



U.S. Diplomacy in the Arab-Israeli Conflict (1948-1973)

Arap-İsrail Çatışmasında ABD diplomasisi (1948-1973)

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Özet:

Arap- İsrail çatışmasında arabuluculuk yapmak ve bu anlaşmazlığa bir son vermek için 1950lerin başlarından itibaren amerikan çabası etkin bir mekanizma olmaktadır. 1952de tanınmış afro-amerikalı diplomat Bay Ralphe Bunche İsrail ile çeşitli Arap komşuları arasında ateşkes anlaşmalarının güvenliğini sağlamayı başarabildi. Henry Kissenger`in 1970lerin başlarında ABD dışişleri bakanı olarak ortaya çıkışı, Amerika`nın Orta Doğudaki çatışma arabuluculuğu çabalarını dünya sahnesine fırlattı. Kissenger, Arap-İsrail çatışması yönetiminin ve aynı zamanda gelecek herhangi barış çözümünün yalnızca ABD arabuluculuğu prizmasında sonuçlandırılması gerektiğini belirten Amerikan dış politika doktrinini oluşturdu. Amerika kaynaklı barış çabaları 1991 Körfez Savaşından sonra tekrar hız kazandı. Şimdiye kadar ki ilk çok taraflı Arap İsrail barış konferansı Madrid, İspanya`da toplantıya çağırıldı. Bu, şuanda feshedilmiş Oslo sürecine bir öncü olarak rol oynadı. Bu makale Filistin İsrail çatışmasında ilk arabuluculuk girişimlerinin bazı detaylarını, özellikle Kissenger`in 1970ler boyunca olan çabalarını kapsamaya çalışacak.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Arap İsrail Çatışması, Amerikan Arabuluculuğu, Soğuk Savaş Diplomasisi, Henry Kissinger, Camp David Anlaşması.*

Abstract

American efforts at mediating an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict have been in active gear since the early 1950s. In 1952, the celebrated African American diplomat Ralphe Bunche managed to secure armistice agreements between Israel and various neighbouring Arab states. Henry Kissinger`s emergence as U.S. Secretary of State in the early 1970s catapulted American conflict mediatory efforts in the Middle East onto the world stage. Kissinger established the American foreign policy doctrine that Arab-Israeli conflict-management as well any future peace settlement should be concluded through the prism of U.S. mediation alone. American-led peace efforts again gathered momentum after the 1991 Gulf War. The first ever multilateral Arab-Israeli Peace Conference was convened in Madrid, Spain. This acted as a precursor to the now defunct Oslo process. This article will seek to cover in some detail early attempts at mediating the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, particularly Kissinger`s efforts during the 1970s.

Keywords: *Arab-Israeli conflict, American mediation, Cold War diplomacy, Henry Kissinger, Camp David Accords.*

Diplomacy and Negotiation Defined: the American Perspective

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Negotiation is the central function of diplomacy, and diplomacy the carrying out of foreign policy. Diplomacy and Negotiation are thus interrelated terms that describe one of the primary functions of the nation-state; namely to carry out the business of state in international relations. Again, negotiation is specifically the bargaining process used in adjusting differences within international relations, and so it is the most important task of diplomacy.

A couple of interesting definitions of the terms diplomacy and negotiation are given below:

Diplomacy is the management of international relations by negotiations; the method by which these relations are adjusted and managed by ambassadors and envoys; the business or art of the diplomatist.¹

Negotiation may be called the process of combining divergent viewpoints to reach a common agreement.²

A negotiation is a cunning endeavor to obtain by peaceful maneuver and the chicanery of cabinets those advantages which a nation would otherwise have wrested by force of arms, in the same manner as a conscientious highwayman reforms and becomes a quiet and praiseworthy citizen, contenting himself with cheating his neighbour out of that property he would have formerly seized with open violence.³

Washington Irving, noted early American writer and diplomat, declared that,

Negotiation is an enduring art form. Its essence is artifice, the creation of expedients through the application of human ingenuity. The synonyms of the word "art" are qualities we have long since come to admire in the ablest of negotiators: skill, cunning and craft. We expect negotiators to be accomplished manipulators of other people, and we applaud this aspect of their art when we observe it in uncommon degree. Negotiation is considered to be the management of people through guile, and we recognize guile as the trademark of the profession.⁴

Diplomacy is usually defined as the practice of carrying out of a nation's foreign policy by negotiation with other nations. This definition correctly stresses that diplomacy is an instrument and not policy itself; the procedures of foreign policy and not the substance.⁵

To quote Zartman again,

¹ Definition by the Oxford English Dictionary, quoted by Sir Harold Nicolson, 1939.

² I. William Zartman, 1974.

³ Gerald L. Steibel, *How can we negotiate with the Communists?* (New York, National Strategy Information Center Inc., 1972), 1. Quoted in Joseph G. Whelan, *Soviet Diplomacy and Negotiating Behaviour: the Emerging New Context for U.S. Diplomacy*, (Colorado, West View Press, 1983), 4.

⁴ Gilbert R. Winham, 'Negotiation as a Management Process,' *World Politics*, 30(2) (1977), 87.

⁵ Ivo D. Duchacek, *Conflict and Cooperation among Nations*, (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939), 15. Quoted in Whelan, *Soviet Diplomacy and Negotiations Behaviour*, 4.

Negotiation may be called the process of combining divergent viewpoints to reach a common agreement.⁶ 'Negotiation is a process in which explicit proposals are put forward ostensibly for the purpose of reaching agreement on exchange or in the realization of a common interest where conflicting interests are present.'⁷

Another American authority on international politics, Charles Burton Marshall, stressed the importance of 'terms' in negotiation. Thus, for him 'negotiation is the process of talking about terms, the achievement of terms, and the terms.'⁸

In the end, diplomacy can be defined as the management of international relations by negotiation. Negotiation is diplomacy's principle instrument, a continuing bargaining process for adjusting conflicting interests in order to reach a common agreement. The aim of both is to seek solutions, adjust differences, and establish a harmony of interests among conflicting parties, in short, to create international stability. This would, by and large, define the American perception of negotiation.

The Question of Palestine: The Standpoint of the United Nations

When the Second World War ended, Palestine was a territory administered by the United Kingdom under a mandate from the League of Nations. Faced with escalating violence resulting from increasing Jewish immigration to Palestine and strong Arab opposition to such immigration, the United Kingdom brought the matter before the United Nations in 1947. The General Assembly then established a committee of 11 states to investigate all matters relating to the question of Palestine and to recommend solutions. The majority on the committee recommended that Palestine be partitioned into an Arab state and a Jewish state, with a special international status for Jerusalem. A minority of three favoured a federated state comprising Arab and Jewish components, with Jerusalem as its capital. After intense debate, the Palestine Partition plan as given by UNGA Resolution 181 (II) was approved on 29 November 1947 with 33 votes in favour, 13 votes against and 10 abstentions. Significantly both the U.S.A and the U.S.S.R supported the partition resolution while the mandatory power UK abstained from voting.⁹ The Jewish leadership accepted the Assembly's resolution while the Arabs rejected it, stating their opposition to any scheme which would dissect, segregate or partition their land and give preferential treatment to a minority. Fighting intensified between Arab and Jewish communities in Palestine.¹⁰

In May 1948, the UK gave up its mandate over Palestine and the Jews promptly proclaimed their state of Israel in the territory identified under the partition plan as belonging to them. The Arabs contested this and full scale fighting broke out as neighbouring Arab states sent their armies into Palestine. Fighting continued despite the efforts of a UN mediator. By the time a truce called for by the Security Council came into force in July 1948, Israel

⁶ Zartman, *Political Analysis of Negotiation*, 386. Quoted in Whelan, 5.

⁷ Fred Charles Ikle, *How Nations Negotiate*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 3-4.

⁸ Charles Burton Marshall, 'The Problem of Incompatible Purposes.' In Duchacek, *Conflict and Cooperation among Nations*, 519. Quoted in Whelan, 5.

⁹ <http://www.rte.ie/news/mideast/resolutions.html>

¹⁰ United Nations, *For the Rights of the Palestinians-The Work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People* (New York: United Nations Department of Public Information, DPI/1304-98093-April 1997), 7.

controlled much of the territory allotted to the proposed Arab state. Jordan and Egypt respectively administered the remaining portions of the West Bank and Gaza strip. In December 1948, the Assembly declared that refugees must be permitted to return to their homes and live in peace with their neighbours, and that those choosing not to return should be compensated. Under Resolution 194 (III), the Assembly also called for the demilitarization and internationalization of Jerusalem. The resolution was never implemented, but its provisions on the special status of Jerusalem and the rights of Palestinian refugees to return have been reasserted by the Assembly almost every year since 1948.

Israel was admitted into the United Nations in May 1949. Between February and July of that year, under the auspices of the UN, armistice agreements were signed between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Notably the agreements accepted establishment of the armistice as an indispensable step towards the restoration of peace in Palestine. The conflictual situation in Palestine/Israel continued over the next three decades, erupting into open hostilities in 1956, 1967 and in 1973. A turning point in Middle Eastern affairs was reached with the Six Day war of 1967 between Israel and Egypt, Jordan and Syria. By the time a ceasefire took effect, Israel had occupied Egyptian Sinai, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and part of the Syrian Golan Heights. The Security Council, in Resolution 237 (1967), called upon Israel to ensure the safety and welfare of inhabitants where military operations had taken place and to facilitate the return of displaced persons. The warring parties were asked to abide scrupulously by the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilian persons in times of war.¹¹

The Security Council again adopted Resolution 242 (1967), laying down the principles for a peaceful settlement in the Middle East. It stipulated that just and lasting peace in the region should include the application of two principles:

1. Withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict, and
2. Recognition of every state in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries.

When another Arab-Israeli war broke out in October 1973, the council unanimously adopted Resolution 338 (1973), calling for an immediate truce and asking the parties to start the implementation of Resolution 242 (1967) "in all its parts." immediately after the ceasefire. Following the 1967 war, the question of Palestine began to be understood in a broader political context than as a matter which related only to refugees. In November 1974, the General Assembly reaffirmed the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination without external interference, the right of national independence and sovereignty, and the right to return to their homes and property. This Resolution 3236 (XXIX) has been reaffirmed by the Assembly every year since. It was also in 1974 that the Palestine Liberation Organization, the primary Arab movement for the liberation of Palestine, was invited by the Assembly to participate as an observer in its proceedings. The item entitled "The Question of Palestine" has remained on the Assembly's annual agenda since 1974.¹²

American Perspectives On Zionism And The Palestine Question. Early History:

¹¹ Ibid, 8

¹² Ibid, 9

American involvement in Palestine dates back to 1832 when the first American consular agent in Jerusalem was appointed. The end of the nineteenth century saw Palestine emerge as an issue engaging the attention of world Jewry and also the State Department (Foreign ministry) of the United States. This was as a result of the establishment of a new political creed called Zionism in 1897 at Basle, Switzerland. The World Jewish Conference comprising 104 delegates from 15 countries agreed that "Zionism aims at the creation of a home for the Jewish people in Palestine to be secured by public law" and accordingly they would encourage immigration to Palestine.¹³ At that time, Arabs represented 95 percent of Palestine's roughly half a million people and they owned 99 percent of the land.¹⁴ The first Zionist Federation was established New York in 1897. Zionism openly rejected assimilation and the whole melting pot metaphor dear to American hearts. Theodore Herzl widely regarded as the founder of the Zionist idea stated in his seminal pamphlet 'Der Judenstaat,'

We have sincerely tried everywhere to merge with the national communities in which we live, seeking only to preserve the faith of our fathers. It is not permitted us.¹⁵

The fundamental rationale of Zionism was a profound despair that anti-Semitism could not be eradicated as long as Jews lived among Gentiles (non-Jews). It was out of this dark vision that grew the belief that the only hope for the survival of the Jews lay in the founding of their own state. The State Department at first dismissed Zionism as merely a minority political group advocating an issue that was essentially an internal Jewish affair. But as Zionism increased in influence in Europe in the first decade of the twentieth century, it also began attracting a select group new converts in the United States. By the start of World War I, the American Zionists had in their ranks influential men like lawyers, professors and businessmen. The American State Department established a Near East Division only in 1909. This new division covered an enormous region that included Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Balkans and the Turkish Ottoman Empire along with all the outlying areas that stretched from Persia to Abyssinia (Ethiopia). Rising Zionist demands for support of a Jewish nation were increasingly resented along U.S. diplomats, who saw such requests "as an illustration of the purely Hebraic and un-American purposes for which our Jewish community seek to use this government" to quote a U.S. diplomat of that period.¹⁶

The First World War and After

The First World War and subsequent developments changed the states of the Middle East profoundly. During the war an important factor was Turkey's involvement as an ally of Germany, Austria and Bulgaria against the allied powers such as Russia, Britain, France and other nations. Palestine, because of its strategic location, assumed great importance in the allied war strategy, especially for Great Britain whose predominant concern was the security of

¹³ Howard M. Sachar, *A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to our Time* (Tel Aviv: Steimatzky's Agency Ltd., 1976), 44-46. Quoted in Donald Neff, *Fallen Pillars: U.S. Policy towards Palestine and Israel since 1945*, (Washington D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1995), 7.

¹⁴ Walid Khalidi (ed.) *From Haven to Conquest: Readings in Zionism and the Palestine Problem until 1948* (Washington D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1987), 12. In Neff, *Fallen Pillars*, 7

¹⁵ Sachar, 40. In Neff, 7

¹⁶ Sachar, 40. In Neff, 8

the Suez Canal.¹⁷ The British instigated the Arabs of the Ottoman Empire to revolt against the Turks thereby compelling the British and French to invade and occupy Syria, Palestine and Iraq. In 1917, the British Government issued the Balfour Declaration, stating that it viewed ‘with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish peoples.’¹⁸ Again in 1922, the League of Nations under British influence recognized ‘the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine’ and ‘the grounds for reconstituting their national home in that country.’¹⁹

In contrast, the U.S. State Department defined its chief function as the protection and promotion of American interests abroad, not in endorsing or encouraging the efforts of a small group of Americans to help found another nation in a foreign land. It was against U.S. policy to interfere in another country without any obvious American interests at stake and with a good chance of worsening relations. U.S.-Ottoman relations were never quite easy and Zionist agitation against Ottoman rule in Palestine raised suspicions in Istanbul about broader U.S. policies and goals in the region. At the Paris Peace Conference that convened in 1919, one of the most contentious issues was the future of the Fertile Crescent in general and Palestine in particular. The first action taken by the peace conference with regard to Palestine was to invoke Article 22 of the Covenant of the League calling for the mandate system.

Both the Arabs and the Zionists sent their respective delegations to the conference to plead for their cause before the Supreme Council. The Zionist delegation demanded before the conference the inclusion of the Balfour Declaration in the peace treaty and the British being given the mandate over Palestine instead of making it an independent Arab state. The Arab delegation led by Emir Feisal (son of Sharif Hussein of Mecca and accompanied and helped by T.E. Lawrence of Arabia) demanded Arab independence as promised by the British during the course of the war. Feisal also urged that a Commission of Inquiry be sent to Syria and Palestine to know the wishes of the people. This proposal was supported by President Wilson. The Supreme Council assigned the mandate for Palestine (including Transjordan that was later formed into the separate state of Jordan) to Great Britain on 25 April 1920. The final draft on the terms of the mandate was concluded by the League council on 22 July 1922.²⁰ This decision was a victory for the Zionists and their compulsive diplomacy to keep the region open to Jewish settlement.

The last action America took with regard to the Palestine question, before returning to its traditional isolationist policy that continued until the Second World War, was to sign the Palestine Mandate Treaty (Anglo-American Convention) with Great Britain on 3 December 1924 whereby it recognized the legality of the British Mandate over Palestine. So from then until 1939, Britain ruled Palestine on its own. As stated earlier, the League mandate not only recognized the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine but also make it the responsibility of the mandatory power “for placing the country under such political, administrative of a Jewish National Home” [Article 2]. It also provided for the recognition of

¹⁷ Frank E. Manuel, *The Realities of American-Palestine Relations* (Washington, D.C: Public Affairs Press, 1949), 113. In Neff, 9

¹⁸ Barny Tarner, ed., *The Statesmen Year book 2000* (London: Macmillan Reference Limited, 2000), 915

¹⁹ Europa Publications 2001, *The Middle East and North Africa 2002* 48th ed. (London, Unwin Brothers Limited, 2001), 62-65.

²⁰ *Great Britain and Palestine, 1915–1945* (London: Royal Institute of international Affairs (RIIA) 1946), 6. In Bansidhar Pradhan, *From Confrontation to Hostile Intimacy: PLO and the U.S.*, (New Delhi: Seh yog Prakashan, 1994), 12.

the Zionist Jewish Agency “as a public body” to advise and cooperate “with the Administration of Palestine in such economic, social and other matters as may affect the establishment of the Jewish National Home”[Article 4].

Again the mandatory power was ordered to “facilitate Jewish immigration under suitable conditions” [Article 6].²¹ So Britain assumed the mandate over Palestine pending the establishment there of such a national home. It was in accordance with this mandate that Jewish settlers were admitted to Palestine under the direction of Zionist settlement agencies. Naturally the native Palestinian Arabs resented this influx and there were anti-Zionists riots in 1921 and 1929. During the period 1938-1939, a major Arab rebellion against the policies of the mandatory power viz-a-viz the Zionists was brutally suppressed by them.

The Second World War and After

During World War II, Palestine remained by and large peaceful. The moderate Jewish community supported the British. In September 1944, a Jewish Brigade attached to the British 8th Army was created. A total of 27,000 Jews enlisted in the British forces to fight against Rommel's Africa Korps in the North African desert.²² Equally important was the support won by the Zionists in the United States, to which they had shifted their major political effort after 1939. In May 1942, at a Zionist conference held at the Biltmore Hotel in New York City, David Ben-Gurion, the future prime minister of Israel, gained support for a program demanding unrestricted immigration and a Jewish army and the establishment of Palestine as a Jewish Commonwealth. Known as the Biltmore Programme, two of the eight resolutions adopted deserve special mention. Resolution 6 called for the fulfillment of the original purpose of the Balfour Declaration and the mandate which “recognizing the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine was to afford them the opportunity, as stated by President Wilson, to found there a Jewish Commonwealth.” Resolution 8 pleaded that:

The gates of Palestine be opened, that the Jewish agency be vested with control of immigration into Palestine ... and that Palestine be established as a Jewish commonwealth integrated in the structure of the new democratic world. Then only then will the age-old wrong to the Jewish people be righted.²³

An increasing number of U.S. Congressmen and politicians started making pro-Zionist statements. In August 1945, President Harry S. Truman requested Clement Attlee, the British Prime minister, to facilitate the immediate admission of 100,000 Jews into Palestine, and in December the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives asked for unrestricted Jewish immigration to the limit of the economic absorptive capacity of Palestine. All these measures contributed to the internationalization of the question of Palestine, already under way with the involvement of the Arab states since the 1930s. The Arabs of Palestine had remained largely neutral during the war, although some supported the Axis powers while others enlisted in the British forces. After the war, the neighbouring Arab countries began to take a more direct interest in Palestine. In March 1945, the covenant of the League of Arab States was drawn up with an annex emphasizing the Arab character Palestine. Again in December, the Arab League

²¹ Ibid, 12

²² Encyclopedia Britannica (15th Ed.), Macropaedia, Vol. 25, 420

²³ Pradhan, 40.

declared a boycott of Zionist goods. The pattern of the post-World War II struggle for Palestine was slowly emerging.

The Proposal for Partition and After

In November 1947, the UNGA passed a resolution calling for the establishment of a Jewish and an Arab state in Palestine. Sometime after the UN resolution, communal fighting broke out in Palestine. The Zionists took all possible measures to increase their strength and to bring in new immigrants. In December 1947, the Arab League pledged its support to the Palestinian Arabs and organized a force of 3000 volunteers. Civil war spread and external intervention increased as the dismantling of the British administration progressed. By mid-January 1948, some 2000 casualties had resulted from the fighting. During this conflict, American policy in Washington and New York underwent changes that often alarmed the Zionist leadership and influenced their conduct of military operations in Palestine. At first, both the State Department and President Truman were of the view that the type of partition approved by the UNGA as per the recommendations of UNSCOP (United Nations Special Commission on Palestine) would be impossible to impose except by military force. The American leadership was very much afraid that the Soviet Union would seek to influence such a situation. Cold war calculations were already being imposed on every possible international affair. Yet the U.S. would not and could not commit its own troops to Palestine, nor would the British do anything, but continue with their plans for withdrawal. The only solution seemed to lie in the UN Security Council and the means it might utilize for implementing the partition vote. In March, the UNSCOP reported its inability to implement partition because of Arab resistance and the attitude of the British administration. The U.S. immediately called for the suspension of UNSCOP. On March 30, 1948, they appealed for declaration of a truce and the further consideration of the problem by the General Assembly.²⁴

U.S. Recognition of Israel

The Zionists insisted that partition was binding on both parties to the dispute. As the date for the British withdrawal approached, they were busy in preparing for the proclamation of their own independent state. The White House, on the other hand was confronting the issue of providing recognition to the emerging Jewish state. On May 14, the last British High Commissioner, General Sir Alan Cunningham, left Palestine. On the same day, the State of Israel was proclaimed. The Truman administration decided to immediately extend 'de facto' recognition to the provisional government of Israel. When it became clear that the new state had secured her future borders, 'de jure' recognition was given on 31 January 1949.²⁵

The U.S. recognition of Israel just eleven minutes after the latter's formation was quite an unprecedented step. It was felt to be quite "inconsistent with accepted principles of diplomacy."²⁶ There had been a divergence of opinion between the White House and the State Department on this issue. Truman's hasty and enthusiastic recognition of Israel was guided more by domestic political considerations (gaining a strong political base in the American Jewish community), than by accepted principles of diplomacy and foreign policy calculations. It was also a reflection of the success of the Zionist lobby in influencing American decision-making with regard to Palestine. Already in 1946, U.S. President Harry S. Truman had made a

²⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica, 421.

²⁵ Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs: Years of Trial and Hope*, Vol. 2 (New York: New World Library, 1965), 194.

²⁶ Richard P. Stevens, *American Zionism and U.S. Foreign Policy 1942-1947* (Beirut: 1970), 1-2. In Pradhan, 49

declaration where he stated that, "... the creation of a viable Jewish state ...in an adequate area of Palestine instead of in the whole of Palestine (would be acceptable)."²⁷ This in turn had a definite bearing on future American policy towards Israel, first in the Arab-Israeli conflict and later in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It also affected the Palestinian Liberation Organization's perception of the U.S. for years to come.²⁸

The *raison d'être* of American interactions with Israel can be traced back to some aspects of the collective American psyche in the immediate wake of World War II.

1. **Guilt:** about the Nazi holocaust that nearly exterminated European Jewry while America and the western nations pretended that they did not know anything about it.
2. **Humanitarian impulse:** the sense of guilt helped to ignite a general American humanitarian impulse towards arranging the resettlement of thousands of refugees displaced from the concentration camps of central Europe. This impulse did not however extend towards settling the refugees in the U.S. A second option such as Palestine was preferred by the American establishment and supported by the people.
3. **Duties:** Jewish donors and voters were very influential in American political life, particularly in the Democratic Party. Given the huge Jewish community in the U.S., American interest in Palestine was natural. American Zionist committees were among the largest benefactors of Jewish settlement projects in the 'promised land.' Allied to these were the activities of Zionist lobbies in Washington such as the America-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) which were constantly pressuring Congress and the Administration to be generous towards Israel. It was, in fact, during the administrations of F.D. Roosevelt and Harry. S. Truman that Zionist leaders were able to penetrate key White House department and sensitize the America ruling elite about the plight of Holocaust survivors.
4. **Idealism:** admiration for the founding of a new democratic state which proclaimed a Declaration of Independence complete with phrases drawn from that of the United States.
5. **Religion:** A common Judeo - Christian bible and heritage fired the enthusiasm of fundamentalist American Christians for this return to the holy land by an ancient nation of wanderers.
6. **Ignorance:** Americans have generally been ignorant of the region and its original inhabitants, in particular the Arabs, a phenomenon that has continued for the last 50 years and is now so very evident in the post-September 11, 2001 scenario.
7. **Containment of Communism [Strategic Relationship]:** The so-called 'strategic relationship' between Israel and the U.S. did not emerge as an openly declared policy statement till the 1970s and the Nixon era. Even then, it was only tacitly acknowledged for many years, developing slowly into today's virtual military alliance.²⁹ It was in October 1947 that American and British officials first met at the Pentagon to sketch out a geopolitical blueprint for the Middle East in light of the new

²⁷ President Harry S. Truman, 1946.

²⁸ Pradhan, 49.

²⁹ Samuel W. Lewis, 'The United States and Israel: Evolution of an Unwritten Alliance,' *The Middle East Journal*, 53(3) (1999), 365

threats of Soviet expansionism and communist ideology. The 'reverse Monroe doctrine' of the interwar period had been finally abandoned. Though Britain still held the upper hand in the Middle East, U.S. Secretary of State George C. Marshall was already contemplating an eventual American leadership role in the region. It was for such an eventuality that support for the new state of Israel was deemed important. But in the 1940s and 1950s, the Israel-angle was not being projected by the State Department.³⁰

At the geostrategic level, the U.S. sought to contain the Soviets in the Middle East through military alliances, similar to NATO in Europe. This approach failed mainly due to American insensitivities about the area. Even the Baghdad pact (1955) generated more animosity than security in the Arab world. Looser political/economic umbrella projects like the Eisenhower Doctrine (1957) were no more successful. By securing arms deals with countries like Syria and Egypt, the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact nations were able to bypass American defenses in the region. For most Arab governments, the real threat was Israel and not the Soviet Union. And it was here that American diplomacy viz a' viz the Arabs always tended to malfunction. The rise of Arab nationalism under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser further complicated affairs for the Americans. Astute U.S. field diplomacy and the respected non-governmental American presence in the region hoped to lessen the State Department's confrontation with Arab Nationalism. The Palestine problem lay at the heart of the pan-Arab cause, and American support for Israel was too big to allow for a compromise solution, a 'modus vivendi.' American diplomats always tried to avoid a head-on collision with the nationalist forces. The U.S. tried to deal with the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. On the other hand, the U.S. actively worked to suppress Iranian nationalism and also opposed the nationalist upheavals in Syria and Iraq. Even though Communism and Arab Nationalism did not mix well together, Soviet patronage enabled the nationalist anti-Israel camp to pose a serious challenge to U.S. interests in the region.³¹

8. **Oil:** was another major reason for American interest in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia alone possessed some 25% of the world's known petroleum reserves. More may be waiting to be discovered. Combine this with the oil wealth of Kuwait, Iraq, the Gulf Emirates, Iran etc, and a formidable source of carbon energy comes into the picture. Oil did not acquire a strategic dimension until World War II. By then the Americans had started to see Middle East oil as a cheap supplement to their own declining reserves. Middle East oil became essential for the Western world's post-World War II economic development. Oil politics played a major role in post-war U.S. strategy in the region.³² The Americans were determined to exclude the Soviets from Gulf oil. They were also dead against the nationalization of western oil companies operating in

³⁰ Michael C. Hudson, 'To play the Hegemon: Fifty years of U.S. policy towards the Middle East,' *The Middle East Journal*, 50(3) (1996), 330.

³¹ Ibid, 332.

³² Bruce R. Kuniholm, 'Retrospect and Prospects: Forty years of U.S. Middle East Policy,' *The Middle East Journal*, 41(1) (1987), 11.

the region. This would result in the economics of price and production going out of their hands.³³

So, the Americans and West Europeans always played their hand in such a manner as to maintain their influence in the region. This frequently included propping up authoritarian regimes (like the Shah of Iran) and despotic rulers (like Saddam Hussein before the Gulf war). The Middle East was a battlefield for Cold War forces. Both sides pumped an incredible amount of arms into the region. This resulted in many military conflicts that caused terrible sufferings to hundreds of thousands of civilians. The Palestinian struggle for self determination can only be seen in this context. It was essentially a victim of cold war machinations.

The Suez War of 1956

Egyptian President Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal prompted a chain of events that eventually led to the joint Israeli- French-British attack on Egypt. Due to various reasons, all stemming from a violent hatred of Nasser and his policies, each of these powers were waiting for an excuse to attack Egypt. The Israeli's under David Ben-Gurion held Nasser to be their worst enemy, not the least because of his demagogic popularity with the Arab masses and his equally scathing verbal attacks on Israel. The French held Nasser responsible for their Algerian problems. The British felt that his calls for Arab nationalism and unity were undermining their traditional power base in the Middle East. All these factors come to a head in July 1956 when Nasser nationalized the Anglo-French owned Suez Canal thereby breaking Egypt's last colonial bondage. The British and French immediately decided to attack Egypt and depose Nasser if possible. Israel on invitation was fully prepared to join them. The war started with an Israeli invasion of Gaza and the Sinai on 29 October 1956. War planning and co-ordination between the three allies called for a joint Anglo-French ultimatum to both on 31 October to cease fire and withdraw ten miles from the bank of the canal. This call would, in effect give the Israelis the right to continue their attack until they reached that boundary, while the Egyptians would withdraw all their forces from the Sinai. Nasser would naturally not agree to the ceasefire and both the British and French could then blame him for continuing hostilities and thus justify their attack on him.³⁴

America Against the Suez War

The Israeli forces occupied Sinai and the Gaza strip as scheduled. Nasser's refusal of the Anglo-French ultimatum on the 31st resulted in British aircraft from Cyprus attacking Egyptian airfields. This in turn caused Nasser to withdraw forces from the Sinai to defend mainland Egypt. The Egyptian withdrawal allowed the Israelis to occupy almost the whole Peninsula by November. A combined Anglo-French invasion of Port Said and Alexandria took place on November 6. The Americans had been totally against this operation from the very beginning. They preferred to deal with Nasser through peaceful means. Both President Eisenhower and his Secretary of State Dulles were indirectly responsible for the Egyptian nationalization of the Suez when they had earlier refused Nasser any financial help from the West in the construction of the Aswan High Dam. Both were now infuriated by what they considered the appalling deception and stupidity of their allies. Although they disliked Nasser, they did not believe that armed force would resolve the matter. The situation was all the more

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Joseph S. Nye, *Understanding International Conflicts: An Introduction to Theory and History* 3rd ed.(New York, Longman, 1999), 158.

serious because the rebellion in Hungary had taken place around the same time as the Suez crisis. Washington now found itself on-the defensive viz-a-viz the Soviets who soon invaded Hungary and crushed the uprising. Dulles, the great purist and anti-Communist moralist found himself unable to use the Hungarian crisis to prove the immorality of Communism and the need for all nations to rely on the West.³⁵ America too found itself appealing alongside the Soviet Union to the warring parties to end the crisis. British and French forces were forced to withdraw from Port Said by 23 December. The Israelis however were determined to remain in the Gaza Strip and at Sharm el-Sheikh. Pressure from the U.S. finally forced them to withdraw but only on the condition that a UN force known as the United Nations Emergency Forces (UNEF) patrol the land border between Israel and the Gaza strip as well as the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh. This was ostensibly to prevent fidayeen attacks from these regions into Israel. Whereas for the British and French, Suez was an unmitigated disaster, the Israelis considered it to be a major success. They had achieved a significant military victory with relatively few casualties. They were able to free Israeli shipping from the blockade imposed by the Egyptians in the Red Sea. Finally, they secured for the next ten years a de-facto peace along the Israeli-Egyptian frontier which remained relatively quiet and patrolled by UN forces.

Nasser also emerged a victor despite the military defeat he had suffered against obviously unassailable odds. Israel aligning with France and Britain to attack Egypt was again proof to the Arab world of the continuing Western collusion to try and impose outside control on developments within the Arab world. Nasser's defiance of the West during the Suez crisis only increased his hero status in the Arab world. The Suez War increased U.S. influence in the Middle East. America now embarked on a period of active intervention in Arab regional politics that in the long run brought it closer to Israel.³⁶

Rise of Palestinian Nationalism

After the 1947-48 war, the Palestinian people become refugees in their own home land. Over 75% of them had to leave their homes and flee. They went to all the neighbouring Arab countries and also to the Egyptian-controlled enclave of Gaza and the Jordanian West Bank. Here these people were herded into squalid refugee camps that soon became more like concentration camps for the displaced people. The host States frequently placed these unwelcome guests under all sorts of inhuman restrictions. Many were even forbidden from leaving the camps. Political activity was also strictly prohibited. The refugees themselves trusted in Arab Nationalism and in the ability of the Arab states to eventually defeat Israel and regain Palestine for them. Thus it was only after both the 1956 and the 1967 Arab-Israeli wars resulted in bitter defeat for the Arabs that the Palestinian people decided to take the full responsibility for struggle against Israel onto their own shoulders. The Algerian revolutionary struggle that culminated in victory for the revolutionary forces, despite their defeat on the battlefield against the colonial French forces, was an eye-opener for the Palestinians. It revealed that an armed struggle, whatever the cost, would be ultimately successful even in the face of overwhelming odds. In this context, it might be noted that it was Nasser's Egypt that gave a helping hand to Palestinian nationalism when they conspired in the setting up of an organization known as the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) in 1964 with Ahmed al-Shukairy as its first chairman. The PLO was meant to be an outlet for the legitimate political

³⁵ Charles P. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 2nd ed. (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1921), 172.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 174.

aspirations of the Palestinian people, especially in the face of Western apathy and disinterest in their fate.

American Attitudes Towards The PLO Until The 1970s

In the early years of the formation of Israel, the Americans seemed quite satisfied to leave the Palestinian refugees to the care of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the official UN body charged with looking after those people who had fled Palestine following the 1948 war. This body had been created with full U.S. support. The Americans however did very little in the way of putting pressure on Israel to accept the refugees back. In this case, they fully supported the argument of the Israelis that to do so would be to negate the Jewish character of the State of Israel. After the formation of Israel, the U.S. deliberately abandoned the UN partition resolution on Palestine. The creation of a Palestinian state was now out of the question, not the least because no Arab state (Jordan was violently opposed to such a state for historical reasons) was willing to support the idea of two states, Jewish and Arab, existing side by side. Moreover, American officials established a linkage between the refugee problem and the dispute between Israel and the Arab states. Thus former Under-Secretary of State, Walter Bedell-Smith stated very clearly in 1953:

The refugee problem is the principal unresolved issue between Israel and the Arabs; outstanding issues are generally listed as compensation to the refugees, repatriation of the refugees, adjustment of boundaries, and the status of Jerusalem and the Holy places. None of the issues can be separated from the refugee problem.³⁷

This American approach was based upon the premise that solving the refugee problem would automatically lead to a solution of all the other issues, thereby bringing about a final settlement. This approach continued till 1967. At first, the Americans did not take the creation of the various Palestinian organizations seriously. They were just seen as isolated terrorist organizations. In this context, the U.S. supported Israel's right of retaliation against these groups, but was frequently forced to protest the massive scale of revenge. In 1966, the U.S. Congress passed a resolution after PLO Chairman Ahmad Shukairy's disclosure that Palestinian commandos were being trained by the People's Republic of China. The passing of the PLO leadership into the hands of the commando groups and their spectacular operations against Israel and other targets, compelled the Americans to take note of the existence of the Palestinian resistance movement. Naturally the view they took of this movement was a strongly pro-Israeli one. The PLO was perceived as a potential threat to vital American interests in the area, representing the faces of radicalism and anti-Westernism. It was definitely viewed as a terrorist organization with links to international terrorist networks.³⁸

The guerrilla organizations, on the other hand, rejected any political settlement that did not include the total liberation of historic Palestine and the return of refugees to their homes. PLO spokesmen always emphasized that their war was against the Zionist entity that was the state of Israel, and not against the Jews. The Charter of the PLO stated the aim of the organization in establishing a secular non-sectarian state in Palestine where Jew, Christian and Muslim would live in absolute equality. The Zionists and their American backers did not

³⁷ Department of State Bulletin, (Washington, D.C.), 28 (728), June 8, 1956, 823. In Pradhan, 69

³⁸ Pradhan, 70

believe in the practicality of this goal and viewed the PLO as terrorists aiming to eliminate Jews.

The U.S. followed three main policies in dealing with the PLO:

1. Unless the Palestinians renounce terrorism, the Americans would have no direct contact or dialogue with it.
2. Non-recognition of the PLO while simultaneously fully guaranteeing the security and survival of Israel.
3. Full support (both military and political) for pro-U.S. Arab regimes that were threatened by militant Palestinian movements within their borders.³⁹ U.S. support for Jordan during the black September crisis was on the basis of this strategy.

These policies lasted till the early 1970s. In January 1970, Assistant Secretary of State, Joseph Sisco ordered a “reevaluation of major assumptions about American strategy” in the area because these assumptions had all turned out to be wrong. Some of these assumptions related to the Palestinians. To quote Henry Kissinger:

We had assumed that the Palestinians could be dealt within a settlement purely as a refugee problem. Instead they had become a quasi-independent force with a veto over policy in Jordan, and perhaps in Lebanon.⁴⁰

It was thus clear that the Americans would have to conduct a major reworking of their tactics and strategies viz-a-viz the Palestinian people and their armed groups in the Middle East.

The 1967 War and After

The war of 1967 was to prove as decisive in its consequences as that of 1948- 49. All the land of original mandatory Palestine as well as the Egyptian Sinai peninsula and the Golan Heights of Syria passed into the control of the Israelis. The balance of power in the Middle East tilted firmly in the direction of Israel. The most important outcome of the war as far as the Zionists were concerned was the capture and annexation of the Old City of Jerusalem. A new concept of security took hold in the minds of the Israelis encompassing the whole Levantine area. The new 1948 armistice lines become as obsolete as the old UN partition borders. Again Jerusalem disappeared from the agenda as a negotiable item after the ‘de facto’ annexation of the former Jordanian sector. The problem of the 1948 refugees, whose population had become double due to natural increase, was made more severe due to a fresh exodus from the West Bank.

The humiliating defeat of the combined Arab armies at the hand of the Israelis again exposed the weakness of the Arab world viz-a-viz Israel. The 1967 war was the final blow to Nasser's pan-Arabism. Henceforth, Jordan and Syria were to deal with Israel on their own calculation of interests and issues. The fate of the Palestinians changed radically as a result of the 1967 war. Until 1967, there was only a small marginalized Palestinian minority within the borders of Israel proper. After 1967, over a million Palestinian Arabs found themselves under Israeli control. In the new circumstances, the PLO sensed the possibilities of new forms of action, strategy and tactics. The war resulted in a marked increase in the degree of independence and broad-based popular support that the PLO movement enjoyed. The

³⁹ Ibid, 71.

⁴⁰ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, (Boston: Little Brown, 1979), 573

Palestinian people also come to realize that their fellow Arab nations could and would do very little for their cause. They realized that the fight for their home land would be solely on their own shoulders. Consequently some Arabs concluded that armed struggle in the form of guerrilla warfare and terrorism had become a more plausible course of action.⁴¹

By the mid 1960s the French had started to withdraw finally from Algeria. General de Gaulle therefore decided to end the special relationship that he had fostered with Israel to counter alleged Egyptian Nasserite support of the Algerian revolutionaries. The Germans also were stopping their postwar Holocaust victims' compensatory packages to Israel. The arena was thus becoming clear for a closer U.S.- Israeli relationship. The U.S. drew closer to Israel and began to play a more important role in assisting it. The U.S.-Israeli relationship soon developed into a virtual alliance. Thus the Arab-Israeli problem moved to the center stage in the Middle East policy of the United States. At a strategic level, the decision of the British in 1968 to withdraw from the area east of the Suez by 1971 posed new problems for the U.S.. The Americans were compelled to fill what was perceived as a power vacuum. Thus from 1967 onwards, the U.S. was to take on the mantle of a semi-permanent peace maker, at first under a multilateral UN umbrella in more or less cooperative ventures with the Soviet Union. From the early 1970s, America relied on its own diplomacy viz-a-viz the Middle East with minimal attention to the UN Security Council and the Soviets.⁴²

Importance of UNSC Resolution 242

The October war of 1973 was the fourth war between the Arabs and Israel since 1948. At the end of August 1967, Arab leaders meeting for a summit conference in Khartoum had reiterated their opposition to recognition or direct negotiation with Israel. Naturally lack of negotiations would only lead to war. Israel's Prime Minister Levi Eshkol meanwhile declared that Israel would refuse to withdraw from any of the Arab territories occupied in June, 1967 without negotiations leading to peace treaties with all the parties concerned. Differences between the two parties prevented any of the early attempts by the UN Security Council to agree on a resolution to address the crisis. The Arab world backed by the U.S.S.R. was determined that the UN should demand the withdrawal of Israeli forces from occupied Arab territory.

On the other hand, Israel and the Americans were opposed to draft resolutions that did not provide adequate guarantees of Israeli security. The minimum demands of both sides eventually found expression in UNSC Resolution 242. Adopted unanimously by the Security Council on 22 November 1967, it underlined the 'inadmissibility' of the acquisition of territory by war; and called for a 'just and lasting peace in which every state in the area can live in security' and for a settlement of the 'refugee problem.'⁴³ Resolution 242 also called on Israel to withdraw from territories occupied in the recent conflict, but strategically did not specify the extent of the withdrawal. The ambiguities and omissions in Resolution 242 were to be a major source of conflict in the Arab-Israeli debate for years to come.

⁴¹ Alain Gresh, *The PLO: The Struggle within-Towards an Independent Palestinian State* (London: Zed Books, 1983), 3

⁴² Samuel W. Lewis, 'The United States and Israel: Evolution of a united Alliance,' *The Middle East journal*, 53(3) (1999), 367.

⁴³ Paul Cossali, 'Arab - Israeli relations 1967-2001.' In *Surveys of the world : The Middle East and North Africa 2002* 48th ed. (London: Europe Publication Ltd, 2001), 26

U.S. Position (1967 -1973)

The United States fully backed Israel's stand of no withdrawal without peace agreement' following the 1967 war. However both the Johnson and the later Nixon administrations expected Israel to withdraw from nearly all the lands it occupied in 1967, subject to minor border changes. Nevertheless, the U.S. supported the UN resolution condemning Israel for unilaterally annexing East Jerusalem. After the 1967 war, there was a tremendous outburst of sympathy and support for Israel among the American public. American Jews were totally engaged in a 'Support Israel' campaign, both monetarily and politically. The American government was thus forced to express in public full support for Israel while at the same time privately trying to moderate its position. U.S. diplomatic initiatives undertaken unilaterally (but also in cooperation with the U.S.S.R.), frequently achieved terms that were usually closer to the Arab stand than the Israeli.⁴⁴

In late 1968, Israel presented a nine-point plan for Middle East Peace to the United Nations General Assembly. The Levi Plan as it come to be known (after the then Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol) did not directly offer an Israeli withdrawal, but proposed mutually agreeable 'boundary settlements.' The Arab world made no response to this plan. Arab public opinion had again hardened after the Jerusalem annexation as well as the establishment of the first settlements in the occupied territories (OT) in September 1967. In fact, in July 1969, after continued fighting along both the Suez and Jordan fronts (the so-called War of Attrition), Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser publicly gave up hope of a peaceful settlement and predicted that another war would be necessary to dislodge Israel from the territories occupied in 1967. Attempts by the U.S.A, the U.S.S.R., France and the UK to obtain an agreement from the warring parties on the implementation of Resolution 242 made little progress. In December 1969, the U.S. secretary of state, William Rogers, produced a set of proposals designed to steer a middle course between the two parties. Known as the Rogers Plan, its most important aspect was that it made clear the American stand that there should only be minor adjustments to the pre-June 1967 boundaries. In July 1970, Nasser accepted the Rogers proposals. The Israeli government followed suit a week later. Negotiations between the two parties were to be mediated by the UN through a Special Representative, Norway's Gunnar Jarring. The Jarring talks were suspended after a single meeting following Israeli withdrawal over a trivial military issue.⁴⁵

Diplomatic initiatives between 1967 and 1975 were seriously handicapped by governmental and organizational factionalism among all the parties concerned. Israeli governments were often paralyzed by differences over what territories should be retained and what offered in exchange for peace. Nasser, in turn, attempted to balance his hope for negotiations with his army's desire for another deciding war. At the same time, he had to face increasing domestic unrest over the lost Sinai Peninsula. The PLO opposed all efforts to attain peace, as it feared that its political objectives would be ignored. The Nixon administration's approaches to the Arab-Israeli conflict were severely affected by the rivalry between National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger and the Secretary of State William Rogers. The State Department, headed by Rogers viewed the issue mainly as a regional problem that should be solved through negotiations as soon as possible, along with the Soviet Union, if necessary. Kissinger had another view about the whole process of negotiations. His view was closer to the

⁴⁴ Michael Brecher, *Decision in Israel's Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 444.

⁴⁵ Cossali, 26.

Israelis, in that he was primarily interested in ousting the Soviets from the region before undertaking any such talks. He wanted to establish total American dominance of the negotiating process which would in turn benefit Israel alone.⁴⁶

Regional developments also seemed to be helping Israel, if not in the long run, at least in the short run. In September 1970 (known as Black September in Palestinian Diaspora terminology), civil war broke out in Jordan between the King's forces and the PLO fighters. Jordanian-Palestinian strife served to indirectly confirm Israel's value as an arm of American policy in the region, especially in the context of excluding the Soviets from the area. The Nixon administration took a secret decision that no further efforts would be made to stage Arab- Israeli peace talks until the Egyptians rid themselves of the Soviets and accepted U.S. influence in the region. This policy which had a classic Kissingerian touch (he had become Secretary of State in 1973), remained unofficial U.S. policy until the October 1973 Yom Kippur/Ramadan War. The new Egyptian President, Anwar al-Sadat played along with the U.S. by expelling all the Soviet advisers from his country in July 1972. The outbreak of war changed all Kissinger's plans. He was forced to start talks between Israel and Egypt. These discussions and later negotiations between Israel and Syria led to agreements in 1974-1975 to disengage forces on the Golan Heights and in the Sinai. This also eventually resulted in the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel in 1978.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* 2nd ed. (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1992), 205.

⁴⁷ Ibid

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