



The Arab–Israeli Conflict

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Overview

The term ‘Arab–Israeli conflict’ refers to a condition of belligerency between the Arab states and Israel. The first Arab–Israeli War began immediately after the proclamation of the State of Israel on 14 May 1948, with assaults by Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and elements from the Iraqi and Lebanese armies. Subsequent wars in this conflict included the 1956 Suez crisis, in which Israel, Britain, and France attacked Egypt, the 1967 and 1973 wars, and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. In addition, border tensions and armed clashes between Israel and Arab neighbours were frequent in the early 1950s and in the mid-1960s, the latter contributing to the 1967 war. Two Arab states, Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994), have signed peace treaties with Israel, but tensions remain high because of the Palestinian question and Israeli settlement expansion in the occupied territories in the midst of uncertainty resulting from the Arab Spring—notably the ongoing turmoil in Syria and Iraq. As for the United States, some in the George W. Bush administration saw Saddam Hussein’s overthrow in 2003 as a step towards enabling Israel to evade any peace agreement with the Palestinians and to consolidate its regional hegemony over its Arab neighbours. The efforts of the Obama administration to reverse that approach, and to oversee a Palestinian–Israeli and Arab–Israeli peace, failed as of summer 2015, with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu focusing the narrative instead on Iran’s nuclear development and the Palestinian Authority (PA) turning to the United Nations rather than the US for support.

Introduction

The Arab–Israeli conflict is a direct outgrowth of the Palestinian question, which resulted from the inclusion of the Balfour Declaration (1917) in the mandate for Palestine. This obliged Britain to support Zionist aspirations to create a Jewish state against the wishes of the Palestinian Arab inhabitants. These two conflicts, Arab–Israeli and Palestinian–Israeli, have frequently intersected, with the Palestinian question often serving as a major factor in Arab state rivalries, as well as Arab–Israeli tensions.

Arab–Israeli hostility did not create alignments that paralleled the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. The major dividing lines were among Arab states, which either sided with the US or Britain during the 1950s and 1960s, or pursued a policy of non-alignment. Non-alignment permitted its adherents to deal with the West and the Soviet bloc, but often resulted in major arms deals with the Soviets and their East European satellites. This split frequently coincided with one between states such as Egypt and Syria, which were governed by young, more radical military officers or politicians, and more conservative monarchies with close Western ties, such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Iraq until the 1958 Revolution.

Cold War allegiances saw Jordan and Israel identified with Western powers, whereas Egypt and Syria were often linked to the Soviet Union. With respect to the Arab–Israeli conflict, Jordan, Egypt, and Syria, whatever their mutual animosities, were considered to be aligned against Israel.

A key element in examining the Arab–Israeli conflict is asking what conditions are required to resolve it. Realist theory has assumed a certain uniformity in states' calculations of their own interests based on their judgements of power relative to their rivals. For realists, 'internal, domestic factors, including identity, are relatively marginal in determining state interests' (Telhami and Barnett 2002: 2; Peleg 2004: 101).

This chapter considers the question of identity politics as key to the definition of nationality and whether such a definition corresponds to the basis of the state. Can conflicting visions of what constitutes the identity of the state and its security, based on religion, ethnicity, or language, block efforts for peaceful resolution of differences? To what extent can state actions and evaluations of what constitutes state security or insecurity represent the input of ideological actors whose views may endanger the state, not protect it? Here, constructivism serves as a useful tool of analysis for explaining state actions within a realist framework; state interests are defined according to the ideology of the group or party that rules. Examples of developments addressing the approaches of realism, identity politics, and constructivism include the following, placed under different headings.

Realism

Many proponents of realism assume a common view of state interests by policymakers within that state, including what constitutes the security of the state. Judgements of security reflect the evaluation of power relationships between neighbouring or rival states. The following examples challenge that assumption.

Israel

Major differences emerged in the early 1950s as to what was required for the security of the state. There were two options. First was an 'activist', aggressive policy that assumed that Arabs would seek peace only once they had been crushed militarily, known as the 'iron wall' doctrine. Originally espoused by revisionists, the Labour Zionist leadership centred in the first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, also adopted it. Second was the 'Weizmannist' policy, which did not eschew force, but sought to resolve disputes initially by diplomacy and the mediation of outside agencies if necessary, such as the United Nations. This approach was linked to Moshe Sharett, the first Israeli foreign minister, who succeeded Ben-Gurion briefly as Prime Minister in 1954–55.

Officials loyal to Ben-Gurion activated a spy ring in Egypt in 1954 without informing then Prime Minister Moshe Sharett. Egyptian discovery of the spy ring played a role in Israeli reprisal actions in early 1955 and contributed to the 1956 Suez crisis. In 1982, Ariel Sharon lied to the Israeli cabinet, and possibly to his prime minister, Menachem Begin. He assured them that the planned invasion of Lebanon was a limited one, when he intended to proceed to Beirut, to destroy the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) infrastructure there, and to instigate a war with Syrian forces to oust them from Lebanon.

One of the major arguments for retaining the West Bank is security-based: the territory would form a buffer against any assault from the east. But ideology also plays a role here. The West Bank forms part of ancient Israel, known as Judaea and Samaria. Abandoning this region would violate the Likud party's platform, which insists on its retention. Ideology linked to national identity means that keeping the West Bank is preferable to negotiating peace agreements acceptable to Arab states or to the Palestinians (Podeh 2014).

Egypt

Accounts suggest that Gamal Abd al-Nasser did not control the Egyptian military during the 1967 war. Chief of Staff Abd al-Hakim Amr and Minister of Defence Shams al-Din Badran pursued a more aggressive military posture than Nasser may have intended, creating the opportunity and justification for an Israeli attack. There was no agreement on policy at the outset of the crisis, thereby threatening state security.

United States

During the 1967 Arab–Israeli War, the Lyndon B. Johnson administration made no policy decisions, but pursued suggestions offered by persons close to Israel. In doing so, it abandoned a commitment to the region's territorial integrity made prior to hostilities. Secretary of State Dean Rusk was never informed of decisions or of the White House's expectation that war was imminent (Smith 2012: 165–92).

During the Nixon administration, major differences emerged over the conduct of Middle Eastern policy between Secretary of State William Rogers, and National Defence Secretary Henry Kissinger and President Richard Nixon. Rogers backed UN efforts to induce a cease-fire between Egypt and Israel in 1969–70 as a prelude to peace talks; Israel, encouraged by Kissinger and Nixon, opposed Rogers's efforts. They objected to UN involvement in the

peace process; rather, the US should control the process and exclude its Cold War rival, the Soviet Union. 'Beating' the Soviets counted more than seeking resolution of regional disputes through international cooperation. Rogers and Kissinger ordered their staffs not to talk to their counterparts.

In the build-up to the US attack on Iraq in March 2003, the Pentagon and Vice-President Richard Cheney's office bypassed the State Department and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice in order to present false intelligence to President Bush. This intelligence served as a basis for war despite being repeatedly challenged by CIA analysts. This intelligence was produced in the Office of Special Plans in the Pentagon, headed by Under-Secretary for Defence Douglas Feith, himself of a revisionist Zionist background.

Identity politics: nationalism, religion, and the state

Arab nationalism, State identity, and Islam

The Arab national idea in the twentieth century, defined on the basis of language and culture, sought to unite Arab peoples from Morocco to the Arabian Peninsula in one state. It failed, owing to rivalry for leadership of the movement, especially between Egypt and Syria, which ultimately became a major factor inciting the 1967 war.

The aftermaths of the American invasion of Iraq (2003) and the Arab Spring (2010–12) have witnessed the weakening or fragmentation of states such as Iraq, Syria, and Libya. Major Sunni–Shia divisions in Iraq have spread to Syria where Sunnis seek the overthrow of the Asad regime. The hostilities have drawn in or affected as refugee centres most central Middle East states such as Turkey, Iran, Lebanon, and Arab Gulf countries. Moreover, all are now confronted by the seemingly Wahhabist-inspired violently puritanical 'Islamic State' (IS) Sunni movement based in northern Iraq and Syria. Although a potentially unstable coalition of groups, the IS ideology challenges the bases of Sunni Muslim identity in the midst of the Sunni–Shia rivalry, while appearing to undermine loyalty to either Arab or existing state identities.

At the same time, Saudi Arabia's recent actions suggest that it will opt for dictatorship rather than democratically-elected Muslim governments. The Saudis opposed the ouster of Egypt's Husni Mubarak and the election of Muslim Brotherhood Muhammad al-Mursi as Egypt's president. They then backed Mursi's overthrow by General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi with financial aid. And whereas Mursi sought to reconcile Hamas and Fatah, al-Sisi has joined Israel in blockading Gaza and has declared Hamas a terrorist organization.

Israel: ideology and identity

Factions have always differed on what lands were essential to constitute the State of Israel. Menachem Begin's Herut Party consistently advocated, during the 1950s, an immediate Israeli takeover of the East, as well as the West, banks of Jordan, to fulfil revisionist Zionist expansionist principles. Today, revisionists insist that Israel retain all of the West Bank, as the Likud party platform declares, whereas a majority of Israelis appear to accept, with some territorial adjustments, a return to the pre-1967 war boundaries, granting the Palestinians a state of their own. These conflicting approaches to the identity of Israel directly affect the peace process and also call attention to the question of state security.

Would Israel be more secure with the absorption of the West Bank and its Palestinian Arab population, thus weakening the nature and identity of a Jewish state? Israeli census statistics for 2011 suggest that the Palestinian Arab populations of the West Bank and Gaza, together with the Israeli Arab population, equal the Jewish population of Israel, including Jews in expanded East Jerusalem and the West Bank (Bassock 2011). Or would Israel be more secure within boundaries resembling those of 1967, thus preserving its character as a Jewish state? In both cases, competing considerations of security are bound up with conflicting visions of what borders are required to constitute Israeli identity.

Finally, revisionist Zionist ideology assumes that Israel, as a Jewish state, can never achieve security because of anti-Semitism and Arab hostility unrelated to any actions that Israel might undertake. Identity and insecurity become a 'mutually constitutive process', requiring constant reassurance through affirmation of military might (Weldes et al. 1999: 11; Peleg 2004: 111). By this logic, Arab hostility will be ongoing with or without a peace agreement, meaning that no peace is possible: 'a culture of insecurity feeds on itself as a self-fulfilling prophecy' (Peleg 2004: 106).

A complicating factor is that right-wing Israeli ambitions, whether religious or secular in origin, acquire great support from the worldwide Christian evangelical movement, and especially Christian fundamentalists in the US. These Christian Zionists openly back Israeli retention of the West Bank, fund settlements, and view the ousting of the Palestinians as fulfilling Old Testament prophecy. They are a major factor in current US Middle Eastern policy, with strong representation in Congress, especially among Republicans, and close ties to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) lobby. In short, definitions of what constitutes the legitimate identity of Israel go beyond the views of its citizens to include those of ardent believers of a different religion in another country.

Hamas/Islamic Jihad

Whereas official Palestinian policy recognizes Israel and supports a two-state solution, the major Islamic groups call for the eradication of Israel and the return of all former Palestine to Palestinian rule, preferably under an Islamic government. This definition of a Palestinian state, based on an Islamic identity, clearly conflicts with that offered by the Palestinian Authority. As with Likud in Israel, it establishes competing visions of the ideal state based on differing calculations of identity. The Hamas platform calls for full Muslim-Palestinian control from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River—the mirror image of Likud's platform for Jewish control of the same land.

Clashes of identity at Camp David, 2000: The Temple Mount and the Nakba

Two key issues obstructing Israeli-Palestinian agreement at Camp David were sovereignty/control over the Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif, and the Palestinian right of return to lands from which most had been expelled in 1948. The former issue considers an area deemed sacred to both Jews and Muslims, with each side arguing for inclusion in its territory as basic to its identity. The right of return addresses events crucial to the national narratives of both Israelis and Palestinians. Israeli achievement of independence in 1948 is to them a

triumph to be considered in itself, apart from its impact on others. For Palestinians, Israel's independence was, and is, their catastrophe (*nakba*).

Palestinians argue, and many Israeli analysts agree, that the Palestinians do not demand a literal right of return for all refugees who so wish, but simply Israeli acknowledgement of the principle of such a Palestinian right. This would entail Israeli recognition that Israel's actions in gaining its state created the Palestinian refugee problem—which is doubtful at the present time.

The United States

Key members of the George W. Bush administration had links with the Israeli Likud party and, in 1996, advised newly elected Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to abandon the Oslo peace process in order to secure Israel's control of the West Bank.

They also argued for the overthrow of Iraq's Saddam Hussein as the first step in ensuring Israel's regional hegemony. Douglas Feith co-authored one paper, *Clean Break*, in June 1996 with Richard Perle (1996), and David Wurmser a second, *Coping with Crumbling States: A Western and Israeli Balance of Power Strategy for the Levant* (Wurmser 1996). Feith, as noted, was later given the number three post in the Defense Department and Wurmser became Middle Eastern adviser to Vice President Richard Cheney, stepping down in December 2007. In short, Likud sympathizers held sway over much of Bush's Middle Eastern, and especially Israeli–Palestinian, initiatives to the extent that, for one analyst, Bush 'subcontracted' Palestinian policy to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon during Bush's first term in office (Quandt 2005: 408).

From the creation of Israel to the 1967 war

Britain handed over responsibility for Palestine to the United Nations in February 1947, setting the stage for the General Assembly's partition decision of November. Fighting quickly erupted between Zionist forces and Palestinians. Zionist military superiority enabled Jewish forces to gain control of the territory awarded to them in the 1947 partition plan, resulting in the declaration of Israeli independence on 14 May 1948.

The Arab state assaults on Israel following this declaration of independence failed, owing to Israeli military superiority and Arab disunity. Most backed the creation of a Palestinian state, to be led by the former mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husseini, who then lived in Egypt. Transjordan, to become the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in 1948, opposed Palestinian self-determination and accepted the idea of partition, hoping to divide Palestine with the new State of Israel. Jordan's Arab Legion sought to retain already-occupied territory, to be known as the West Bank, and clashed with Israeli forces only when challenged for control of the city of Jerusalem, which was divided. Jordan's King Abdullah was assassinated in 1951 because of his negotiations with Zionists over the partition of Palestine.

Israel and the combatant Arab states signed armistice agreements between January and June 1949, but a state of war still existed. Arab states boycotted companies trading with Israel and Egypt forbade Israeli ships from transiting the Suez Canal, although it permitted

passage of foreign ships destined for Israel. Between 1948 and 1956, border tensions were strong, with frequent clashes between Israel and its neighbours, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt—especially Jordan.

The Suez crisis of 1956: background

During 1955, the focus of Arab–Israeli animosity shifted from the Jordanian front to the Egyptian, influenced by Cold War rivalries between the Soviet Union and the West. Washington wanted Egypt to be the linchpin of a Middle Eastern alliance to form part of the West's containment policy towards the Soviet Union and world communism. However, Egypt's Gamal Abd al-Nasser, the young colonel who had taken over in a coup in July 1952, espoused the doctrine of neutrality or non-alignment between the Cold War rivals. When Britain arranged a security pact with Nuri al-Said of Iraq in February 1955 (the Baghdad Pact), this ignited severe inter-Arab rivalries and regional tensions.

At the same time, February 1955, Nasser suddenly found himself confronted by a military crisis with Israel. This stemmed from an agreement that he had reached with Britain during the summer of 1954 for British withdrawal of forces from their 200-square-mile military base in the Suez Canal Zone, to be completed by June 1956. News of this pact led Israeli officials to activate a spy ring in Egypt without the knowledge of Prime Minister Moshe Sharett. The reason given was to buttress Israel's future security by forcing Britain to remain in the Suez Canal Zone, thus blocking the possibility of Egyptian troop movements into the Sinai. This would be done by having the spies blow up installations frequented by Westerners, forcing Britain to conclude that it should remain to protect its citizens.

An amateur affair, the spies were soon captured and placed on trial. The hanging of two spies and the imprisonment of others gave the Israeli public the impression of Egyptian racism towards Israel, since Sharett, once aware of Israeli responsibility for the ring, could not openly admit it. Popular alarm at Israel's apparent inability to counter Egypt's actions led to calls for Ben-Gurion's return to government, rewarded when he took over as Minister of Defence in January 1955, officially under Sharett's control, but in reality independent.

In February 1955, Israel undertook a massive raid into Gaza that resulted in major Egyptian casualties. The raid was primarily intended to reassure Israeli citizens of their government's military superiority in the face of supposed Egyptian provocations in the aftermath of the spy trials. It proved to be a landmark in the Arab–Israeli conflict within the Cold War context. Concerned at Egyptian military weakness, Nasser signed an arms pact with the Soviet Union in September 1955, causing Israel to seek more arms from its supplier, France. Tensions mounted in July 1956 when the US and Britain refused to finance the building of the Aswan Dam. Nasser retaliated by nationalizing the Suez Canal the same month.

As a result, Britain, France, and Israel, for different reasons, collaborated to attack Egypt. Israel sought to destroy the Egyptian blockade of shipping through the Tiran Straits into the Gulf of Aqaba, and to force Nasser's overthrow—the latter goal, shared by France. Humiliated by France's forced withdrawal from Vietnam in 1954, French officials were determined to retain control of Algeria, which they had invaded in 1830 and colonized, making it a *département* of France. Convinced that Nasser sustained the Algerian Revolt that had

erupted in 1955, France saw Nasser's ouster as ensuring its position in Algeria. The British government viewed the canal's nationalization as an intolerable affront by a former imperial possession and a threat to international order.

The Suez war and its legacy

The Suez war of late October/November 1956 ended in political failure for France and Britain, despite the military defeat suffered by the Egyptians. Nasser's defiance in the face of aggression by the Western imperial powers, Britain and France, allied with Israel, which Arabs considered to be the product of British imperialism, reinforced his reputation as a defender of Arab nationalism. The war brought Israel ten years of peace on its Egyptian frontier, with open passage for Israeli shipping into the Gulf of Aqaba. United Nations Emergency Forces (UNEF) were stationed in the Sinai to serve as buffers between Israel and Egypt; Israel warned that Egyptian re-imposition of the blockade of the Tiran Straits from the Sinai promontory of Sharm el-Sheikh would be a *casus belli*—that is, a legitimate cause for war.

The Suez crisis was the last Middle Eastern war in which European powers strove to retain or reassert an imperial presence. Henceforth the Arab–Israeli conflict involved only regional forces, although the US and the Soviets, along with European countries, were heavily involved in supplying arms to Arab states and Israel.

The 1967 war, Arab nationalist rivalries, and the re-emergence of the Palestinian factor

In contrast to the Suez crisis, the preliminaries to the 1967 Arab–Israeli War directly involved Palestinian factions: Palestinians served competing Arab state interests, while seeking to define their own objectives. The war's aftermath introduced a new stage in the Arab–Israeli conflict, the territorial ramifications of which remain unresolved into the twenty-first century.

Arab rivalries

The 1967 war stemmed as much from Arab nationalist debates and rivalries as from direct Arab–Israeli hostilities.

Following its secession from the United Arab Republic (1958–61), Syria impugned Nasser's Arab nationalist credentials by accusing him of evading further confrontations with Israel. These charges and counter-charges became a staple of Egyptian–Syrian–Iraqi invective, as did similar accusations hurled by Jordan's King Hussein; both leftist and conservative governments used the same propaganda. The symbols of Nasser's supposed fear of challenging Israel were the UNEF forces stationed in the Sinai since the Suez war of 1956. Syria especially accused Egypt of hiding behind the UNEF because of Syrian–Israeli confrontations in 1963 over Syrian development of a water diversion system that Israel had attacked and destroyed.

Palestinians and a concern for the Palestinian question became embroiled in these inter-Arab disputes. At an LAS meeting in Cairo in January 1964 called to discuss Syrian–Israeli

clashes, Egypt's Nasser agreed to back the formation of an official organization that represented the Palestinians, the PLO. Nasser intended to use the PLO to focus Palestinian attention on political concerns under Egyptian control. Egyptian sponsorship of PLO activities would counter Syrian charges of ignoring the Palestinians, while defusing Syrian calls for war with Israel.

Syria continued to incite tensions with Israel, if only to bolster its own Baathist image as the leader of Arab nationalism. With Egypt controlling the PLO, Syria turned to a small, revolutionary group, Fatah. Founded in 1959 in Kuwait by young Palestinians who included Yasser Arafat, Fatah rejected the PLO as a tool of Egypt. Dedicated to Israel's destruction, in 1965 Fatah began undertaking raids into Israel, sponsored by Syria but frequently launched from Jordan. These incursions and Israeli reprisals inflamed Arab-Israeli and inter-Arab tensions, especially once Syria became directly involved in skirmishes with Israel in early 1967.

The 1967 war

In May, Israel threatened Syria with possible retaliatory strikes, leading the Soviets to warn Nasser, falsely, that Israel had massed forces on the Syrian border. Eager to boost his anti-Israeli image, Nasser sent Egyptian troops into the Sinai Peninsula on 14 May 1967. They ousted UNEF forces from the Sinai, including Sharm el-Sheikh overlooking the Straits of Tiran, and, in response to taunts from Jordan and Syria, reimposed a blockade of those straits to Israeli shipping. Nasser thus recreated the circumstances that had been in place prior to the Suez war of 1956. Egypt's actions, motivated primarily to prove its nationalist credentials against Syrian claims, established the *casus belli* for Israel that it had proclaimed in 1957. Jordan then allied itself with Egypt along with Syria, Jordan's enemy.

Israel attacked Egypt on 5 June 1967 after being informed by the US that an Egyptian envoy would arrive in the US on 7 June to seek terms for resolving the crisis peacefully (Schwar 2004). With the entrance of Jordan and Syria into the war, Israel conquered and occupied the West Bank and the Golan Heights, in addition to the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula. Israel immediately annexed East Jerusalem, with its religious sites holy to Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, and declared that unified Jerusalem would remain forever the capital of the Israeli state. Hundreds of thousands of West Bank and Gaza Palestinians now fell under Israeli rule.

The 1967 war and its legacy: UN Security Council Resolution 242

The consequences of the 1967 war have defined the parameters of negotiations to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict ever since. Israel declared that it would return territories in exchange for full peace agreements, the extent of the lands involved left undefined. Arab countries meeting at Khartoum, Sudan, in August 1967 issued a document that called for full Israeli withdrawal, but without entering negotiations with that country. Still, the Khartoum Declaration was seen as presenting diplomatic opportunities, especially since Egypt's Nasser sided with Jordan's King Hussein in seeking international intervention via the United Nations. Syrian refusal to consider negotiations was consistent with Syrian hostility towards Israel prior to the war, as was Palestinian rejection of talks. For the Palestinians, however, the situation was more complicated. If Arab states were to recognize Israel, Israel would have had to

accept the refugee status for Palestinians as a result of the 1948 wars—a condition in which there was no Palestinian political entity.

Palestinians sought to regain all of pre-1967 Israel or former Palestine, a position proclaimed in the modified 1968 PLO Charter, which referred to the attainment of this goal by 'armed struggle'. Palestinian groups and the PLO, with Arafat as its head from 1969 onward, constantly opposed international efforts to resolve the results of the 1967 war unless the Palestinian political objective—self-determination—was considered. This explains their attempts to undermine, or later modify, the document considered the basis of negotiations to resolve the changes brought about by that war: UN Security Council Resolution 242.

Passed by the United Nations in November 1967, Resolution 242 called for Arab–Israeli settlement of the consequences of the war based on exchanges of occupied land in return for peace. Its deliberate ambiguity led to conflicting interpretations at the Arab–Israeli state level, but none at all for the Palestinians.

Declaring its intent to achieve 'a just and lasting peace' for the region, the Resolution condemned 'the acquisition of territory by war' and called for all states 'to live in peace in secure and recognized boundaries'. Resolution 242's key statement was its clause stating that Israel should withdraw 'from territories occupied in the recent conflict'. This expression deliberately omitted the article 'the' before the word 'territories', owing to Israel's insistence that it should not be required to withdraw from *all* of the territories that it had occupied. Israel argued that the Resolution's statement that all states should live 'within secure and recognized boundaries' required that it retain some territories acquired in the war in order to establish those secure boundaries that it had lacked prior to the war.

Resolution 242 referred to the Palestinians solely as refugees whose condition would be resolved through Arab–Israeli state negotiations. As they had feared, the Palestinians were not considered to be a people with legitimate political aspirations. The PLO, from this time onwards, strove to block any settlement that enshrined the refugee status of the Palestinians, while working to modify Resolution 242 to permit Palestinian access to negotiations as a people with acknowledged political rights.

From the 1967 war to the Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty

In the aftermath of the 1967 war, Arab states worked to recover lands taken by Israel in that conflict by both military and diplomatic means. Their strategies differed according to their perceptions of their interests.

The war of attrition

Egypt undertook a war of attrition from 1968 to 1970, combating Israel across the Suez Canal. Although Israel was the victor militarily, its triumph was marred by significant casualties and ultimate setback. Its military advantage, especially air superiority, led Israel to bomb targets inside Egypt and not only on the canal—raids designed to humiliate Nasser and to cause his downfall. Instead, these attacks brought the Soviet Union more directly into the Arab–Israeli conflict. Nearly 15,000 Soviet troops and pilots were shifted to Egypt to bolster its defences.

This massive Soviet presence altered the Cold War equation in the Arab-Israeli conflict, but the Nixon administration still pursued its contradictory policy. Secretary of State William Rogers backed UN efforts to institute a ceasefire between Israel and Egypt, achieved in August 1970—a regionalist approach. National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, with Nixon's approval and Israel's knowledge, strove to undermine Rogers's efforts. Their miscalculations led to the greatly enhanced Soviet presence in Egypt, stalemating the conflict and resulting in the ceasefire.

The Jordanian civil war, September 1970

For their part, the Palestinians were alarmed by the August 1970 ceasefire, fearing that it might lead to negotiations in which they would be excluded. Arafat, now head of the PLO, could not dominate that organization, challenged by groups such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) headed by George Habash and the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP) led by Nayif Hawatmah. Both called for the overthrow of conservative Arab regimes as a precondition for an assault on Israel, whereas Arafat and Fatah focused on Israel and endeavoured to distance the PLO from Arab state politics. Following the August 1970 ceasefire, the PFLP and PDFLP attempted to overthrow Jordan's King Hussein as the first step in creating a more radical Arab front that would challenge Israel. This led to the Jordanian civil war of September 1970, in which King Hussein's Jordanian army crushed Palestinian forces, with a major Arab-Israeli crisis barely averted.

The Palestinian-Jordanian clashes of August-September 1970 altered Arab state involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Palestinian defeat and subsequent losses in later engagements with Jordanian forces forced the PLO to move its command structure in 1971 from Jordan to Lebanon. From that time onward, PLO actions against Israel engaged Lebanon more directly in the Arab-Israeli conflict and became a major factor in instigating a Lebanese civil war in the mid-1970s.

The Jordanian civil war had another casualty: Egypt's Nasser died shortly after negotiating a ceasefire. He was succeeded by Anwar Sadat, who, from 1971 to 1973, sought unsuccessfully to negotiate an Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai via UN mediators, but failed to gain US backing for his efforts.

Nixon and Kissinger rejected Egyptian overtures, refusing to act while Soviet forces remained in Egypt. Then, when Sadat expelled them in July 1972—a Cold War victory for Washington—the US did not respond because Kissinger was diverted by scandals pertaining to Nixon's 1972 re-election campaign. US inaction contributed to the 1973 war.

The 1973 war and its consequences

With no diplomatic initiatives forthcoming, Egypt and Syria decided to attack Israeli forces in the Golan Heights and Sinai Peninsula. Expectations of continued diplomatic stalemate had been furthered when Israel declared it would annex a large area of the Sinai in defiance of Resolution 242. Minister of Defence Moshe Dayan proposed this plan as a condition of his remaining part of the Labour Party (formed in 1968) in forthcoming elections scheduled for November.

Egypt and Syria attacked Israel on 6 October 1973. Israeli forces fell back in the Golan Heights, but ultimately stopped the Syrians. Egyptian troops crossed the Suez Canal and overwhelmed the Israeli defences, advancing into the Sinai before being checked. Initial Egyptian successes were thwarted by Israeli counter-attacks that led to Israeli forces crossing the Canal and occupying its West Bank. Technically, Israel had won the war against Egypt, but Egyptian troops held out in pockets in the Sinai against fierce Israeli efforts to oust them and to restore the *status quo ante*.

Whereas the 1967 war had completely overturned the political–military parameters of the Arab–Israeli conflict existing since 1948, the 1973 war created a modified territorial framework within which the changes wrought by 1967 might be resolved. Henry Kissinger, now Secretary of State as well as Nixon's National Security Advisor, intervened to gain an Egyptian–Israeli ceasefire that left Egyptian forces in the Sinai, creating a situation that required negotiations. Kissinger now argued that limited agreements between Israel, Syria, and Egypt, with minor Israeli withdrawals from lands that it occupied, could create a climate of confidence and trust within which full peace treaties might ensue. He negotiated Israeli pullback accords in the Sinai and the Golan Heights with Egypt and Syria during 1974, pursuant to Security Council Resolution 338, passed on 22 October 1973, the last day of the war; it called for full implementation of Resolution 242.

Eager to pursue talks and to recover the Sinai, Sadat agreed to a second limited agreement with Israel in September 1975. For Arab leaders, the accord signalled Egypt's willingness to seek a separate agreement with Israel—anathema to them, but attractive to Israeli politicians, including Yitzhak Rabin, who had succeeded Golda Meir as prime minister in the summer of 1974.

Rabin, like most Israeli leaders, was primarily concerned with retaining the Golan Heights and the West Bank for Israel regardless of Resolution 242. From this perspective, a separate peace with Egypt would remove Egypt from the military equation of the Arab–Israeli conflict, enabling Israel to concentrate its forces against Syria and Jordan in order to impose its terms and to retain land. Here, Rabin was reassured by Kissinger that the US would not push for any limited withdrawal agreements between Israel and Jordan over the West Bank.

The American-sponsored peace efforts of 1974–75 and Israeli disinterest in any agreement with Jordan over the West Bank had important repercussions for Palestinians and the PLO within the framework of the Arab–Israeli conflict.

Jordan and the Rabat Declaration

Jordan's King Hussein had been humiliated by his exclusion from the pullback agreements of 1974—the product of Israel's refusal to negotiate over the West Bank. His inclusion would have reaffirmed Jordanian claims to the area, and undercut PLO calls for Palestinian self-determination and claims to represent all Palestinians.

Further humiliation awaited Hussein. In October 1974, Arab heads of state met in Rabat, Morocco, where they recognized 'the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent national authority under the command of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, in any Palestinian territory that is liberated' (Cobban 1984: 60). The Rabat Declaration remains a landmark in the history of Palestinian efforts for self-determination within the framework of the

Arab-Israeli conflict. It declared that Hussein and Jordan had no right to represent Palestinian interests in any international forum. Hussein appeared to accept this decision, which acquired international recognition when Arafat spoke at the UN General Assembly in November 1974, and the PLO was awarded observer status over the strong objections of Israel and the US.

Henceforth, advocates of a diplomatic resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict were divided. Most countries, including America's European allies, called for inclusion of the PLO and discussion of Palestinian political rights in any negotiations based on Resolution 242. In contrast, the US and Israel rejected PLO inclusion in talks, calling it a terrorist organization.

The Camp David talks and the Egyptian-Israeli peace accord

The election of Jimmy Carter as US president in November 1976 initiated a new approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Carter abandoned Kissinger's scheme of limited agreements and decided to seek a comprehensive Arab-Israeli accord, to be negotiated at an international conference that would include not only the Soviet Union, but also the Palestinians if the PLO could accept Resolution 242. In the end, Carter failed to achieve his objectives. The Camp David agreement of September 1978 between Egypt and Israel was a last-gasp effort to salvage something out of his search for a comprehensive peace.

Carter had overreached in seeking an international conference. Arab states had no common policy agenda and most suspected Sadat of seeking a separate arrangement with Israel. The PLO would not openly accept Resolution 242 unless the Palestinians' right to a state was acknowledged beforehand—a condition that Carter could not meet. Israel objected to an international conference, preferring US oversight of limited talks. Finally, Israeli opposition to negotiations involving territory or the Palestinians was now intransigent. Menachem Begin had succeeded Rabin as prime minister of Israel in June 1977. Leader of the right-wing Likud party and a pillar of Revisionist Zionism, he had continually advocated since 1948 the need for Israel to invade and capture the West Bank (Judaea and Samaria) to fulfil the Zionist goal of governing ancient Israel; the Likud coalition official platform (1977) rejected the idea of a Palestinian state, and stated that Israel would rule eternally over the land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River.

Carter's difficulties convinced Sadat to approach Israel on its terms: those of a separate peace—an arrangement that would hopefully bring Western, especially US, economic aid to Egypt. On 9 November 1977, Sadat announced to the Egyptian National Assembly that he would go to Jerusalem in search of peace if invited, leading to his visit to that city the same month. The search for an Egyptian-Israeli peace had been set in motion.

The most tangible result of the Camp David accord was the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty of March 1979, the first between an Arab state and Israel. Although a milestone in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Egyptian-Israeli treaty did not suggest progress towards resolution of the broader conflict through further negotiation. The LAS expelled Egypt and moved its headquarters from Cairo to Tunis.

Arab censure of Sadat focused on the conflicting interpretations of what Camp David had promised with respect to the Palestinians. The agreement referred to the 'legitimate rights of the Palestinian people' and Palestinian 'autonomy'. Begin interpreted these references to mean their non-political rights under Israeli sovereignty, whereas Carter and Sadat believed

it meant political rights under Arab rule, probably Jordanian. Disputes also arose over the supposed moratorium on Israeli settlement-building after Camp David: Israel undertook such activity after three months; Sadat and Carter thought that they had an oral agreement for five years. From Begin's perspective, 'the Sinai had been sacrificed but Eretz Israel had been won', meaning that removing Egypt as a hostile neighbour would enable Israel to retain the West Bank and prove to the million Palestinians living there that they had no hope of true self-determination. Israel had already begun a massive settlement programme in the West Bank under Ariel Sharon's direction (Quandt 2005: 228–40).

The legacy of Camp David went beyond the achievement of an Egyptian–Israeli peace. The document's clauses for the West Bank envisaged a transition period of five years during which gradually implemented electoral and administrative procedures, including Israel's withdrawal from many areas, would lead to final status negotiations. Never attempted as part of the Camp David accord, this scheme would become the basis for the Oslo process following the first Oslo accord in 1993.

From Camp David to Oslo

With Egypt removed from Arab–Israeli hostilities, the conflict assumed new dimensions, which included state sponsorship of proxies—notably in Lebanon, that led to the Israeli invasion of that country in 1982.

Lebanon: civil war and foreign intervention

Lebanon had served as an unwilling base for PLO attacks into Israel since the later 1960s; hijackings of El Al planes by Palestinian factions based in Lebanon resulted in an Israeli assault on the Beirut airport in 1968. The shift of the PLO command from Jordan to camps outside Beirut in 1971 further destabilized an already-fragile Lebanese political structure and inspired the formation of Maronite Catholic militias independent of government control, as was the PLO. The Maronites in particular resented Lebanon being drawn into the Arab–Israeli conflict, but this confrontation became embroiled in local political tensions. Lebanese Muslim and leftist anger at Maronite political dominance, already expressed in the 1957–58 civil war, erupted again in the mid-1970s.

The clashes this time were far more destructive and involved state sponsors, Israel and Syria. In addition to arming and training the Maronites, Israel facilitated Maronite infiltration into southern Lebanon via Israel to seek to block Palestinian attacks. The Syrians briefly supported the Palestinians before allowing them to be crushed by the Israeli-backed Maronites, fearing that Palestinian dominance in Lebanon might lead to a Syrian confrontation with Israel. A truce in the civil war in 1976 permitted PLO groups to attack Israel again from the south, leading to a major Israeli invasion into southern Lebanon in March 1978 in response to a terrorist attack into Tel Aviv.

In the wake of Camp David and the Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty, Prime Minister Menachem Begin and his chief adviser, Ariel Sharon, reconsidered their strategy regarding the PLO. The treaty with Egypt seemed to ensure Israeli domination of the West Bank, but most West Bank Palestinians remained loyal to the PLO. Destruction of the PLO command in

Lebanon would relieve Israel of border strife and crush West Bank Palestinian hopes that they could escape Israeli rule.

Israeli ambitions meshed with those of Bashir Gemayel, leader of the Phalange, the premier Maronite militia; Gemayel had wiped out his leading Maronite rivals. He, like Begin and Sharon, hoped to oust, if not destroy, the PLO in Lebanon, with the goal of installing himself in power with Israeli assistance; this would ensure Maronite dominance of Lebanon despite their minority status and give Israel an ally on its northern border.

These calculations resulted in the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982, when Ariel Sharon misled the Israeli cabinet, which had been briefed for a limited incursion similar to that of 1978. The Israeli army encircled Beirut, where repeated assaults caused many civilian casualties, but did not destroy the Palestinian community or command. International intervention resulted in the PLO agreeing to leave Lebanon for Tunisia in August, with guarantees that the Palestinians who remained would be protected. Once the PLO left Lebanon, US military contingents were withdrawn. Almost simultaneously, Bashir Gemayel was assassinated. As a result, the Israeli army permitted Maronite Phalangists to enter the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, where over a thousand Palestinians were slaughtered.

These massacres brought the return of US forces, which became increasingly caught up in Lebanese factional disputes. In 1983, the Reagan administration called for naval bombardments of Druze positions, over the strong objections of the marine commander in Beirut. Opposition forces retaliated with the suicide bombing of the marine barracks in October, causing 241 deaths. After a further show of force, Reagan ordered the withdrawal of US troops in early 1984, leaving Lebanon to its regional competitors.

The 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon proved, in retrospect, to be an undertaking the short-term triumphs of which masked long-term liabilities—in particular, the incitement of Lebanese Shia hostility towards Israel. The Lebanese-Israeli frontier remained a zone of conflict—notably, an enclave in southern Lebanon where Israel retained control. There, the Iranian-backed Hezbollah, formed in response to the Israeli invasion, engaged Israeli troops and client forces in a war of attrition that ultimately ended with Israel voluntarily withdrawing from most of the enclave in May 2000.

Israel and the intifada

These difficulties did not deter Israeli Likud prime ministers of the 1980s, Menachem Begin and later Yitzhak Shamir, from pursuing the real goal of the Lebanese venture: consolidation of the Israeli position in the West Bank. The decade saw the vast expansion of Israeli settlements in the area. Arab-Israeli state tensions were muted, with Egypt sidelined, Iraq involved in a protracted and costly war with Iran (1980–88), and Syria monitoring its position in Lebanon. Jordan sought entry into negotiations with US support and that of Labour politicians in Israeli coalitions, continually stymied by Likud objections. No major change in the diplomacy of the Arab-Israeli conflict occurred until December 1988, when the US agreed to talk to the PLO, declaring that it had satisfactorily renounced terrorism and accepted Security Council Resolution 242.

Taken with more reluctance than enthusiasm, the US decision appeared to be a major stepping stone towards resolution of issues within the framework of the broader Arab-Israeli conflict. However, the impetus for recognition lay not in diplomacy, but in the actions

of Palestinians in the West Bank and especially in the Gaza Strip, who had rebelled against Israeli occupation. The rebellion, known as the intifada, began in December 1987 and lasted into 1991. The intensity of Palestinian protests and the brutality of the Israeli response focused international attention on the nature of Israel's role as occupiers of these lands, and called into question the future of the territories. In addition, the intifada gave legitimacy, if only indirectly, to PLO claims to represent the Palestinians in the territories. Still, US agreement to discuss matters with Arafat did not mean a willingness to negotiate with him; the Jordanian solution remained the favoured option. Matters remained stalemated, with Likud, guided by Yitzhak Shamir, ever more determined to resist pressures to compromise, despite US pressures to do so.

The Gulf War, 1990-91

The catalyst for an apparent breakthrough toward resolution of Arab-Israeli matters was a factor indirectly related to the conflict: the decision of Saddam Hussein to invade Kuwait in August 1990 and the counter-decision of President George H. W. Bush to forge a military coalition that included Arab armies to drive Iraqi forces out of that country. These developments, coupled with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, removed the Cold War justification of US-Soviet rivalry for control of Arab-Israeli negotiations. Arab states such as Syria, long a recipient of Soviet aid, but a foe of Iraq, now had incentives to join an American-led force. These incentives were not limited to defeat of an Arab rival; they included US promises to seek to broaden Arab-Israeli negotiations at the conclusion of the war and to confront more directly the militancy of Yitzhak Shamir.

The Madrid Conference

Herein lay the basic irony of the Gulf War: the ultimate, although not immediate, beneficiary of the Gulf War was to be Arafat, and with him the PLO, despite the fact that he had sided with Saddam against the US-led coalition and had, as a result, lost his funding from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, his principal sources of revenue.

With the end of the Gulf War, Washington pressured Israel in order to fulfil US promises made to Arab leaders to gain their inclusion in the coalition against Saddam Hussein. Secretary of State James Baker's efforts resulted in an international conference in Madrid, convened in October 1991 attended by Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. In addition, the Palestinians, for the first time, participated in such a conference, although the PLO was excluded and the Palestinian contingent was officially part of the Jordanian delegation.

The Madrid talks included several rounds of negotiations, from October 1991 to the summer of 1993. Arab states and Israel negotiated directly for the first time, as did Israelis and Palestinians. No formal agreements resulted, although Israel and Jordan drafted a peace accord that would not be signed until October 1994, following the 1993 Oslo accord. Exchanges between other delegations led nowhere—especially those between Palestinian delegates, who demanded a Palestinian state, and their Israeli counterparts during a period of increasing violence in the territories and in Israel, undertaken by the Islamic groups, Hamas and Islamic Jihad. These attacks reflected anger at Israel's settlement expansion and at Arafat's failure to represent Palestinian interests. Although Arafat had benefited from the Gulf

War to the extent that Palestinians were invited to the Madrid talks, he remained isolated in Tunisia, trying to influence Palestinian resistance from afar, while Hamas and Islamic Jihad led armed resistance as the intifada lost momentum.

Yitzhak Rabin's election as Israeli prime minister in 1992 gave impetus to peace efforts. He and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres saw the Islamic-inspired violence as a greater threat to Israeli security than Arafat and the PLO. They decided to resurrect Arafat and instil a sense of hope among Palestinians to undermine the appeal of the Islamists, a decision that led to the historic Oslo accord of August–September 1993.

The Oslo peace process in retrospect

The two Oslo accords, of September 1993 and October 1995, treated more fully in **Chapter 13**, were hailed by many as signalling an ultimate resolution of a problem that had festered for nearly half a century. But the apparent successes in implementing the process concealed inherent problems concerned primarily with acceptance by key parties in the Palestinian and Israeli political spectrum.

Not only Hamas, but also many Palestinians identified with a peaceful resolution of the conflict condemned the first Oslo accord ('Oslo I') because Arafat recognized Israel's right to exist without acquiring Israeli recognition of Palestinian statehood in return. Delays in implementing specific clauses of Oslo I pertaining to the Israeli handover of responsibilities increased tensions, as did terrorist acts from both sides. Ironically, these tensions led Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, initially reluctant to enter the Oslo process, to resolve to establish firmer procedures that would lead to the final resolution of outstanding issues. The second Oslo accord ('Oslo II'), with its promise of greater Israeli handovers of land and increased Palestinian political and security responsibilities, seemed to presage a final accord with a Palestinian state on most of the West Bank: Israel would retain only heavily populated settlements close to the Green Line. Rightist Israeli condemnation was harsh and swift, especially since Rabin said that the settlers were a greater threat to Israel's security than the Palestinians. Likud rivals Ariel Sharon and Binyamin Netanyahu competed to condemn Oslo II and Rabin. Both participated in rallies during which posters portraying Rabin as a Nazi were prevalent. This vilification, accompanied by calls for Rabin's assassination from rabbis in Brooklyn, as well as the West Bank, led to his killing on 4 November 1995.

Rabin's death and the election of Netanyahu to succeed him in June 1996 promised Likud determination to block adherence to Oslo II's goals, frustrating Palestinian hopes. By the time Labour Party candidate Ehud Barak replaced Netanyahu in July 1999, Yasser Arafat's reputation among Palestinians had plummeted. He had bowed to US encouragement to proceed with the appearance of a process even as Israel took more Palestinian lands for settlements and bypass roads to be used exclusively by Israelis. And despite Barak's declared commitment to resurrect negotiations, the fragmentation of Israeli politics required him to include in his coalition parties opposed to peace; settlement growth initially proceeded at a faster pace under Barak than it had under Netanyahu.

In such circumstances of mistrust and political instability, all sides approached the Camp David 2000 talks unprepared, with rifts within every camp. But it was the US–Israeli version of Palestinian responsibility for the talks' failure that would resonate and influence opinion as the al-Aqsa intifada exploded at the end of September 2000. Triggered by Ariel Sharon's

provocation in visiting the Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif on 28 September, that uprising could also be seen as a condemnation of the Oslo process, which to Palestinians represented further loss of land and of the possibility of achieving statehood.

Palestine-Israel: 2000-15

Camp David 2000: talks and their repercussions—the George W. Bush administration

The dominant narrative explaining the failed Camp David 2000 talks and the eruption of the al-Aqsa intifada stressed Palestinian rejection of Ehud Barak's offers at Camp David and Palestinian incitement that required harsh Israeli retaliation. This narrative, initiated by President Bill Clinton, was adopted by his successor George W. Bush, and underwrote Bush's approach to Palestinian-Israeli matters, an approach that condoned further Israeli settlement expansion.

Yet testimonies given by participants from all three delegations, Israeli, American, and Palestinian, challenge this narrative (Pressman 2003; Swisher 2004; Bregman 2005). Indeed, in the case of chief US negotiator Dennis Ross, he admitted to a European audience that both Israel and the Palestinians were responsible for the failure of the Oslo peace process, and specifically noted the doubling of Israeli settlements between 1993 and 2000 as causing justified Palestinian mistrust of Israeli motives. But, for a US audience, Ross withheld any mention of Israeli settlement growth from 1993 onwards in his own memoir of the period (Ross 2004; cf. Malley and Agha 2001; Enderlin 2003: 360-1; Swisher 2004: 362).

Similarly, whereas most reports cited Palestinian incitement, official records indicated that Palestinians initially demonstrated with rocks and tyre burnings, as in the first intifada, while Israeli troops fired live ammunition from the outset and fired rubber bullets to make them more lethal. With the advent of Ariel Sharon's government in March 2001, Palestinian suicide bombings reappeared and penetrated into Israel itself. One at a Passover seder in April 2002 led to Sharon ordering the retaking of all lands granted to the Palestinians during the Oslo process; the headquarters of the Palestinian Authority were destroyed and Yasser Arafat isolated in its ruins, essentially under Israeli supervision. The Bush administration's refusal to deal with Arafat led to Mahmoud Abbas becoming *de facto* head of the Palestinian Authority; he succeeded Arafat as president on the latter's death in November 2004.

In the meantime, Sharon ordered the construction of a security barrier in the West Bank, often 20 feet high. Justified to halt suicide bombings, its political intent was to incorporate most large settlements under Israeli control. It also cut through Palestinian towns, such as Bethlehem, and blocked tens of thousands of Palestinians from their fields or places of work. Announced as a temporary measure, its cost has exceeded US\$1 billion and it will likely remain in place as an obstacle to any Palestinian acceptance of a peace agreement. Then, in April 2004, Sharon gained US approval for a unilateral withdrawal from the eight Israeli settlements in Gaza. His goal was to block any further peace talks on the West Bank.¹ President Bush in return promised that any future peace agreement would have to take account of 'new realities'—that is, large Israeli centres of population well within the West Bank, not just adjacent to the 1967 border, would become Israeli in any Palestinian peace accord. A

controversial agreement contradicted by Bush's further statement that any Palestinian state should have territorial contiguity, Bush's 'new realities' phrase remains a staple of Prime Minister Netanyahu's rhetoric (Smith 2016: 512–13).

Israel withdrew from Gaza in August 2005, but retained leverage over the area and its Palestinian residents by encircling the Gaza Strip with a 15-foot wall, imposing naval surveillance of the coast, and restricting goods entering the Gaza Strip. These measures contributed to Hamas' stunning electoral victory in the January 2006 Palestinian Authority elections, placing Hamas's Ismail Haniya as prime minister under Fatah's Mahmoud Abbas, who remained president of the PA. Although the US had insisted on Hamas's participation in the elections to demonstrate its commitment to democracy, the Bush administration condemned the results, and joined Israel in furthering the military and economic blockade of Gaza. When news emerged that the two countries were funding new Fatah battalions to enter Gaza and crush the Hamas military, Hamas pre-empted by taking over all government functions and defeating those Fatah military cadres that remained. This would lead to a devastating Israeli attack on Gaza in December 2008, as much a result of Israeli domestic politics, with an upcoming election, as of any presumed Hamas violation of ceasefires.

Obama, Netanyahu, and the Arab Spring: stalemate?

Barack Obama took office as US president in January 2009; Netanyahu regained the Israeli premiership in March. The Obama administration consistently sought to advance Israeli-Palestinian peace talks based, for negotiating purposes, on the 1967 borders. Netanyahu consistently rejected this idea and proposals that he halt West Bank settlement expansion. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton appeared to gain a partial success when Netanyahu agreed to freeze new settlement construction for ten months in the West Bank, but not East Jerusalem; nonetheless, 2,400 units were constructed in the West Bank. Her successor, John Kerry, was equally unsuccessful.

Netanyahu's stance against the Obama administration was encouraged by the US Congress. Former House Majority Whip Eric Cantor (Republican) told Netanyahu in 2010 that the House of Representatives 'would serve as a check on the administrations', referring to peace efforts where settlements would be abandoned (Cooper 2011) and he received repeated standing ovations when he addressed Congress in April 2011. Congress gave him a similar though more controversial welcome in March 2015 when he openly opposed US policy on Iranian nuclear development as the guest of the Republican members of Congress who had not informed the president of the invitation beforehand, introducing a new level of partisanship regarding Israel and US foreign policy with major implications for future elections. Domestic politics forced Obama to side with Israel in September 2011, when PA President Mahmoud Abbas sought UN Security Council recognition of a Palestinian state. The US blocked the measure, which had the backing of all other members. Similarly, when the UN Human Rights Council voted to undertake an inquiry on Israeli settlements and their impact on Palestinians in March 2012, the US was the only state to vote 'no', although some members abstained. The American stance on negotiations has, in turn, forced the PA to reconsider its reliance on US sponsorship of peace talks particularly given that daily existence for most Palestinians, especially in Gaza, has worsened considerably.

Palestinian Options: the 2014 Gaza War and Israel's March 2015 elections

From the Palestinian perspective, continued reliance on American oversight of the peace process with Israel, despite the efforts of Secretaries of State Hilary Clinton and John Kerry, has resulted in a stalemate at the same time that Israeli settlement expansion has intensified. The only progress has been in increased cooperation between PA security forces, trained by US advisers, and the Israeli military, employed primarily to block Palestinian attacks on Israelis that often occur in protest of that settlement growth. Once the latest round of American-sponsored talks collapsed at the end of April 2014, a process began where Palestinian politics and clashes with Israel interacted.

In April 2014, the PA and Hamas reached another accord to form a unity government—several past efforts had failed. Israel immediately suspended peace talks with the PA, a week before the deadline for negotiations to end, demanding it nullify the agreement. Then two Palestinian teenagers were killed by Israeli police on 14 May during demonstrations against commemoration of Israeli independence day—Palestinians call it 'Nakba remembrance day'. Massive Palestinian demonstrations followed and, on 12 June, three Israeli teenagers were kidnapped in the West Bank. Netanyahu immediately condemned Hamas for the abductions and ordered the arrests of hundreds of West Bank Palestinians while PA security forces helped Israelis search for the youths. With the bodies found on 30 June, Netanyahu ordered airstrikes on Gaza the next day, setting in motion further strikes following rockets fired from Gaza into Israel along with Palestinian anger as three Israelis confessed to burning alive a Palestinian teenager as revenge for the deaths of the three young Israelis. These developments led to the Gaza war of Summer 2014, officially dated 8 July—26 August, that devastated much of the Gaza Strip and killed over 2,200 Palestinians, at least two-thirds of them civilians; there were 72 Israelis killed, 66 of them soldiers. Israel used four times the artillery shells fired in the 2008 war while Hamas fired at least 3,000 rockets, less than 10 per cent of which struck Israeli residential areas. Gaza's isolation intensified as Israeli strikes and incursions destroyed many tunnels used for smuggling goods and Egypt, under General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, imposed a blockade on Gaza's eastern side similar to that applied by Israel. Little if any reconstruction has occurred in Gaza as of spring 2015.

This sequence of events weakened Hamas militarily but did not boost Mahmoud Abbas's popularity among West Bankers. Apparently losing faith in American sponsorship of peace talks, at the end of 2014 he made a failed attempt to have the United Nations Security Council pass a motion calling for a peace pact with Israel within one year and Israel's withdrawal to the 1967 borders within three years, steps that would have signalled UN backing for a Palestinian state. The Obama administration would have vetoed the motion if it had had sufficient support. The next day Abbas applied for Palestinian membership on the International Criminal Court, a move whose legal and political ramifications are unclear.

The PA's perception of the futility of further American-backed negotiations appeared justified by the results of Israel's March 2015 elections where Netanyahu and Likud gained the most seats in parliament and he was asked to form a coalition government. Netanyahu had declared at the end of his campaign that he opposed a Palestinian state and rejected the formula of a two-state solution. Although he and his aides later sought to depict these comments as electoral strategies, they matched the policies set down in the Likud Party platform and appeared to confirm the overall strategy of Netanyahu's tenure in office. Attention to the

implications of these statements was short-lived as Israel and its American allies in and outside of Congress focused on blocking a Great Power agreement with Iran on its nuclear programme. However, Netanyahu's freedom of action was short-lived. Having withheld payment of tax revenues to the PA since January because of Abbas's application for Palestinian membership on the International Criminal Court, he was forced to back down and hand over the funds after warnings from the Israeli military of an imminent Palestinian uprising.

Palestinians in both Gaza and the West Bank face uncertain futures. Gaza residents still confront the destruction wrought by the summer 2014 war and the near total enclosure of the Gaza Strip enforced by Egypt as well as Israel; no serious reconstruction has been undertaken in the aftermath of the war. For West Bank Palestinians, Netanyahu's electoral remarks confirm fears that American oversight of the peace process has failed because of the realities of settler presence in the West Bank and American domestic politics. Many Israelis, on the other hand, appear to accept the idea that retention of the West Bank offers more security than a peace accord. Lacking political options, Palestinians are faced with ongoing Israeli dominance at a time when international attention is focused on regional strife. In such circumstances, violence for many may become the only option.

Conclusion

These developments occur at a time when the attention of the Great Powers as well as most Middle Eastern states is focused elsewhere, on the ongoing civil strife in Syria, Iraqi attempts to oust IS militias from major urban areas in the north, especially Mosul, and the potential collapse of the Yemeni state that has led the Arab League to form a military coalition of Sunni forces to defeat a Yemeni uprising by the former Shi'i rulers of the country. These events have created unforeseen alliances that mitigate against any great attention being paid to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Israel and Saudi Arabia have had a tacit accord to back radical Sunni opponents of the Asad regime in Syria, an anti-Iran ploy that has been at least temporarily stymied by the growth of IS which both countries oppose. At the same time, the United States, hitherto leader in imposing sanctions on Iran, tolerates Iran's role in Iraq's war against IS, to the dismay of Saudi Arabia, still in principle a major American ally but one whose vision of the Middle East for the moment differs sharply from that of Washington; the 2002 Saudi-sponsored peace proposal to Israel has been set aside.

The first two decades of the Arab-Israeli conflict, often marked by armed hostilities, were notable for Arab refusal to recognize Israel's existence. Since the 1967 war, Arab states, notably Syria and Saudi Arabia, have displayed willingness to recognize Israel, and two, Egypt and Jordan, have signed peace treaties; Yasser Arafat recognized Israel's right to exist in the 1993 Oslo agreement.

This recognition has been premised on a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli question, with Israel ceding the Gaza Strip and most of the West Bank. Revisionist Zionism rejects that notion as both Ariel Sharon and Netanyahu have ignored Arab state peace initiatives and opposed proposals that would require abandoning most of the West Bank along with seeking to undermine any Palestinian unity government (Podeh 2014). These developments suggest that the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict is now affected more by Israeli

state militancy than by Arab, as was formerly the case. Likud expansionism to achieve fulfilment of its identity as a true Jewish state, with the apparent tolerance of many American politicians embraces ideological perspectives requiring the subjugation of neighbours as well as inclusion of West Bank Palestinians whose presence would appear to contradict the very idea of a Jewish state (see **Chapter 16**).

In this regard, most Arab states have adopted a realist approach to the Arab–Israeli conflict, seeking coexistence based in part on acceptance of Israel’s military supremacy. In contrast, Israel appears to insist on security through regional domination, coupled with retention of the West Bank as Greater Israel. Here, one finds no homogeneity of state interests, as realist theory sometimes assumes, but rather an assertion of identity based both on power and on claims to historic territory, the West Bank.

As a result of the Arab Spring and its fallout, with Egypt labelling Hamas a terrorist organization as does Israel and the US, the Palestinian question is for the moment no longer central to relations between Israel and many Sunni Arab states with whom it has no diplomatic relations. Indeed, the Middle East as a region has seen state alignments develop along the lines of religious identity, Sunni vs Shia, allowing Israel to tacitly ally itself with Sunni states against Syria and Iran, abandoning the Arab–Israeli dichotomy of the past.

Given this fluid regional situation, the Arab–Israeli conflict, as a state to state interaction, has achieved stasis, leaving the field to non-state actors such as Hezbollah. Any challenges to Israel from within the region in the near future will likely be military, not diplomatic, and would likely come from non-state organizations, whether Shia Hezbollah or Sunni jihadist groups if the latter survive the combined efforts of Western and regional governments to destroy them. Regional dynamics have been nearly totally transformed since the Arab Spring, placing the Arab–Israeli conflict in limbo and creating the possibility that European states may abandon acceptance of American leadership to resolve the issue and unilaterally recognize a Palestinian state, leaving the US isolated with Israel.

Key events

1948	May	Declaration of State of Israel
	May–July	First Arab–Israeli War: Arab states attack Israel
1956	October	Suez crisis: Israel, France, and Britain attack Egypt
1964		Formation of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)
1967	June	Six-Day War: Israel defeats Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, and occupies Sinai Peninsula, Golan Heights, Gaza Strip, and West Bank
1973	October	October War: Egypt and Syria attack Israel in the Golan Heights and Sinai Peninsula
1978–79		Camp David talks establish basis for an Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty
1987	December	Outbreak of first Palestinian intifada
1991	February–March	Gulf War
	October	Madrid Conference

1993	September	First Oslo accord (Oslo I)
1994	October	Israel–Jordan peace treaty
1995	September	Second Oslo accord (Oslo II)
	November	Yitzhak Rabin assassinated
	December	Israeli forces withdraw from areas outlined in Oslo II
1996	January	Palestinian Self-Governing Authority (Council) elected
	May	Binyamin Netanyahu elected Israeli prime minister
1997	January	Hebron redeployment agreement
1998	October	Wye Memorandum between Israel and Palestinians
	December	Palestinian National Council removes clauses from Palestine National Charter calling for Israel's destruction
1999	February	Jordan's King Hussein dies; succeeded by his son, Abdullah II
	May	Ehud Barak elected prime minister
2000	January–March	Syrian–Israeli peace talks end in failure
	June	Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad dies; succeeded by son, Bashar
	July	Camp David Israeli–Palestinian summit (final status talks)
	September	Ariel Sharon visits Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif; triggers second intifada
	November	George W. Bush elected US president
2000–01		Israeli–Palestinian talks, building on Camp David
2001	February	Likud candidate Ariel Sharon elected prime minister
	September	9/11: Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on the US
	October	US initiates attacks on Afghanistan in response to 9/11
2002	February	Israel rejects Saudi Arabian peace initiative
2003	January	Ariel Sharon re-elected prime minister; construction of Israeli 'security fence'
	March	US invades Iraq; Yasser Arafat appoints Mahmoud Abbas prime minister of new Palestinian Authority
	April	'Road Map' issued
2004	April	President Bush supports Ariel Sharon's proposal for full disengagement from Gaza, and appears to approve Israel's retention of major settlement blocs within the West Bank
	November	Death of Yasser Arafat

2005	January	Mahmoud Abbas elected Palestinian Authority president
	March	Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice calls for 'free and fair' Palestinian elections; Sasson Report documents official Israeli backing for settlement expansion; Hamas declares that it will enter Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections
	August	Israel withdraws from all Gaza settlements and four settlements in northern West Bank
2006	January	Sharon incapacitated; Ehud Olmert succeeds him as acting prime minister; Hamas wins PLC elections; Ismail Haniya becomes PA prime minister in Gaza, while Mahmoud Abbas remains PA president in the West Bank; Olmert declares no negotiation with Hamas until it disarms and accepts Israel's existence and existing Israeli-PLO accords
	February	US rejects Palestinian election outcome and boycotts Hamas government; Quartet follows suit
	April	Olmert elected Israeli prime minister
	July-August	Major Israel-Hezbollah clashes in Lebanon
	September-October	Hamas-Fatah clashes in Gaza and West Bank
2007	June	Hamas forces take over Gaza; Israel imposes blockade
	November	Annapolis (Maryland) Conference: Bush, Olmert, and Abbas issue 'Joint Understanding'
2008	June	Israel and Hamas agree to a tentative, renewable sixty-day truce, arranged via Egyptian mediation
	June-July	Israel enters peace talks with Syria, sponsored by Turkey
	December	Israeli assault on Gaza
2009	January	Barack Obama assumes US presidency
	March	Binyamin Netanyahu becomes prime minister of Israel
	June	Barack Obama's speech at Cairo University, calling for Arab-Israeli peace based on the 2002 LAS peace plan and a halt to Israeli settlement-building
2010	December	Uprisings in Tunisia mark start of Arab Spring
2011	April	Obama declares US support for Palestinian-Israeli peace based on the 1967 borders; Netanyahu rejects Obama's conditions
	September	Obama blocks vote on UN Security Council measure calling for UN recognition of a Palestinian state; Netanyahu describes Obama's speech as 'heroic'

2012–14		Ongoing unsuccessful efforts by the Obama administration to achieve Palestinian–Israeli peace talks leading to a final settlement.
2012	June	Muslim Brotherhood candidate Muhammad al-Mursi elected President of Egypt. Seeks Hamas–PA reconciliation.
	August	General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi appointed Egyptian Minister of Defence.
2013	July	Muhammad al-Mursi ousted as Egyptian president by army
	November	Israeli–Hamas strife in Gaza
2014	June	Al-Sisi elected Egyptian president. Declares Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas terrorist organizations.
	July–August	New Gaza war destroys much of Gaza Strip infrastructure
2015	January	US Speaker of the House of Representatives John Boehner collaborates with Israel's ambassador to Washington to invite Netanyahu to speak to Congress, opposing possible agreement on Iran's nuclear capabilities without informing the White House in advance.
	March	Netanyahu reelected prime minister of Israel after disavowing support for a Palestinian state.

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- Robinson, Shira (2013) *Citizen Strangers: Palestinians and the Birth of Israel's Liberal Settler State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press)
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Expanded and updated, this is the basic study of Israel's attitudes and policies toward the Arab world.

Smith, C. D. (2016) *Palestine and the Arab–Israeli Conflict* (9th edn, Boston, MA: Bedford/St Martin's Press)

A comprehensive history.

Questions

1. How would you distinguish between the Palestinian–Israeli and Arab–Israeli conflicts? Have they always been and are they now interrelated?
2. How do the Palestinian Authority and Hamas differ in their goals? How have each been viewed by Israel and the international community?
3. What are the goals of Revisionist Zionism?
4. What is Security Council Resolution 242 and how is it interpreted?
5. How would you explain current regional Middle East conflicts, including the role, if any, that the Arab–Israeli conflict plays in these other disputes?

Note

1. Ari Shavit, 'The Big Freeze, Interview with Dov Weisglas', *Haaretz*, 8 October 2004. Weisglas, Sharon's chief aide, said that the Gaza withdrawal would put the peace process in 'formaldehyde'.