel is no longer a practical option.

Other critics of the idea see it as a vehicle for indefinite Israeli control over the Palestinians and an inevitable undemocratic society, resembling apartheid. Former Secretary of State John Kerry stated in a press conference “Here is a fundamental reality: if the choice is one state, Israel can either be Jewish or democratic- it cannot be both- and it won ’t ever really be at peace. Moreover, the Palestinians will never fully realize their vast potential in a homeland of their own with a one-state solution.” Essentially, Kerry outlines that one state for two peoples is not in the best interest of anyone. This is contestable, as Israelis would argue that a one-state solution, with the state keeping its democratic nature, would benefit the Palestinians more, and

---

give them essentially what many of them have desired all along, their entire historic homeland back.

Other ideas, have been proposed by Israelis, for which the purposes of many are to retain as much control over the West Bank in any future scenario as possible. A proposal which has been coined by a prominent Israeli researcher is the *Palestinian Emirates* plan. Dr. Mordechai Kedar, the architect of this plan, is an Israeli scholar of Arabic culture and is fluent in English, Arabic, and Hebrew. He is an expert on Israel’s Arab population and Arab society. It is Dr. Kedar’s belief that the Western style nation-state structure which was imposed on much of the Arab world after WWI is an unsuitable government structure for the region. Kedar argues that creating an artificial Palestinian state, which would require uprooting Jewish families where no Arab population currently exists would lead to indefensible borders for the Jewish homeland. He claims that multi-national societies such as Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen are failing due to this government structure’s incompatibility with the natural societal order of the Middle East. Because the tribe or clan is the cornerstone of society, Kedar believes, the governance of society should be with local tribes, families, or clans, not some overreaching authority governing citizens of many different families and tribes. He cites the success of the United Arab Emirates, being a series of homogenous tribes, as proof for this theory. Dr. Kedar believes that Palestinian society would be governed more efficiently if it utilized this model. The “Palestinian Emirates” would be comprised of eight autonomous Emirates in the most densely populated Arab areas in the West Bank and Gaza, considering that nearly all Palestinians live in city-centers in Areas A and B of the West Bank... Kedar claims that due to tribal rifts and local patriotism there will never be a successful unity government among the Palestinian Arab
population centers in Judea and Samaria or Gaza... The eight city-states would comprise the areas of Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah, Jericho, Tul Karem, Kalkilya, the Arab part of Hebron and the Gaza strip. Residents would become citizens of these eight independent countries. Any Arab leadership that attempts to circumvent or dominate the development of these Palestinian Emirates would inhibit a future security and economic opportunity for the citizens of these eight independent countries. The Palestinian Emirates vision is a viable alternative based on the Arab sociology of tribalism in Gaza, Judea and Samaria. Kedar believes that this initiative will bring about a stable peace to the region and added security for Israel. With areas A and B becoming Palestinian sovereign territory, Israel would annex area C.48 This is the most noticeable flaw to his plan. Any proposal which involves Israeli annexation of Area C is going to be difficult to gain support among the Palestinians, especially the ones who live there would need to either relocate and declare allegiance to one of the Palestinian city-states or become citizens of Israel.

Another potential scenario, one that is less discussed as viable solution to the conflict or an ideal one, is the maintenance of the status quo. Should all other options fail, this will be the direction which continues until drastic changes further advance the prospects for real peace. Israel can continue to occupy a large majority of the West Bank and Gaza on the grounds of security and terror prevention. The Palestinians in both territories would continue to resist, including using terrorism, and groups like Hamas would continue to gain support. The cyclical violence and the conflict could simply continue perpetually.

48 Kedar, Mordechai. “Palestinian Emirates Introduction.” PalatinianEmirates.com, FGP Holdings, LLC.
Regional Dynamics Changing, Mutual Threats Creating New Alliances

In the 25 years since the signing of the Oslo Accords, the situation on the ground has changed drastically. Regional alliances, strategic interests, and priorities have changed. The threat of an increasingly aggressive Iran and the shift in the regional balance of power has created mutual interests between Israel and many of its long-time adversaries, to a point where there is visible cooperation and undiplomatic relations. An ideal settlement on behalf of the Palestinians is becoming less of a priority to some players in the region, and the increasing relationships between Israel and the Arab states is sure to affect what an eventual peace agreement will entail. The obstacles to a two-state solution which have grown over the years have not rendered it completely infeasible, however the “ideal” two-state solution for many is no longer ideal for the Palestinians. The growing relationship between Israel and Saudi Arabia and the mutual strategic interests between Israel, Egypt, and Jordan are unprecedented. Saudi Arabia seeks to recruit Israeli power and intelligence in its fight against Iranian expansionism. Israel and Egypt are cooperatively fighting terrorism in Egypt’s territory, and Jordan relies on Israel now more than ever for its supply of water and partnership in crucial projects like replenishing the Dead Sea. Primarily due to unprecedented and surreptitious support for Israel from these critical Arab states, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan are more likely to push the Palestinians toward accepting a solution which offers them much less than what they have always demanded.
Impact of the JCPOA

The signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) of 2015 emboldened Iran and shifted the balance of power in the Middle East. An influx of money for the Iranian regime boosted its economy and allowed it to continue its bountiful spending on foreign proxies and military adventurism. Also known as the Iranian Nuclear Deal, its inception marked the beginning of increased yet covert cooperation between Israel and many Sunni Arab states, led by Saudi Arabia. The JCPOA, also known as the Iran Nuclear Deal, was signed by the Obama Administration, Iran, and the rest of the Permanent members of the U.N. Security Council and Germany in 2015. The deal was pushed by the Obama administration to curb Iran’s nuclear program. This deal changed the dynamics of the Middle East and changed the course of regional alliances as well as the direction of Israeli-Palestinian peace. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, the deal succeeded in bringing the Arab states, and primarily Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, and Israel closer in covert cooperation amid a perceived mutual threat of Iran. Iran posed and continues to pose threats to Israel and the Sunni Arab states from its nuclear program- which is viewed by them as insufficient in preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon- as well as Iran’s ballistic missile program. Additionally, Iran’s regional expansion by means of its militant proxy groups, such as Hezbollah, Hamas, the Assad regime in Syria, and the Houthi rebels in Yemen pose a significant threat to Israel and other Arab states. A nuclear Iran also has the potential of starting a nuclear arms race among the Arab states. Saudi
officials have explicitly said that should Iran develop nuclear weapons; Saudi Arabia would immediately follow suit.\textsuperscript{49}

Israel and the Saudi-led GCC were both staunch critics of the Iran deal prior to its signing. They believed the deal didn’t do enough to prompt the regime to end its support for terror organizations, human rights abuses, and its ballistic missile program, in violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions. The implementation of the JCPOA gave the Islamic Republic $100 billion in unfrozen assets, in addition to a decades-old financial settlement of $1.7 billion. Because of the sanction relief by the U.S. and E.U., the country was also open to international commercial and investment activity. As the critics of the deal suspected, much of this money continued to be funneled into Iran’s proxies such as the Assad regime, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthi rebels in Yemen, and Shia militias in Iraq, continuing to destabilize the region, as well as the acceleration of its intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) program.\textsuperscript{50} After the implementation of the deal Iran intensified its efforts to bolster the Syrian regime, using the airline Mahan Air to transfer weapons and IRGC servicemen to Syria.\textsuperscript{51} In addition, it is presumed that as the deal is set to expire in 2025, Iran will then be able to restart their nuclear ambitions from a much greater economic position than before. Having explicitly promised to withdraw from the agreement while running for president, President Trump is to decide by May 12\textsuperscript{th} if the United States will remain a signatory of the agreement. The Trump Administration would like to see many revisions if not a full withdrawal from the deal (some of which are

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{49} “Saudi Arabia Pledges to Create a Nuclear Bomb if Iran Does.” \textit{BBC News}, BBC, 15 Mar. 2018,
\item \textsuperscript{50} \textit{Nuclear Deal Oversight: Implementation and its Consequences}, House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, 114th Cong. 2 (2016) (Testimony of John E. Smith).
\item \textsuperscript{51} Testimony of John E. Smith.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
nonstarters for the Iranian regime, such as strengthening inspections at any suspect site inside Iran and adding a provision on its ballistic missile testing and activity.) The Trump Administration would also like to more directly confront Iran’s cyber-attacks, human-rights abuses, and support for terrorism and military adventurism. The U.S. withdrawing from the deal or proposing harsh revisions the regime would never agree to, would likely result in Iran restarting its nuclear weapons program, increasing the likelihood of Israeli military action to prevent this. Seeking to maintain its *qualitative military edge* and a monopoly on nuclear weapons in the region (though it is not officially admitted that Israel has nuclear weapons it is widely believed to be so), Israel has in the past taken preemptive military action to prevent states from developing such weaponry. Israel bombed suspected nuclear reactors in Iraq and Syria in 1981 and 2007, respectively, and has taken covert and overt action to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons in Iran and Syria.\(^\text{52}\)

Iran’s support for the Assad regime as well as Hezbollah acting on behalf of Assad in Syria has allowed Iranian-friendly forces, as well as the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to firmly establish a presence in Syria, inching closer to Israel’s borders. Iran has long sought to create a land corridor from Tehran to Beirut, allowing for easier transport of men and weapons to Hezbollah in Lebanon. In the words of Ali Akbar Velayti, Senior Advisor for Foreign Affairs to Iran’s Supreme Leader, “The chain of resistance against Israel by Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, the new Iraqi government and Hamas passes through the Syrian highway... Syria is the golden ring of the chain of resistance against Israel.”\(^\text{53}\)

---

\(^{52}\) “Israel Admits Striking Suspected Syrian Nuclear Reactor in 2007” BBC, 21 March 2018

Increase in Saudi-Israeli Cooperation

The overt and covert relationship between the Saudi-led Gulf states and Israel due to the threat of Iran has changed the direction of Israeli-Palestinian peace. The need to obtain a just peace deal based on the traditional framework of a fair two-state solution is becoming less of a priority for Israel and the Arab states. The desire for expanding cooperation between the two is becoming more important than the issue of solving the conflict, for both Israel and the Arab state. Israel and the Arab states both face severe threats from Iranian ambitions and proxies along their borders, and potentially with a future nuclear Iran with increased missile capabilities. Now, with the Trump administration in office in the United States, added to increasingly friendly relations with Egypt and growing covert cooperation with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, the prospects for a just two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is becoming less and less likely. What is likely to come from this developing alliance is a peace deal which is less balanced between Israeli and Palestinian interests, and will be heavily favored towards Israel, for the sake of normalizing Arab-Israeli relations and continuing to normalize and formalize an anti-Iranian alliance.

Israel’s relationship with Saudi Arabia has transformed throughout the last half century. In the 1950s Saudi Arabia’s founding father, King Saud liked to declare that “Israel is to the entire Arab world like a cancer to the human body, and the only way of remedy is to uproot it just like a cancer…” King Fiasal, years, later, often presented his guests with copies of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, an anti-Semitic forgery used by the Nazis, among other things, as
a justification for genocide against the Jews.\textsuperscript{54} Decades later, amid a changing landscape in the Middle East and an unlikely alliance growing, the rhetoric of former Saudi regimes towards Israel is now history. Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman said to an interviewer from The Atlantic, in an unprecedented step in Saudi history or that of the Arab world entirely, that Israel has a right to live in peace alongside the Palestinians. He recognized the Jewish state’s right to exist, without requiring the traditional two-state solution as a precursor, as was stipulated by the Arab Peace Initiative.\textsuperscript{55} The Palestinians are not naïve to this developing warming of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia. 70% of Palestinians believe there is an Arab Sunni alliance with Israel against Iran despite the continued Israeli occupation of Arab land.\textsuperscript{56}

The evidence for Saudi-Israeli military and intelligence cooperation is strong and it is indisputable. Using its proxies in Lebanon and Yemen, Iran has increased its presence on both Israel’s and Saudi Arabia’s borders. With the help of the Russian intervention in Syria and Hezbollah and other Iranian-sponsored ground forces, the Assad regime has begun to retake large swaths of territory, including nearing the 1974 Armistice lines near Israel’s Golan Heights border. In recent years Iranian or related forces have begun establishing bases and military positions approaching dangerously close to Israel’s border, which Israel treats as a red line. Israel has often having struck Iranian positions to prevent further entrenchment. Iran has yet to seriously buildup threatening capabilities in Southern Syria, in part due to Israeli strikes on Hezbollah weapons convoys, suspected Iranian bases, and weapons factories. Israel will


\textsuperscript{55} Goldberg, Jeffrey. “Saudi Crown Prince: Iran’s Supreme Leader ‘Makes Hitler Look Good’.” The Atlantic, Atlantic Media Company, 2 Apr. 2018,

continue these actions to prevent Iran from maintaining a permanent presence in Syria like that of Hezbollah in southern Lebanon.

Israeli defense and intelligence officials cite the threat of Hezbollah in the northern front as the greatest current threat to Israel’s security, not a massive insurrection of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Israeli officials have been noting Hezbollah’s provocative actions and threatened to engage if necessary. Other sources of recent tension between Israel and Hezbollah are an Israeli-planned border fence along the Lebanese border and Lebanese offshore gas and drilling in disputed maritime waters, an area called Block 9, which closely borders Israeli waters. Hezbollah has threatened to strike Israel’s oil facilities if it interferes with Lebanese off-shore energy. The increased military capabilities of Israel and Hezbollah since 2006, rhetoric from both Israeli and Hezbollah officials, and the increased scope of the conflict have signaled that the next Lebanese-Israeli war will be far more devastating than the last. Also, the next war will likely be fought on a larger “northern front” in both Lebanon and Syria, given Iran’s recent entrenchment in territories deemed too close for comfort by Israel.

The IDF estimates that Hezbollah currently possesses approximately 150,000 rockets; Katyushas with a range of 7-24 miles to Scud missiles with a range of 420 miles. About 1,000 of these have precision-guided capabilities. Hezbollah has also acquired remotely guided aircraft (drones). For perspective, during Israel’s most recent war with Hamas in 2014, Operation Protective Edge, Hamas fired approximately 4,500 rockets into Israel during the 50-day conflict. With Hezbollah’s newly refreshed arsenal and capabilities, in the next confrontation, the group could fire nearly 4,500 rockets per day for about a month. Most of Hezbollah’s arms depots and
rocket launchers are dispersed amongst civilian towns and villages throughout Lebanon, primarily in the south, increasing the potential devastation of a third Lebanese war.  

Saudi Arabia expressed its support for Israel in the 2006 conflict with Hezbollah. On the second day of the war, Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal declared ‘there is a difference between legitimate resistance and miscalculated adventurism’. Other Saudi criticisms of fellow Arabs fighting Israel marked a strategic difference in Israeli-Saudi relations and reflected the Kingdom’s deep fears of increasing Iranian influence.

Tensions escalating along the Israeli-Lebanese, Israeli-Syrian, and Saudi-Yemeni borders are actively increasing the likelihood of Israeli-Arab cooperation against Iran and its proxies. Israel and Saudi Arabia now share a mutual interest in curbing Iranian influence by weakening its proxies Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and the Assad regime in Syria. Indeed, a spokesman for the Houthi rebels has said that the rebels would be ready to fight Israel alongside Hezbollah. Israeli officials have admitted to sharing intelligence with the Saudi-coalition states regarding arms shipments to these various players. “Much more is going on now than any time in the past,” said Israel’s Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz in an interview, referring to Israel’s relations with Gulf states. “It’s almost a revolution in the Middle East.”

In an unprecedented move, Israeli military Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot told the Saudi newspaper Elaph that Israel was ready to cooperate with Saudi Arabia on mutual interests. Specifically, he

---

57 Berkowitz, Peter. “And now, the fallout: regardless of what Iran gets out of the nuclear deal, its proxy Hezbollah clearly gains—and Israel clearly loses.” Hoover Digest, no. 1, 2016, p. 106+. Opposing Viewpoints in Context


said that Israel would be willing to share critical information with the kingdom on regional security. These steps signal significant growth in the relationship, and a strong likelihood of future cooperation. Saudi Arabia also just recently ruled to allow India Air to fly to Tel Aviv over Saudi airspace, enthusing Israelis and individuals looking for further expansion in relations. Israel has also reportedly been selling arms and drones to the U.A.E., and the two countries recently took part in the same air force exercise in Greece, along with the U.S., Italy, the U.K, and Cyprus. Regional cooperation between Israel and the Saudi-led Gulf states is undoubtedly increasing. Speaking at the Brookings Institution in Washington D.C., Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said that Israel and the Kingdom had “a commonality of interests.” However, he added that this “does not mean we have to have diplomatic relations.” He also stressed that Saudi Arabia would prefer to establish formal relations with Israel only after a peace accord is signed, and not before. However, the desire for more regional cooperation between Israel and Saudi Arabia has created more pressure for an alternative solution to the two-state solution.

It is not just the Saudi government and Crown Prince Mohamad bin Salman which are warming up to Israel. Because of the conflict in Yemen between the Saudis and Iran’s proxy Houthi rebels, Saudi citizens now view Iran as their main adversary, over Israel. A poll conducted by the Israeli Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Institute for Policy and Strategy found

---

62 Weizman, Stephen. “In World First, Air India Crosses Saudi Airspace to Israel.”
63 “Israel, UAE Take Part in Joint Air Force Drills in Greece.” Middle East Monitor, 21 Mar. 2018, /
64 “UAE Buying Arms from Israel.” Middle East Monitor, 5 Feb. 2018
that 18% of Saudis viewed Israel as their principle enemy; 22 believed ISIS to be their main enemy and a significant 53% chose Iran.\textsuperscript{66} Iran’s support for the Houthis is increasingly visible. It considers the Houthis, along with Hezbollah and its Shia proxies in Iraq, Syria, and gulf countries to be the “axis of resistance,” resistance to American imperialism and Sunni dominance in the region. On January 25\textsuperscript{th}, 2015, cleric Ali Shirazi, the Supreme Leader’s representative to the IRGC, stated: “Hezbollah was formed in Lebanon as a popular force like Basij [Iran’s militia]. Similarly, popular forces were also formed in Syria and Iraq, and today we are watching the formation of Ansar Allah in Yemen.”\textsuperscript{67} Saudi Arabia’s anti-Houthi coalition (the U.A.E., Kuwait, Bahrain, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Pakistan, and Sudan) is facing similar threats to Israel, with regards to Iranian proxy groups increasing in strength along its border, firing Iran-provided weapons into its territory. Like Israel and its blockage of Gaza, Saudi Arabia has effectively blockaded Yemen, which has intensified the already dire humanitarian crisis there. The threats to Israeli and Saudi security posed by Hezbollah and the Houthis far surpass that of the Palestinians in the occupied territories. Because of this, much of the Israelis’ diplomatic and intelligence efforts will be more focused on preventing another war with the group than achieving a peace deal, or at least one which is too compromising to Israeli security, with the Palestinians.

In addition to expanding and normalizing covert security cooperation in the fight against groups like Hezbollah, the Houthis, and other forces in Iraq and Syria, Saudi Arabia and Israel

also share a desire to expand partnership through joint-economic projects. Israeli companies have expressed interest in investing in the proposed Saudi mega-city NEOM, a major project which is to accompany an array of reforms meant to liberalize and modernize Saudi Arabia, as per the Kingdom’s 2030 Vision. This proposed city is planned to be 26,000 square kilometers and built on the corner of the Red Sea neighboring Jordan, and close to Israel and Egypt. A bridge is rumored to be built from the Saudi coast at NEOM to Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula, and it is highly feasible that this plan for a major tourist attraction includes the vision of Israeli tourists as well as investors. Prominent Israeli businessperson Erel Margalit told the Jerusalem Post in an interview that “Prince Mohammed bin Salman has come up with a project of regional cooperation … It gives an invitation to the Israelis to speak for regional economic cooperation through the concept of innovation.”

There is also historical precedence for major Arab states like Saudi Arabia to make peace and even normalize relations with Israel without a comprehensive resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat went to Jerusalem in November 1977, breaking from every Arab country. The peace treaty that followed, signed by himself and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin in 1979, was accompanied by an agreement on a “framework” for settling the West Bank question and the “Palestinian problem in all its aspects.” This deal was able to be made because Egypt’s desire to regain the Sinai Peninsula from Israel outweighed the Palestinian problem. Therefore, it is not implausible that a country as historically adversarial as Saudi Arabia to put its own agenda ahead of the plight of the

68 NEOM. “Will Israeli Companies Participate in the NEOM Project?” Neom Saudi City, 15 Feb. 2018
69 Foreign Policy in World Politics, Dimensions of the ME problem, Nadav Safran, page 357
Palestinians and take advantage of its growing mutual interests with Israel. Through the actions and words of Saudi officials, including the Crown Prince, the establishment of a working anti-Iranian alliance including Israel is more of a priority to Saudi Arabia than settling the conflict in a way which the Palestinians receive all their historic demands for peace.

**Increase in Israeli-Egyptian Cooperation**

Israel and Egypt have increased security and economic cooperation in recent years to an unprecedented level. Israel and Egypt have been collaboratively fighting the Islamic State in Sinai or “State of Sinai.” In February of 2018 the *New York Times* reported that “for more than two years, unmarked Israeli drones, helicopters, and jets have carried out a covert air campaign, conducting more than 100 airstrikes inside Egypt, frequently more than once a week- and all with the approval of President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi.” Egypt also shares Israel’s desire for a stable Gaza, fearing that the “Great March of Return” and the glorification of Hamas and other Muslim Brotherhood-inspired groups may cause unrest on Egyptian streets. For this, Israel and Egypt share an interest in empowering the Palestinian Authority and weakening Hamas, using the opening of the crucial Rafah crossing as a bargaining chip with Hamas.

Another indication of increasing Egyptian complicity with Israel and the American sponsored peace plan was the Egyptian government’s reaction to President Trump’s declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. It was uncovered by the *New York Times* that the Egyptian military followed the announcement by urging popular talk show hosts, which

---

hold large influence in Egyptian media, to downplay the Jerusalem decision, and persuade their audiences to accept it. In a phone conversation obtained by the Times, Egyptian Army Captain Ashraf al-Kholi asked “How is Jerusalem different from Ramallah, really?” 71 These signs show that the Egyptian government is less concerned about the future of the Palestinians’ aspirations for a capital in Jerusalem than ever before. Also, in a momentous sign of increased economic cooperation with Israel, An Egyptian gas company recently signed a 10-year contract for the importation of $15 billion in natural gas from Israel, despite outcry from Egyptians and Palestinians. 72 With the current situation in the Sinai and Egypt’s need for natural resources, a friendly and working relationship with Israel has been prioritized over the Palestinian issue or finding a permanent settlement to the conflict, at least temporarily.

President Al-Sisi’s transferring control of the Tiran and Sanafir Islands in the Red Sea to Saudi Arabia was also signaled an increase in cooperation with Israel and Saudi Arabia, against the interest of the Palestinians. Israeli Knesset member Tzachi Hanegb said about the transfer of control “The Saudis, who are committed to freedom of shipping under international law, will not harm the essence of the agreement between Egypt and us in this regard, and freedom of shipping in Aqaba and Eilat will remain as is” (Williams 2016). Regarding the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said “there is an agreement and commitments that Egypt accepted related to these islands, and the kingdom is committed to these.” 73 Egypt under President Al-Sisi is proving to be cooperative with Israel and Saudi

Arabia’s interests. Because of Egypt’s current struggle with Islamic State-inspired groups in the northern Sinai, it is far more concerned with increasing regional economic and security cooperation than with achieving a just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Egypt will likely support a deal proposed by the American administration, which is likely to be heavily biased in favor of Israel.

**Critical Israeli-Jordanian cooperation**

Israel and Jordan are in diplomatic talks regarding the mutually beneficial Red Sea-Dead Sea pipeline. The ambitious project, meant to slow and eventually reverse the increasing degradation of the Dead Sea, has created joint efforts. For example, the two countries are working together on the physical Red Sea-Dead Sea pipeline, meant to replenish the diminishing Dead Sea from the Red Sea. In the first phase of the project, 300 million cubic meters of water will be pumped into the Dead Sea each year. In the next phase, the project will see 2 billion cubic meters of seawater transferred annually, according to Jordan’s Water and Irrigation Ministry. The project is also to include a desalination plant with a capacity of 65-85mcm per year near Aqaba, using Israeli technology. The project is mutually beneficial, and experts say water levels in the Dead Sea have been falling at a rate of one meter each year, warning that it could completely dry out within 30 years.74 Talks regarding the project were stalled last year following incident last year in which an Israeli security guard killed two Jordanians near the Israeli Embassy in Amman, resulting in a diplomatic standoff. Despite the diplomatic obstacles, the project is seen as essential to the region given the economic and

---

74 Ghazal, Mohammad. “Jordan to Go Ahead with Red Sea-Dead Sea Project despite Israel’s Withdrawal Threat.” *Jordan Times*, 15 Nov. 2017
environmental circumstances, and would be unquestionably beneficial to Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority. In addition to sharing water resources, Jordan is a strategic partner on which Israel must to rely on to keep Sunni radical terrorists, including the Islamic State, away from its eastern border. Islamic State has a presence on the southern end on Israel’s Golan border in the northwest, and it is crucial that the Hashemite Kingdom and Israel work together to prevent it from gaining a presence in Jordan. Jordan has also sent strong signals to the Palestinian Authority expressing their position. Jordan is in the process of revoking the Jordanian citizenship of 30 top PA officials, including President Abbas, likely to pressure the PA to return to the negotiating table with the United States. For Jordan, a strong partnership with Israel in keeping Islamic State from threatening its regime takes priority over achieving the “just” two-state solution it has always sought on behalf of the Palestinians.

The Trump Administration, Israeli, and Palestinian Leadership

Formulating a peace deal which could work for Israelis, Palestinians, the Arab states, and the Trump Administration, is reliant on the actions of the stability and future of Israeli and Palestinian leadership, and the Trump Administration. The Israeli government led by Benjamin Netanyahu’s Likud Party coalition is very fragile. Compounded with Netanyahu’s possible future indictment for corruption charges, the stability of his government threatens the feasibility of any peace deal proposed by the United States. The Trump Administration and regional players like Mohammad bin Salman need a Palestinian leadership which will be flexible and agree to a

deal that does not meet all or many of the Palestinians’ demands. Figures in the Trump Administration responsible for formulating his Middle East policy, including his son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner and ambassador to Israel David Friedman, are also important, as are their futures in the administration. Actions of the Trump Administration, the Israeli and Palestinian governments have demonstrated that the traditional two-state solution and its respective components regarding Jerusalem, refugees, and other issues, has become more unrealistic.

The Trump Administration

In contrast to the chilly relationship with the Obama Administration, the overt bias favoring Israel is visible in the history of the Trump Foundation and the people President Trump has included in his Middle East peace envoy. His friendliness towards Israel, Saudi Arabia, and hostility towards Iran and the JCPOA were visible in his campaign.

In 2003 the Trump Foundation donated $10,000 to schools in the religious West Bank settlement of Beit El. President Trump’s son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner’s family foundation has also made charitable donations to West Bank settlements. Between 2011 and 2013 the gifts totaled $58,500. These donations were made mostly to schools and religious yeshivas. The Kushner’s also donated $5,000 to the Etzion Foundation, which provides funds for Yeshivas and other schools in Gush Etzion, in 2012, and $10,000 in 2013. They also gave $5,000 in 2011 to Ohr Torah Stone, a group of schools headquartered in the settlement of Efrat. In addition, they donated $500 to the Od Yosef Chai Yeshiva in the settlement of Yizhar in 2012. Yizhar is near the Palestinian city of Nablus, and Jewish extremists from the settlement have launched violent attacks against Palestinians and Israeli security forces.
Trump’s Ambassador to Israel David Friedman served as the president of the group American Friends of Bet El (AFBE), which received $10,000 from the Kushner family in 2011 and $28,000 in 2013. Friedman is the president of the Beit El Yeshiva’s fundraising arm. David Friedman has called the two-state solution “an illusion” for a “non-existent problem.” He is also a frequent contributor to the Israeli right-wing newspaper Arutz Sheva based in Beit El and partially funded by AFBE. In his op-ed pieces, he has frequently called for settlement expansion and advocated against a Palestinian state.77

The Palestinian public in general does not trust the American administration to be an honest broker for negotiations, especially after the declaration to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. Of Palestinians interviewed by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 88% view the US as biased in favor of Israel, and 65% are opposed to the resumption of contacts with the administration that were suspended last December following the Jerusalem declaration. A slim majority of 51% say that if the US submits a peace plan, the so-called “deal of the century,” the PA should reject it regardless of its content.78

The recent appointments of Mike Pompeo to Secretary of State and John Bolton to National Security Advisor have guaranteed an even more hawkish administration than previously. The two officials have staunch anti-Iranian views and will further promote the idea of a Saudi-Israeli-American alliance against Iran. What is the most practical option for the immediate future of peace talks is an interim agreement (in-lieu of a less-likely final-status

agreement) which expands Palestinian Authority control over more of the West Bank and all of Gaza, continues to preserve Israel’s security needs, and allows Israel to retain control over key settlements, but otherwise cease settlement activity. This is in the best interest of the Trump Administration, the Arab states, and would be acceptable for Israel. While it is not a final-status agreement, an interim agreement would allow the Arab states time and political reason to make certain gestures of normalization with Israel. This would be the most progress, even if it makes very little difference, seen by the parties since 1993.

**Implications of the Jerusalem Decision**

President Trump’s decision to officially recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and announce the beginning of the process to move the American embassy there from Tel Aviv, was a significant step towards reigniting the Jared Kushner and Jason Greenblatt-led regional peace process, with special focus on solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israelis generally supported the US decision. The Israel Democracy Institute found that 65% of the Jewish public thought that the decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel was in Israel’s best interest. Regarding the future of the city and its possible division as part of a peace process with the Palestinians, 72% believe that the city should remain united and the capital of Israel, even in the context of a comprehensive peace agreement. Surprisingly, only 44% of the Arab-Israeli population would like to see the city divided into east and west, serving as two capitals for two states.79 As of writing, the American administration has made

---

79 Hermann, Tamar. “Is President Trump’s Public Declaration That Jerusalem is the Capital of Israel in Israel’s Best Interest?” *The Israel Democracy Institute*, 3 Jan. 2018
the ambitious claim that it will move the American Embassy to Jerusalem by May 14th, 2018, to commemorate Israel’s 70th anniversary of statehood.80

As was to be expected, this was a largely unpopular decision among Palestinians. The Jerusalem Media and Communication Center, a Palestinian NGO based in Ramallah, West Bank, produced a study published in February 2018 showing the extent to which Palestinians condemned this decision and were largely upset with the general Arab response to it. According to the survey conducted by the JMCC, 96.1% reject the establishment of a Palestinian state without Jerusalem as its capital under any circumstances, while only 3% accept the establishment of a Palestinian state without Jerusalem as its capital under any circumstances.

The Saudi reaction was noticeably half-hearted. King Salman, arguably the most influential Arab leader in the region, denounced Trump’s decision. However, it had been reported that the kingdom had been urging Palestinian President Abbas to accept a watered-down peace plan, which might not have included East Jerusalem as a future capital of Palestine. During the protests which followed Trump’s announcement, Palestinians in Beit Hanoun, Gaza, burned American, Israeli, and Saudi flags.81 However, despite condemnations from virtually every Arab and Muslim world leader of the Trump administration’s decision, Palestinians viewed the overall Arab response as insufficient. When asked how satisfied they were with the Arab world’s response, 73.4% of Palestinians claimed to be either “very dissatisfied” or “somewhat dissatisfied” opposed to 24.4% who were either “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied.”

---

81 “Angry Youth Burn the Flag of US and Saudi Arabia in the Town of Beit Hanoun in the Northern Gaza Strip.” Palestine and Israel News Today on Map, 6 Dec. 2017
satisfied."\(^82\) During the April protests along the Gaza border meant to reaffirm the Palestinians’ right to return to their homes inside Israel, Palestinians burned photos of Mohammad bin Salman, in addition to Israeli and American flags.\(^83\)

The Palestinian Authority responded harshly to this decision, effectively cutting ties with the American administration. The Palestinian Authority announced its intent to boycott the U.S. administration and to refuse to accept it as a broker of peace talks in the future. The PLO Central Council recommended to the PLO Executive Committee that it suspend its recognition of Israel and halt security cooperation with Israeli security forces. However, Palestinians lack confidence in the PA’s willingness to take such measures. Some 55.7% of Palestinians polled did not expect the decisions to be implemented, and 54% expressed that they expect the Palestinian leadership to backtrack on its decision to boycott the U.S. administration and not accept it as a mediator in peace talks.

Future of Israeli Leadership

The ability of Israeli leadership to negotiate a solution is threatened by two factors— the fragility of the current Likud coalition and the likelihood that a successor to Benjamin Netanyahu will be less flexible and conciliatory. Though not much is publicly known of the details of the Trump Administration’s peace plan, the implementation of any peace plan is also heavily dependent on the stability of the current Israeli government. The current Likud-led

---

\(^82\) Poll No. 91- Trump’s Jerusalem Decision & Freedom of Expression. Jerusalem Media and Communications Centre, 24 Feb. 2018

government is a coalition of six parties (Likud, Jewish Home, Kulanu, Shas, United Torah Judaism, and Yisrael Beiteinu) and holds a total of 66 out of 120 seats in the Knesset.  

The recommendation by the Israeli Chief of Police that the Attorney General indict Netanyahu for a series of corruption charges, including bribery, fraud, and breach of public trust, risk jeopardizing any regional peace deal brought forth by the U.S. However, given the lengthy process which it would take to indict the Prime Minister, and the months of legal battles which would follow, it is unlikely that he will be indicted and arrested in the foreseeable future. In addition, “Mr. Security” Netanyahu is still widely popular among Israelis. He will continue to rule with the support the Israeli public if the threat of terror or an aggressive Iran remains. At this time, with the increase in tensions along the Lebanese, Syrian, and Gaza borders, Israelis will continue to support their Prime Minister. An Israeli poll taken after the publication of the Chief of Police’s recommendation found that if new elections were held immediately, Neyanyahu’s Likud party would gain one Knesset seat, from 25 to 26, and Yesh Atid, the main opposition party, would lose two seats.

However, Netanyahu must still tread lightly while among his own party members. His right-wing government is very fragile, and at risk of collapse due to highly contested issues within the coalition (such as the Ultra-Orthodox draft bill and the conversion bill, both highly disputed between religious and non-religious parties.) Due to the fragility of his coalition and his own vulnerability brought by the police recommendations of indictment, Netanyahu is

---

84 “Parties and Elections.” The Israel Democracy Institute
85 Hoffman, Gil, and Udi Shahan. “Most Israelis Consider Netanyahu Corrupt, but He Is Still Climbing in the Polls.” The Jerusalem Post, 15 Feb. 2018
unlikely to make serious concessions in a proposed peace deal. To make too many or overly large concessions to the Palestinians (which might be perceived as compromising to Israeli security) will likely be exploited by his rivals and possible successors. Given its dominance of the government, the next Israeli Prime Minister is likely to come from the Likud Party, or an MK in his cabinet who belong to other party in the government coalition. The most likely candidates are Netanyahu’s Defense Minister, Avigdor Lieberman, Education Minister Naftali Bennet, Economy Minister Moshe Kahalon, Minister of Public Security and Information Gilad Erdan, or former minister and Likud insider Gideon Sa’ar.

Should the next Prime Minister be one of these Likud or other Coalition party members, the likelihood of Israeli concessions or cooperation in a regional peace plan would become even slimmer. The only people who could possibly succeed Netanyahu are less likely to make any sort of territorial or other concessions to the Palestinians, let alone accept the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state. For the MKs in Netanyahu’s inner circle, and those who will likely end up replacing him, regional peace and cooperation are far less important than maintaining security on all fronts, and as much control of the West Bank as possible. Lawmakers like Naftali Bennet openly propose annexing Area C, or at least a large portion of the West Bank, to include all settlers currently residing there. Under this plan, 96% of Palestinians would live under PA rule and the remainder would be given Israeli citizenship.

Since the start of 2018, Knesset members have been attempting to pass legislation to increase Israeli sovereignty in the West Bank and make future negotiations more difficult. Netanyahu has been blocking most of these attempts, including those to specifically apply Israeli sovereignty to Israeli settlements, academic institutions, and the Jordan Valley, and to
retroactively legalize illegal and unrecognized settlements. Major unilateral moves such as these would isolate Israel from the U.S. and Arab states and would jeopardize any future peace plans. The Knesset passed a law requiring any vote to cede any part of Jerusalem to any foreign power to have 80/120 votes, instead of the traditional 60. This law, an amendment to the Law on Jerusalem, make it more difficult to relinquish any part of the city to a foreign power under any future peace deal.86

Netanyahu is on track to become the country’s longest serving Prime Minister, surpassing the country’s founder, David ben Gurion, in 2019. Netanyahu is hawkish on Israeli security, but he is willing to make certain concessions, even with his debilitating circumstances. Should Netanyahu be indicted and replaced by a fellow party or coalition member, there are few options as to who would be a good candidate that will make the same concessions as part of a peace deal. Ideological hardliners to his right will be less likely to make any significant concessions and will be less likely to comply or cooperate with the Trump Administration’s vision for Middle East peace.

Future of Palestinian Leadership

Last November, Mohammad bin Salman invited Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to Riyadh, to discuss primarily Iran, the reconciliation effort with Hamas, and restarting peace negotiations with Israel. Abbas had been attempting to drum up regional support for the reconciliation deal and obtain much needed political and economic backing from gulf countries like Saudi Arabia. It was rumored that during Abbas’ trip to Riyadh the Crown Prince essentially

86 “In Late-Night Vote, Knesset Passes Law to Hinder East Jerusalem Withdrawal.” The Times of Israel, 2 Jan. 2018
gave him an ultimatum: “either accept the terms [of president Trump’s peace plan] - no Jerusalem, no right of return - or make way for somebody who will.” It is in the best interest of Saudi Arabia that the Palestinian Authority cooperate with it and its regional ambitions, and should an Abbas-led government not comply, it runs the risk of being replaced by a government more willing to accept President Trump’s watered down peace proposal, heavily in favor of Israel. Due to the urgency of the emerging anti-Iranian alliance with Trump and Israel, it has become the primary objective of Saudi Arabia to achieve any sort of peace deal possible at this time. Cooperation with Israel and combatting Iranian expansion is a bigger priority for Saudi Arabia currently than the well-being of the Palestinians. Mohammad bin Salman, having watched his father’s generation deal with Palestinian leadership led by Abbas and Arafat, is likely frustrated by the PA’s refusal to adapt to modern circumstances. In March of 2018, the Crown Prince told an audience of American Jewish organizations that “in the last several decades the Palestinian leadership has missed one opportunity after the other and rejected all the peace proposals it was given.” He also said, “it is about time the Palestinians take the proposals and agree to come to the negotiations table or shut up and stop complaining.”

The PA will have to make heavy sacrifices on issues such as refugees, settlements, and Jerusalem. Mohammad bin Salman, wanting normalization with Israel, seeks a Palestinian partner who can move forward with him and Israel, not one who is stuck in the past and will only drag the kingdom down in its regional aims. These views are supported by many in the Saudi academic and political elite. Expressing his impatience with the Palestinians and the

---

87 Hearst, David. “The axis of Arab autocrats who are standing behind Donald Trump.” Middleeasteye.net, Middle East Eye, 7 Dec. 2017
88 Haaretz, 30 Apr. 2018, The Forward and Aiden Pink
perceived trouble that they have caused the country, Saudi novelist and writer Turki al-Hamad tweeted “since 1948 we have been suffering in the name of Palestine. Coups were orchestrated in the name of Palestine... development was suspended in the name of Palestine... liberties were repressed in the name of Palestine.”

There is internal pressure on Palestinian leadership as well. Support for the Palestinian Authority and President Abbas is low among Palestinians. Satisfaction with the performance of President Abbas is at 33% and 68% of the Palestinian public would like to see him resign; specifically, 62% in the West Bank and 81% in Gaza. In all, most Palestinians believe that the PA has become a burden for the Palestinian people and fear its overarching authority. Over 60% of Palestinians believe that the PA security services eavesdrop of Palestinian citizens’ phone calls. Only 33% believe people in the West Bank can criticize the PA without fear, vs. 63% who say they can’t criticize it without fear.

One of Abbas’ last remaining tools to maintain whatever trust and popularity he still holds with the Palestinian public is the payment of monthly stipends to the families of those who have committed terror attacks against Israel or have been killed by Israeli forces. Israel views this practice as incentive to commit terror attacks against Israelis, while the Palestinian Authority views it as a necessary measure to create an economic safety net for Palestinian families. The Trump Administration has explicitly asked Abbas to cease these payments, and the U.S. Congress just recently passed the Taylor Force Act, to stop this payment to the families of

---

terrorists and martyrs by the PA. Palestinians have criticized this law as politically motivated and damaging to peace efforts.\(^91\)

If the Palestinian Authority wants to continue to be the credible Palestinian governing body and a part of this new equation in the Middle East, it must work to urgently find a replacement for Abbas. This will be difficult. The state of Palestinian leadership is in disarray. Abbas, who was elected to a four-year term in 2005, has succeeded in expelling or isolating all his political opponents capable of challenging him, and out of fear for becoming a lame duck, he has not formally appointed or kept anyone close enough to be his possible successor. He has expelled top contender and his arch-rival Mohamad Dahlan and his associates from Fatah institutions. A favorite among Palestinians, Marwan Barghouti, is a member of Fatah’s Central Committee and is currently serving five life-sentences in an Israeli jail for orchestrating a series of terrorist attacks in 2002- which collectively killed five Israelis.\(^92\) He recently reemerged in headlines for leading fellow Palestinian prisoners in a hunger strike in jail, until security footage revealed that he had secretly been eating in his cell. This did not severely impact his popularity among Palestinians, however.

The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research found that if Abbas were to run directly against Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh, Abbas would receive 41% of the votes and Haniyeh would receive 52%. If elections were held between top Fatah contender Marwan Barghouti and Ismail Haniyeh, Barghouti would receive 55% and Haniyeh 39%.\(^93\)


\(^{92}\) Harel, Zvi, and Assaf Bergerfreund. “Court Sentences Mrwan Barghouti to Five Life Terms.” Haaretz.com, 10 Jan. 2018

The next Palestinian president must be accepted by the Palestinian public, indicating a certain authenticity, and thus likely to be much more entrenched and noncompromising, like Abbas. He must also be compatible to the interests of the United States and the Arab Quartet (Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, and the UAE.) Top candidates like Marwan Barghouti and Jibril Rajoub are Fatah insiders and would never cooperate with the Arab states in their regional ambitions. Those who appear moderate enough to comply with the Arab states, mainly Saudi Arabia and Egypt, would have to be political outsiders, and would be distrusted by the Palestinian public. These figures include Naser Al-Qudwa and Mohammad Dahlan. Al-Qudwa, nephew of Yasser Arafat, is preferred by the Arab states for his moderate stances, but was not born and raised under the occupation, and thus is perceived as out of touch with the Palestinian population. An enemy who has been politically isolated by President Abbas, Mohammad Dahlan is arguably the most qualified and likely candidate, due to his experience in the Palestinian security apparatus, also putting him in the favor of Israel. However, his comfortable life and luxurious home in Abu Dhabi is working against him. He is not suffering in the occupied territories with his fellow Palestinians, a fact that Abbas would surely seek to exploit should Dahlan run against him or in succession to him.

In addition, failure to replace Abbas with a candidate within Fatah could result in inadvertently yielding power to Hamas. The Palestinian Basic Law stipulates that the speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) takes over the presidency for 60 days following the absence, due to death or resignation, of a sitting president. The PLC has not convened since
2007, and the last speaker, Aziz Dweik, is a Hamas supporter. This means that if implemented as the law stipulates, the interim Palestinian president could be from the Hamas leadership. ⁹⁴

Abbas’ hardline rhetoric regarding Trump and an American-sponsored peace deal has been discredited by Arab leaders. Abbas, blatantly refusing to continue cooperating with the US, has expressed interest in the EU, France, Russia, and China to take a more active role in facilitating the peace process. Directly contradicting Abbas, Jordan’s King Abdullah has openly stated that there cannot be a peace process without the presence of the US. Abbas’ hardline response was a signal to the Palestinian public and to the world that he would not cooperate with the US and Saudi Arabia. He refused to be the Palestinian leader who compromises on issues which Palestinians care about the most. In Abbas’ harsh rhetoric which followed President Trump’s Jerusalem declaration, as well as his refusal to accept the U.S. as a mediator in peace talks, he has further isolated himself and the PA from much of the world, including the Arab states. Jordan’s King Abdullah disregarded Abbas’ refusal to work with the U.S. King Abdullah said at the World Economic Forum in January 2018 that “we cannot have a peace process or peace solution without the role of the United States.” ⁹⁵ In addition, as of September 2017, 65.5% of Palestinians opposed the dissolution of the Palestinian National Authority and saw it as necessary to maintain.

To achieve an effective anti-Iranian alliance with Donald Trump and Israel, Mohammad bin Salman has a key interest in supporting a stable, moderate Palestinian Authority which is flexible to Trump and Netanyahu’s terms of a peace deal. The transitioning of power to the next

⁹⁴ “Will Nasser Al-Kidwa Succeed President Abbas?” Al-Monitor
⁹⁵ Montag, Rebecca. “Jordan’s King Abdullah: No Peace Process or Peace Solution without U.S.” The Jerusalem
president after Mahmoud Abbas will be a complicated struggle, due to Abbas’ political isolation of his potential enemies. The next president must be accepted by the Palestinian public (such as Marwan Barghouti or Ismail Haniyeh) but also accepted by the Arab states and the international community (Mohammad Dahlan or Nasser al-Qudwa). It will be challenging to find a candidate who can meet these criteria, to be accepted by the Palestinian people while moderate enough to cooperate with regional powers on a peace plan.

**Hamas-Fatah Reconciliation**

The Palestinian government is still divided between Hamas in Gaza and the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, and it is unlikely that the two will reach a full reconciliation agreement any time soon. Some of the most contentious issues between Hamas and Fatah continue to be the management of the crucial Rafah crossing on Gaza’s southern border with Egypt and the disarmament of Hamas’ military wing, something prioritized by Fatah and considered a nonstarter for Hamas. The assassination attempt of Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah, for which Abbas was quick to blame Hamas, essentially ended the prospects for reconciliation. Surprisingly, even the Trump Administration’s declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel was not enough to act as a catalyst to unite Hamas and Fatah, forming a cohesive government with which Israel would be forced to take seriously.

To sum, Gaza has endured three devastating wars with Israel since Hamas’ takeover. In addition, due to political strife with the PA and Israel’s naval blockade, Gaza only receives a few hours of electricity per day. Many describe the status of Gaza to be a humanitarian disaster.

---

97 Al Jazeera, 2017
Regarding responsibility for the electricity crisis in Gaza, Palestinians in the territories are differing on who they believe is responsible. 51.6% of residents in Gaza responded that the Hamas government is responsible, and only 16.9% blamed Israel. Palestinians in the West Bank were quicker to blame Israel for the electricity crisis in Gaza. 51.1% said Israel was responsible and only 17.8% blaming Hamas. The people of Hamas recognize the role that Hamas has played in the electricity crisis, more-so than West Bank residents. This divide is one of many which keep the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank separated, not only geographically, but in terms of ideology and beliefs. West Bank residents, who interact with Israelis more often than Gaza residents, would be quicker to vote for Hamas in an election, because they have not lived under their regime for 10 years like the residents of Gaza have.

**Responsibility for the Crisis in Gaza**

Since Hamas initially took power in the Gaza strip in 2007, the 1.8 million residents there have endured three devastating wars, isolation and restricted movement from the Egyptian and Israeli blockades, and lack of services from the PA, as a way of putting pressure on Hamas to cede power in Gaza to the Palestinian Authority. This political strife between Hamas and the PA is the reason Gazan citizens currently receive only a few hours of electricity per day.

For its nearly two million residents, the humanitarian situation in Gaza is deteriorating rapidly. The lack of drinkable water in Gaza has the U.N. particularly alarmed, and a 2017 report produced by the Agency found that if measures are not immediately taken to alleviate the crisis, Gaza will become unlivable by 2020.98 Among Palestinians questioned in the PCPSR

survey, only 5% describe conditions in the Gaza Strip as good or very good.\textsuperscript{99} The lack of clean water and sanitation facilities also greatly increases the risk of a potential cholera outbreak, as in Yemen. However, unlike Yemen, Gaza is much more densely populated, and the disease would not stop at Israel’s border fence. When asked to identify the party or side responsible for the worsening conditions in Gaza, the largest percentage (39\%) blamed Israel; 25\% blamed President Abbas and the PA, and 18\% blamed Hamas. Support for Hamas over the PA is generally stronger among Palestinians who (1) live in refugee camps or cities, compared to villages and towns, (2) are religious, compared to somewhat or non-religious, (3) among those with the lowest income, compared to those with higher income, and (4) those who hold a BA degree, compared to literates.\textsuperscript{100} From this information, it can be gathered that support for Hamas is still quite strong, and support for the PA is decreasing substantially. The divide of Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank is clear, and the reconciliation process is unlikely to mend those divides, creating a unified Palestinian government soon.

President Trump’s decision to defund UNRWA, the United Nations agency which oversees the welfare of Palestinian refugees, had many implications, and greatly exacerbated the ensuing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The decision to cut over $60 million from U.S. aid to UNRWA was opposed by the Israeli defense establishment, the Shin Bet, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (which is led by Benjamin Netanyahu, who serves as his own foreign minister.) Israel considers the stability of Gaza of high importance due to the risk of war breaking out from the severe desperation of the people in Gaza. Past trends indicate that aggressive

\textsuperscript{100} PCPSR. (2018)
behavior on the part of Hamas may be due to an attempt to gain support among an increasingly frustrated public. Approval ratings for Hamas and its leadership rose significantly after Operation Protective Edge in 2014.\textsuperscript{101} The Palestinian people also believe that this move was a deliberate target against their right of return. When asked why they believed the Trump Administration did this, 43.2% believed that it was meant to be political pressure to force Abbas to return to the negotiating table. A majority, 51.5%, believed it was a move to close the refugee file and completely remove it from negotiations.\textsuperscript{102}

In the time since the 1993 Oslo Accords instituted the two-state solution as the primary structure for a future peace agreement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, changing realities on the ground of hindered its feasibility, and many on both sides of the conflict believe it to be unviable. Settlement expansion in strategic locations in the West Bank has threatened the possibility of a future contiguous Palestinian state. Hamas’ election victory in 2006 and the following Lebanon war that summer discredited the idea of “land for peace” in the eyes of Israelis, reinforced by the continued threat of terror from both borders. The two-state solution, as conceptualized in the Oslo Accords, is no longer perceived as a possibility by Israelis and Palestinians. When added to the recent Iranian expansion in the Middle East and other regional developments pushing Israel and the Sunni Arab states closer in relations, it appears the Palestinian question and the pursuit of a just two-state solution is no longer a top priority of the Arab states. This differs from decades of the traditional Arab-approach, calling for Israel to withdraw from all territories seized in 1967, allow for the creation of a Palestinian state with

\textsuperscript{102} PCPSR. (2018)
East Jerusalem as its capital, and a right of return. Arab states have always supported these Palestinian ambitions, but because of the mutual threats and interests posed by an increasingly aggressive Iranian foreign policy in the Middle East, Arab leaders are now more willing to push for the adoption of a peace deal which is less favorable to the Palestinians.

**Components of the American-Saudi Proposal**

Given the status of the two-state solution and the implications brought by the shifting priorities and alliances by regional powers, the deal likely to be proposed by the American Administration, in conjunction with the Arab states as part of a regional-peace deal, will be heavily favored to Israel. This alternative to the two-state solution will exclude some of the critical components of the traditional solution that have been demanded by the Palestinians throughout the history of the peace process. Any future Palestinian state, entity, or enclave, is likely to be will exclude full sovereignty, East Jerusalem as a capital, and a large-scale right of return for Palestinian refugees. These components have historically been crucial to the two-state solution, and to the implementation of a wider, regional peace deal. During this round of negotiations unlike those of the past, the Arab states have signaled that they will not back up the Palestinians.
Land Swaps and Settlements

In addition to social and economic improvement for Palestinians in Gaza, a second pressure point would involve a critical rethinking about land swaps. Land swaps are a crucial component to the successful implementation of any peace deal. The concept of mutual land swaps, for Israel to maintain over large settlement blocs in exchange for Israeli land annexed to a Palestinian state, were evident in the Camp David Summit in 2000 and Olmert’s proposal in 2008. Some of the key principles to territorial exchanges in any sort of deal are (1) A land swap ratio of 1:1. (2) Israeli annexation of areas that are home to approximately 70-80% of settlers. (3) Israeli annexation of a minimal amount of land acquired in 1967. (4) No Palestinian dislocation. (5) Measures that satisfy Israeli security concerns. (6) A contiguous Palestinian state in the West Bank.  

The land swaps that would have to be made at this point would be much larger than those proposed as part of the Geneva talks, potentially causing more domestic turmoil in Israel than it saw in 2005, when just 8,000 settlers were forcibly evicted from their homes in Gaza as part of the disengagement plan. The Washington Institute for Near-East Policy, a think tank with focus on international security and U.S. Middle East Policy, has compiled different scenarios of territorial exchanges, all of which offer the potential for a contiguous Palestinian state, excluding the issues of Kiryat Arba and Israeli presence in the Jordan Valley.

In the first scenario, Israel would annex land holding 43 of the main settlements, confined within five major blocs. This territory holds 80.1% of settlers, 239,246 in total. The

remaining 19.99% (59,782) live in 77 communities, known as “non-bloc” settlements, and these would be evacuated and become a part of a Palestinian state. In total, Israel would annex 4.73% of the West Bank, including some of the most contentious settlements: Ariel, the zone north of Ariel, Kfar Adumim, and the expanded area of Ofra and Beit El. This total land area is 293.1 square kilometers.

In a second scenario, Israel would annex all settlements mentioned in scenario one except Ofra, Beit El, and other small settlements in that area (expanded Ofra and Beit El.) This brings the number of settlers annexed into Israel down to 219,223, or 73.31% of total settlers, in 38 settlements instead of 43. This would leave 79,805 settlers in 82 settlements outside of Israel, and decrease the land annexed to 4.31% of the West Bank. Excluding Beit El and Ofra from a land swap deal would be difficult for any Israeli government. Beit El has biblical significance and Ofra is home to many leaders of the settler movement. This would lead to tremendous upheaval by Israel’s religious groups and parties, including many in the Israeli government. For this reason, this option is highly unfeasible.

In a third scenario, Israel would not annex expanded Ofra and Beit El, the zone north of Ariel, or Kfar Adumim, which collectively hold 34,444 people. This calls for annexing 32 settlements and leaving 88 outside of jurisdiction. The number of settlers absorbed into Israel would be 219,223, or 68.49%, on 3.72% of the land. The number of settlers left outside of Israel would jump to 94,226. The increased number of Israelis that would need to be forcibly or voluntarily evacuated and resettled makes this option even more undesirable for the Israeli government. Of these three scenarios produced by the Washington Institute, negotiators would likely use models such as these to establish where the line is drawn on settlement and land
annexation. Israel would prefer scenario one, the Palestinians would prefer scenario three. These produced scenarios are a good starting point for negotiations, in which the United States and Arab states can play a role in intervening to seek an agreement.

Some settlements which are not mentioned in these land swap scenarios are the particularly thorny ones for negotiations, Kiryat Arba and the Jewish part of Hebron (H2). Due to the religious significance of Hebron, and the nationalistic and religious settlers which live in Kiryat Arba, any land swap proposal would likely include Israeli desire to annex a route through the southeast West Bank from Israel to Kiryat Arba, careful to avoid annexing any Palestinian villages. An American-proposed peace deal would likely include at least permanent Jewish access to the settlements, if not annexation of them. Anything less would not be accepted by the religious parties in the current government coalition. However, Israeli annexation of the settlements has never been accepted by any Palestinian negotiating team, though some agreement could be reached, with help from the U.S. and Arab states, to ensure Jewish access to the holy sites in Hebron.

To annex as much of the West Bank as it can, Israel is prepared to cede land inside Israel proper to a Palestinian state, focusing north and southwest of the West Bank, where there is arable land for farming or industry. Due to Gaza’s current state and its denser population than the West Bank, more land which would be ceded to a future Palestinian state by Israel would be adjacent to Gaza rather than the latter. The land immediately to the Southeast of Gaza,

---

north Chalutzah, southeast of Gaza, is easily irrigatable and could be used as a major industrial center or for agriculture. More Gazans today work in industry than agriculture.\textsuperscript{105}

An idea which has long been considered by Israeli officials is creating a Palestinian state in part of the Sinai Peninsula, directly bordering Gaza. This idea has always been met with rejection from the Palestinians and Egyptians (As of April of 2018 86% of Palestinians are opposed to this idea, though the idea is understandably more popular in Gaza than in the West Bank).\textsuperscript{106} However, with the current leadership in the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, the idea could become more relevant and brought back on the table in this latest round of discussion. The establishment of a Palestinian state in the north of Sinai would present Egypt with an opportunity to greatly expand security cooperation with Israel and would lift a severe economic and military burden from the Egyptian government.

Once again, shifting pressures from players beyond Israel and the Palestinians may contribute to a revitalization of this long-rejected idea. In this case, pressure point is President Al-Sisi’s draining war against the Islamic State affiliated group in the Sinai Peninsula State of Sinai, or Walayat Sinai. In the Egyptian army’s ongoing campaign against the Islamic State affiliates, it has destroyed entire neighborhoods near the Gaza border in Rafah, seeking to create a buffer zone with Gaza. Continued evacuations of Egyptian citizens from areas such as Rafah, Sheikh Zuweid, and Al-Arish are part of a major counter-terrorism plan.\textsuperscript{107} However, it

\textsuperscript{105} Makovsky, David. “Imagining the Border: Options for Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian Territorial Issue.” The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2011,
\textsuperscript{107} Gold, Zack. “North Sinai Population Continues to Suffer for Egypt.” Inss.org.il, Institute for National Security Studies
may also be for potentially resettling Palestinians in this land. Again, 86% of Palestinians oppose this idea.\textsuperscript{108}

A 720 square kilometer plot of land, from Rafah, to Sheikh Zuweid, to Al-Arish, if added to the Gaza strip, would triple its size. Adding this land to a Palestinian state could be the rationale for allowing Israel to annex some of the West Bank settlements outside of the security barrier, like Ariel, Ofra, Beit El, or even Hebron and Kiryat Arba. An additional component to this plan could be Israel ceding some land in the Negev to Egypt, in Nahal Paran, allowing for a direct access route from Egypt to Jordan.\textsuperscript{109} The Israeli government, if it were forced to make serious concessions, would surely prefer to relinquish territory around Gaza and even in the Negev in exchange for as much of the West Bank as possible.

If Al-Sisi did cede territory in the northern Sinai to a Palestinian state, it would likely be met with public uproar. The Egyptian people already stood by and watched as Al-Sisi gave away the strategic Tiran and Sanafir islands to Saudi Arabia. Located in and near the Strait of Tiran, essentially controlling access from the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba, these islands are of high importance to Israeli and Jordanian shipping. This transfer of power was another sign of growing Egyptian-Israeli and Saudi-Israeli trust and partnership. Netanyahu was so confident that this agreement would continue to preserve Israel’s maritime security that he approved plans for the King Salman Bridge, linking the Sinai to the Saudi mainland.\textsuperscript{110} The Egyptian response to the island transfer was significant as well. The lack of serious demonstrations and

\textsuperscript{109} Lazaroff, Tovah. “Is Trump Eyeing a Plan to Expand a Palestinian State into Sinai?” The Jerusalem Post, 3 Dec. 2017
\textsuperscript{110} Aronson, Geoffrey. “Red Sea Islands Deal Undermines Arab Peace Initiative.” Middle East Institute, 25 July 2017
dissent proved to the Egyptian authorities that ceding land from the Sinai for a Palestinian state may not result in the blowback that was once expected.

**Gaza-Focused Palestine**

Whether it be a state with full or limited sovereignty, the peace plan proposed by the Trump administration is likely to focus heavily on rebuilding Gaza and shifting power and influence there away from the West Bank. Weakening the PA government’s influence in the West Bank and focusing more energy and resources on quickly solving Gaza’s civilian and infrastructure crises would more easily allow Israel to annex territory and assert control over much of the West Bank upon the creation of a Palestinian state. This would be done with Egyptian cooperation in easing the blockade and restrictions in Gaza, and ultimately helping to create a more thriving Palestinian society and state in Gaza than in the West Bank. However, it is also vital that Gaza no longer be under the control of Hamas. Israel, keeping with its policy of not recognizing Hamas as part of a legitimate Palestinian government, will not cede any territory to Gaza or grant the coastal enclave any real autonomy if Hamas remains in power.

Given the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza, Israeli officials have proposed ideas and projects to uplift Gaza from its current state, for the benefit of the people in Gaza and the security of Israel. Due to the severity of the humanitarian crisis, the Israeli Army has suggested a $1 billion plan to rehabilitate Gaza, including a $710 million desalinization plant ($250 million from donor countries), a $36 million new electricity line to Gaza, to double the amount of electricity going to Gaza from Israel, and investments of $800 million to connect Gaza to natural gas, and $31.5 million for solar energy in Gaza. Israeli minister of intelligence and
transportation Israel Katz has suggested the construction of an artificial island 5 kilometers into the sea, linked to Gaza by bridge. The island proposed would cost an estimated $5 billion and would be eight square kilometers. It would likely have a marine port, a hotel, a small port for yachts, and eventually, possibly an airport. It would have electricity and desalinization plants. The main contributors to the project would be Saudi and Chinese companies. In theory, this island would give the Palestinians an outlet to the world without endangering Israeli security.

This ambitious project would not likely be implemented at the scale which is proposed, rather certain projects would be chosen based on their sense of urgency. Electricity and desalinization plants are more crucial now than an airport, which the Palestinians are highly unlikely to get in any sort of plan. The alternative to this plan would be that Israel continues to pay for Gaza’s increasing costs of water, electricity, food, and other goods supplied to Gaza. The construction of this island would help build the Gazan economy, increasing the quality of life in Gaza, thereby decreasing the likelihood of support and recruitment for terrorist groups. An American-proposed peace deal will focus heavily on rehabilitating Gaza, to shift the Palestinian government, economy, and resources there, thereby allowing expanded Israeli control in the West Bank (e.g. annexation of the most contentious settlements, like Ariel, Kfar Adumim, Ofra, Beit El, and Kiryat Arba.)

---

The Right of Return

A large-scale return or Palestinian refugees and their descendants to what is now and will be in any given peace deal, the Israeli state, would undoubtedly threaten Israel’s existence as a Jewish state. An influx of millions of refugees into Israel would throw the country into political chaos. However, as there have been offers in the past of Israel accepting certain numbers of refugees, rather symbolic and for family reunification purposes, as opposed to a real implementation of the Palestinian desired “right of return” for what is now five million people. The proposals of past negotiations have ranged from 5,000 upwards to 100,000. The government of Israel informed the United States that it would accept 100,000 Arab refugees for family reunification in 1949, shortly after the state’s founding.112

Seeing as a right of return for all refugees is a non-starter for Israel, Mohammad bin Salman is has expressed to the Palestinian president that this would not be included in an offer presented by the Trump Administration.113 Today, Israeli officials understand that there must be some right of return, and Israel must accept some, albeit a small number of refugees. This idea, which is so fundamental to the Palestinian narrative, is truly the cornerstone of the future of the Palestinian people in all historic Palestine and the diaspora, and it is not a demand that will be given up lightly by any Palestinian leader. 30% of Palestinians believe that the first most vital goal, even superseding ending the occupation and building a functioning Palestinian state,

should be to obtain the right of return of refugees to their 1948 towns and villages. Former Israeli President Shimon Peres once said “you don’t ask a people to give up their dream. You just don’t let them turn it into our nightmare.” Palestinian leadership must understand that a full-scale right of return is out of the question, but Israeli leadership must also understand that no right of return is not an option either.

The Capital of Palestine

East Jerusalem being the capital of the future state of Palestine is one of the most pressing demands among the Palestinians and the PA. President Abbas confirmed in a speech to the Palestinian Legislative Council in Ramallah that the deal that was being offered to him included Abu Dis as Palestine’s capital. The idea of Abu Dis as the Palestinian capital is not a new concept. It had been discussed extensively in the past, and the Palestinian Authority began construction on the Palestinian parliamentary building in the suburb just east of Jerusalem. It is only 1.5 kilometers from the Old City. If it were to become the future capital of Palestine, infrastructure would be put in place to ensure easy access for Muslims to pray freely at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif in the Old City. The capital of Abu Dis would be conjoined with the adjacent town Al-Azaria. While this idea may be popular for the American administration, the Arab states, and Israel, it is a non-starter for the Palestinians and the PA. An overwhelming 94% of Palestinians oppose it and 4% support the idea.

---

116 Mahmoud Abbas, Speech to Palestinian Legislative Council, Jan. 14, 2018
117 Menachem, Yoni Ben. “Palestinian Capital in Abu Dis or Ramallah?” Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 1- Jan. 2018
feasible option for the location of Palestine’s capital is Ramallah, in the central West Bank just north of Jerusalem. Ramallah is already the de facto capital of the Palestinian Authority, its leadership, and its government ministries and other institutions.

**Demilitarization and Security in the Jordan Valley**

Regardless of level of autonomy the Palestinians attain in any future agreement, whether it be statehood, semi-sovereignty, or a confederation status with Jordan or Egypt, any Palestinian entity would have to be demilitarized to be accepted by Israel. What will likely be proposed by the American-proposed deal is a demilitarized state with a strong police force and other internal security forces, which will continue to conduct security operations in conjunction with Israeli forces. The Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv has a potential withdrawal plan from the West Bank which is compatible with Israeli security needs. Before Israel ever withdraws from the West Bank as they did from Gaza, they need to have more “insurance policies” in mind other than the last resort option of reinvading and reoccupying, or fencing off completely, such was the case with Gaza. Part of any long-term peace deal would have to ensure multiple “insurance policies” so that the possibility of having to reoccupy the West Bank is decreased. These other insurance policies must be (1) Stronger economic relations with Arab countries. (2) Increased border security, including the completion of the separation barrier. (3) Joint counter-terrorism activities with Palestinian forces in Palestine (establishment of a Security Implementation and Verification Group). (4) Gradual, condition-based
redeployment. (5) External monitors of the process of disengagement such as the United States, Jordan, and Egypt. And (6) The undesired option of reoccupying the West Bank.\textsuperscript{119}

The American Administration’s proposed deal will also likely include Israel holding at least a temporary presence in the Jordan Valley, as it has always insisted on the grounds of security. Israeli negotiations have always requested early warning stations, mobile patrols, airspace rights, and supply bases in the Jordan Valley, as well as the right to redeploy forces to the Jordan River in the event of an external threat that constituted a “national state emergency” in Israel.\textsuperscript{120}

**Conclusion**

Over the course of Israel’s 50 years of occupation of the West Bank and Gaza strip, the viability of the traditional two-state solution has decreased. It appears that a two-state solution based on the pre-1967 war boundaries is no longer an option. Other key aspects of this most ideal peace deal are becoming less feasible, such as a large-scale right of return for refugees and now possibly East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine. However, the most significant factor influencing the future of the peace process today is the current shifting of relationships and dynamics between important regional powers in the Middle East. The signing of the JCPOA in 2015 and the various strategic victories throughout the Middle East which have followed, have emboldened Iran to accelerate an increasingly-aggressive foreign policy. Iran’s increased presence in the Middle East has threatened the security of both Israel and the Saudi-led Gulf states, who have begun to develop a strong, strategic partnership more than ever before.

\textsuperscript{119} “A Security System for the Two-State Solution” Youtube, INSS, June 30, 2016
Because of the desire of the Arab states to expand this cooperation, Israel is no longer forced to accept the traditional two-state solution. Israel is gaining much more leverage and from the support from regional players and the Trump Administration, and the Palestinians are losing leverage in negotiations as Arab countries are finding it to be in their interest to align with Israel.

If President Trump proposes an American-sponsored peace deal, likely with cooperation from Saudi Arabia, it is highly likely that the proposal will heavily favor Israel. Due to the pro-Israel bias in the administration, and Arab tacit approval for actions like the Jerusalem decision, the deal will likely not result in a two-state solution with the guarantee of Palestinian sovereignty, a capital in Jerusalem, or a right return. It will be a semi-autonomous entity, with continued Israeli military presence in the newly created state of Palestine (albeit likely temporary.) The Palestinians will be lucky to be allowed an international airport in Gaza. What should be expected from this deal is an autonomous Palestinian entity in Gaza and the West Bank (less of the West Bank than has been proposed in the past). It will be a fractured state with limited sovereignty, rather than a sovereign and contiguous one. Because of the players and changing landscape of the Middle East, this is the reality the Palestinians now face after 70 years of conflict and 50 years of Israeli occupation. This is the reality of an Israeli foothold in the American administration and in the favor of the most powerful Arab states. The traditional two-state solution, and many of the Palestinians’ most crucial demands, are no longer on the table.
Bibliography


mascus_axis.pdf
Harel, Zvi, and Assaf Bergerfreund.


Hermann, Tamar. “Is President Trump’s Public Declaration That Jerusalem is the Capital of Israel in Israel’s Best Interest?” The Israel Democracy Institute, 3 Jan. 2018, en idi.org.il/articles/20462
“Hezbollah.” American Israel Public Affairs Committee, www.aipac.org/learn/issues/issue-display?issueid=%7BE01BC8E4-1162-46F1-A9A4-69E26E64FB80%7D


Mahmoud Abbas, Speech to Palestinian Legislative Council, Jan. 14, 2018, Retrieved from www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQuFd_jJn2c


NEOM. “Will Israeli Companies Participate in the NEOM Project?” Neom Saudi City, 15 Feb. 2018, neomsaudiicity.net/israeli-companies-participate-neom-project/


“Parties and Elections.” The Israel Democracy Institute, en.idi.org.il/israeli-elections-and-parties/


“Statement on Hajj Amin Al-Husayni.” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, United States