

# American Foreign Policy toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Strategic Transformations

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**ABSTRACT** *The shifts in U.S. foreign policy toward the Palestinian cause reveal the fact that this policy varies from one period to another, and from one president to another, and that its role and its impact on the conflict contribute greatly to the progress of the peace process. The region has witnessed increased tension since America made the Palestinian cause its second priority. Whether its involvement is active or not, the U.S. role remains strong and influential in achieving peace and spreading security and stability in the Middle East. The essay concludes with recommendations for concluding the long-standing conflict.*

## Introduction

**T**he U.S. has played an important role in settling the Arab-Israeli conflict. This role has been distinct and effective from the beginning of the conflict in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century until the establishment of Israel in 1948, and has continued to the present day. The U.S. has maximized its engagement in the recent period, especially after the events of September 11, during which America has exerted remarkable efforts to end the conflict, motivated by an understanding that this is the best way to achieve peace and stability in the Middle East.

Since the establishment of Israel, there has been a strategic shift in the U.S.'s role. This became crystal clear during the presidencies of George W. Bush and Barack Obama, during which this conflict was not a top priority on the agenda of decision makers. Instead, the American administration increased its emphasis on eliminating terrorism, and adapting the region to U.S. will by routing out the powerful countries. This strategy paved the way for the so-called "new Middle East project," which was launched by the administration of Pres-

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**Insight Turkey**  
Vol. 20 / No. 2 /  
2018, pp. 251-271

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powers which sought to play major roles in the region and threaten American and Western interests. This strategy is epitomized in the case of Iraq in the 1980s, when Israel launched a military strike targeting Iraq's nuclear program, although it was still peaceful.

The positions of most of the former U.S. presidents (Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Clinton) were largely aligned with that strategy. While a commitment to Israel's security has remained a fundamental principle throughout the decades, the techniques adopted by the presidents have been different. President Nixon may be taken as an example of the U.S. presidents' support of Israel; he expressly recognized that since the partition of the Palestinian lands, the U.S. has guaranteed Israel's security.<sup>1</sup> Nixon also noted that the U.S. was deeply committed to the existence of Israel, and that the U.S. and Israel relation was well-established. He added that Israel's security was a moral obligation that has not been violated by any U.S. president in the past, and that all the next U.S. presidents would be committed to ensuring Israel's security.<sup>2</sup>

In short, America considers Israel a strategic base for U.S. interests, and the mutual interests of the two countries are the secret behind America's support for Israel. As a military, civilizational and security base for the U.S., Israel is much cheaper to maintain than the 10 aircraft carriers that the U.S. would have had to build and send to the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea to protect American interests.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the U.S. strategy cannot be separated from Israel's in any way, as the elements of strategic planning for both countries are interconnected to a large degree. The U.S. believes that the safety and security of Israel guarantees the stability of the region and the protection of U.S. interests there.<sup>4</sup> With that in mind, the question arises about the nature of the shifts in U.S. foreign policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict. These shifts indicate the firmness of the U.S. position, despite the changes in administration, with respect to the Arab-Israeli conflict issues, particularly those related to refugees, Jerusalem, Israeli settlements, and the establishment of the Palestinian state.

Although there are many studies that deal with U.S. policies towards the Arab-Israeli conflict, the importance of this study is to shed light on the role of the American administrations toward the settlement of the conflict. In addition,

ident George W. Bush, and which focused on a wide area, including all the Arab countries in addition to Turkey, Israel, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, to promote political, economic and social reform. This project also supported the superiority of Israel as a strategic American tool, and as a deterrent to regional

it shows the change of this role and to what extent the U.S. seeks to maintain the status quo or to use its power to impose specific solutions on one or both of the conflicting parties.<sup>5</sup> This article will proceed by interpreting the shifts in U.S. policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict, based on a historical approach. In addition to the assumptions of neorealism, which believes that foreign policy is a product of complex models of interaction between internal and external factors, it assumes that the choices in the process of making foreign policy are influenced by perceptions and values inherent in the decision makers themselves.<sup>6</sup> Under this framework, this study is divided into four parts: first, from the establishment of the Israeli state until October 1973; second, the Camp David Accords; third, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the U.S.' control of the conflict; and fourth, the September 11 events and changing American priorities.

## **American Policies toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict**

The U.S.' policy toward the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict is of great importance to both parties because of its great influence in the conclusion of mutual peace agreements. Nevertheless, these agreements have failed to reach a comprehensive peace between the Palestinian and Israeli parties to date. This failure is due in part to the shifts in American policy, and in part to the U.S.' unconditional political, economic and military support for the Israeli practices towards the Palestinian people and its refusal to recognize the latter's legitimate right to establish an independent state on the 1967 borders. The U.S.' policies have raised many questions, especially regarding their stability and change from one administration to another. The U.S. administrations have exercised pressure, at times, on the Israeli government to make concessions to prevent the escalation of the conflict and to reach mutual understandings. But this pressure has had little influence due to Israel's ongoing violation of the U.S.-sponsored agreements, Israel's continuation of settlement building and its violation of the sacred Muslim shrines in Palestine.

In analyzing the American policies since the establishment of Israel until January 2017, it may be noted that the various American administrations have followed a strategic path which changes tactics but maintains a strategic vision of the conflict. This vision places Israel's security above all other considerations, as will be seen below.

### ***From the Establishment of the Israeli State until October 1973***

The U.S. presidents have consistently engaged in loose talk while their policies on the ground differ from their principles and policies towards the Arab-Israeli conflict. Before the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine, then President Wilson emphasized the right of all peoples to self-

Then U.S. President Jimmy Carter (C) acts as a witness to the signing of the Camp David Accords signed by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat (L) and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin (R) on March 26, 1979. CORBIS / Getty Images



determination and independence. He sent the King-Crane Commission to investigate facts in Palestine, and the Commission confirmed the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. However, the U.S. administration overlooked this right, while welcoming the idea of establishing a national homeland for the Jews in Palestine.<sup>7</sup>

This contradiction was reified by successive American administrations, which ignored or dismissed the reports issued by the Commission. The King-Crane Commission considered that the establishment of a national homeland for Jews in Palestine would be a flagrant violation of the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination.<sup>8</sup> Its final report recommended granting the Palestinians their right to self-determination without any mandate.<sup>9</sup> This report was not revealed at that time, since the U.S. was afraid that it would negatively affect the deliberations at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, given that the report explicitly referred to “the desire of the Palestinians for independence, [and] their opposition and hostility to the Zionist movement.”<sup>10</sup> The suppression of the report paved the way for the Balfour Declaration, which supported establishing a homeland for the Jews.<sup>11</sup>

The U.S. policy remained firm for two decades, as subsequent presidents Warren Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover all followed the same pol-

icy with regard to the Palestinian cause. Therefore, it can be emphasized that the U.S. commitment to the Zionist movement had actually begun by the end of WW II.<sup>12</sup>

The period between the First and Second World Wars may be seen as a time of U.S. support as opposed to

an effective commitment, as the U.S. supported the British role, which was compatible with the Zionist movement's position.<sup>13</sup> The U.S. commitment came into effect only after the Zionist movement exerted considerable pressure upon U.S. decision makers. Therefore, 1940 witnessed a shift of all forms of support from Britain to the U.S. for the Zionist movement. The U.S. not only replaced Britain,<sup>14</sup> it adopted the entire Zionist project in Palestine.<sup>15</sup> In his letter at a conference held by the American Zionists in 1944, then President Roosevelt confirmed his party's commitment to achieving the Zionist goals. Thus, he ignored the existence of a Palestinian nationalism and identity in his policy towards Palestine.<sup>16</sup>

During the early years of Israel's establishment, the U.S. strained every nerve to serve Israel, as it was hostile to Soviet expansion and a custodian of U.S. interests in the Middle East.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the U.S. administration expressed its desire for guardianship over Palestine from the United Nations (UN) in March 1948, so as to give the Zionist entity international legitimacy. However, the UN did not agree to a temporary guardianship, which is why the U.S. decided to support UN Resolution 181 –the "Partition Resolution."<sup>18</sup>

In fact, were it not for the U.S.' support for the Partition Resolution, the voting on this Resolution would not have occurred, as the delegates from Haiti, Siam (Thailand), Liberia and the Philippines opposed it. Nevertheless, the U.S. pressured these countries to vote in favor of the Resolution on November 29, 1947, which was followed by the declaration of the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.<sup>19</sup>

After the 1948 war, and because of the disasters that the Palestinian people faced in the Arab countries, the U.S. Department of State proposed continuing its efforts to get immediate donations for the Palestinian refugees from American relief organizations, and taking diplomatic actions to reach a peaceful settlement to the Palestine issue.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, all the efforts of the UN and others have failed to resolve the Palestinian cause.<sup>21</sup>

After the establishment of Israel, the U.S. was not concerned at all with the implementation of Resolution 181,<sup>22</sup> which provided for the establishment of an

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Arab state. This period witnessed many proposals by the American administrations to solve the most complex refugee problem in the Palestinian cause. The Palestinians were specifically seen at the time as refugees in need of resettlement, return, rehabilitation and reparations, so that the Arab-Israeli conflict could be resolved. In this vein, the U.S. could continue to form political alliances with conservative Arab States, such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia.<sup>23</sup> This behavior explains the continuous refusal of the Eisenhower Administration to recognize the political rights of the Palestinians, including their right to self-determination.<sup>24</sup>

During that period, the U.S. did not exert any concerted effort to resolve the Palestinian cause in any comprehensive way. After 1956, during which Israel, together with England and France, launched a war against Egypt, the U.S. made no attempt to broker an Arab-Israeli peace.<sup>25</sup> In retrospect, the Eisenhower Administration's potential to achieve a settlement was greater than that of any other president, as, by 1961, Israel was militarily and economically stronger, more populous than ever, and less willing to compromise.<sup>26</sup> The U.S.'s reticence was due to Israel's insistence on a firm policy which opposed any aspirations of the Palestinians, and which totally rejected their right to self-determination. Therefore, U.S. policy under Eisenhower was a continuation of the same policy of the previous administrations.<sup>27</sup>

The U.S. policy continued in this way during the 1960s, especially during the presidency of John F. Kennedy, who strengthened U.S. relations with Israel. He also launched the military sales program to Israel. Kennedy emphasized that Israel's friendship was not related to a certain party, and is instead a national commitment. During that time, the U.S. was keen on securing the Israeli presence in the region and preventing any Arab threat against it.<sup>28</sup> It can be said that the U.S. policy was biased toward Israel as a result of the influence of the Zionist organizations on the American administrations, which did not deliberately press Israel to find practical solutions to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The American relationship with Israel during this period became stronger and more positive. President Kennedy's entourage included a number of powerful people who advocated for Israeli interests.<sup>29</sup> The persisting prejudices of the U.S. administration towards Israel fueled conflict in the region to the extent that Israel began waging war against its neighboring Arab States and occupying a part of their territories.<sup>30</sup> The 1967 war created a new status quo in

the region, and the Israeli occupation of additional territories became a new bargaining point through which Israel could balance the long-standing Arab demand for amending the 1948 borders. At this point, the U.S. began to call for a comprehensive settlement and lasting peace for Israel, along with the amendment of the new 1967 borders. The position was announced by the Johnson Administration on June 19, 1967, and was later introduced in the UN as Security Council Resolution 242.<sup>31</sup> This resolution was accepted by the Israeli government, especially after President Johnson promised to encourage the resettlement of Arab refugees in territories where there were areas of opportunity.<sup>32</sup>

Under Johnson, the American-Israeli friendship flourished. Johnson was personally sympathetic with Israel, and surrounded himself with strong advocates calling for such a friendship, which reached such a point that both Israel's Ambassador, Avraham Harman, and the Deputy Minister, Efraim Elrom, had permission to enter the White House freely due to their personal friendship with the President.<sup>33</sup> This bias contributed to the failure of the U.S. to change its position in support of Israel after the June 1967 war.<sup>34</sup>

As soon as Nixon entered office in 1969, he sent a special envoy to the Middle East to study the conflict conditions. The real purpose of the visit was to make the concerned parties feel that change was coming. Nixon chose the former Governor of Pennsylvania, William Scranton, to lead the envoy. Scranton concluded that the U.S. policy should be "more balanced" in order to maintain U.S. national interests, especially since America was considered to be the only country that cared for Israel and its security.<sup>35</sup>

However, this approach was short-lived, as the Zionist lobby succeeded in pushing Nixon to support Israel, increase the amount of economic and military aid, and align America diplomatically with Israel in an unprecedented manner. A review of the use of the U.S. veto in the UN at this time indicates that the U.S. allocated it to protect Israel to such an extent that this veto became synonymous with protection of Israel.<sup>36</sup>

By fast tracking the most important features of the U.S. policy toward the Palestinian cause up until the war of October 1973, we can observe the following two points:

- U.S. policy towards the Palestinian cause before 1967 was implemented within the framework of its whole policy. This was governed by a perspective of the international conflict, and in line with American interests.
- This period saw no American attempts at a comprehensive settlement of all aspects of the international conflict. However, it did see intermittent and sporadic attempts at resolving certain aspects of the conflict that would ultimately serve its interests.

### ***The Camp David Accords and the Shifts in the U.S. Policy***

At the beginning of the 1970s, especially during the Presidency of Gerald Ford, relations with Israel became a bit lackluster due to Israel's intransigence and the derailment of the bids for peace made by Kissinger, then U.S. Secretary of State. This made President Ford angry, as, at that time, American interests were in conflict with Israel's. In 1975, Ford pressed the Israeli government, calling for a reassessment of U.S. policy. The U.S. administration stopped negotiations on financial and military aid to Israel. In addition, the President asked the Department of State and Department of Defense to look for an alternative to the U.S.-Israeli relations in the interest of U.S. policy, and to exert pressure on the Israeli government to accept the Sinai agreement.<sup>37</sup>

However, that attitude would soon change. U.S. policy returned to its bias towards Israel after signing the "Sinai agreement." The U.S. provided a range of gifts to Israel, starting with a promise of annual aid of \$2 billion, the right to access the latest American weapons, and meeting its oil needs. In addition to full coordination on diplomatic developments, the U.S. promised not to recognize or negotiate with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as long as the organization refused to recognize Israel's right to existence, and refused to accept UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338.<sup>38</sup>

The ideas at that time were that a comprehensive peace must be more than a termination of the state of war. The Arabs should accept not only the existence of Israel, but also the idea that peace must ultimately include normal relations among the countries, including trade and peaceful interaction among citizens. In return, peace would require Israel's withdrawal to the 1967 borders, with the possibility of minor amendments in the borders for Israel's security. Such measures might include the placement of some Israeli forces in Arab territories beyond Israel's political borders, and the establishment of demilitarized zones.<sup>39</sup>

President Carter did not differ from his predecessors. On the contrary, he began his electoral campaign with a program that strongly supported Israel and opposed the Palestinians. Throughout his campaign Carter repeated Kissinger's statement that "No negotiations would be made with the PLO until its recognition of UN Resolution 242 and Israel's right to existence." Carter had visited Israel in 1973 when he was governor of Georgia. As a politician, Christian and patron, he consistently expressed deep sympathy with and commitment to the Jewish state.<sup>40</sup>

The Carter Administration worked hard to pave the way for the integration of Israel into the region through an Arab-Israeli peace treaty, and facilitated the negotiations between Egypt and Israel that became known as the Camp David Accords. They included two "frameworks" –one for a peace treaty be-

tween Egypt and Israel, and the other for peace in the Middle East. Considering the way the “Framework for Peace” was developed, with its embedded ambiguities and a high level of uncertainty –notably without Palestinian representation– the agreement only led to an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty.

Although Carter claimed that the agreement included the application of Palestinian national rights, a careful analysis of the agreement contradicts this claim. None of the three parties at Camp David was willing to represent the Palestinian interests in a manner consistent with the Palestinian political realities. Thus, the “Framework for Peace” failed to directly address the rights of the Palestinians to self-determination.<sup>41</sup>

Carter suggested that there should be a homeland for the Palestinian refugees who had suffered for many years. He stated at a press conference that, “the establishment of a homeland for the Palestinians and the solution of the refugee problem are of paramount importance,” adding that it is crucial to find a solution to the Palestinian cause.<sup>42</sup> Carter recognized that the American efforts for peace must consider the involvement of the Palestinian people. But because of the Israeli intransigence on one hand and the pressures of Zionist organizations on the other, he could not implement his ideas and convictions practically.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, under Carter, U.S. policy entered a new dimension to solve the Palestinian cause at that time. Carter was the American leader closest to solving the conflict. Prior to his administration, the idea of establishing a Palestinian homeland had not been part of any official American project. However, the Geneva Conference in 1977 reached no conclusions or agreements on the conflict. Carter left office without making any clear progress on the Arab-Israeli track.

President Reagan came up with a somewhat different insight on the conflict. On September 1, 1982, during his speech after taking office, Reagan announced two basic principles: The U.S. neither supports Israel’s annexation of the occupied territories nor the establishment of a Palestinian state.<sup>44</sup> Reagan added that the U.S. would prefer to see the West Bank and Gaza in some kind of relation with Jordan. But that plan did not succeed because King Hussein refused to negotiate on behalf of the Palestinians and Israel did not agree to negotiate. Nonetheless, American policy continued on this course until the end of 1988.<sup>45</sup>



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In December 1988, U.S. Secretary of State George Schultz announced a major shift in U.S. policy, stating that the government would open a key dialogue with the PLO. The Organization's ambassador in Tunisia would lead this dialogue, after Yasser Arafat had agreed on the American conditions, including the recognition of UN Resolutions 242 and 338, and the renunciation of terrorism.<sup>46</sup> According to the Schultz Initiative, the Palestinian cause would be dealt with through negotiations between an Israeli delegation and a Palestinian-Jordanian delegation, as follows: (i) Holding an international conference in April 1988 to pave the way for negotiations involving Israel, Egypt, Syria, a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation and the five permanent members of the Security Council, (ii) Starting six month-negotiations for reaching a transitional period of autonomy for the West Bank and Gaza, including holding elections, (iii) Starting negotiations among the Arabs, Israel and the Jordanian-Palestinian delegation concerning the final status of the territories, and ending these negotiations within one year.<sup>47</sup>

This initiative was opposed by the Israelis despite the PLO's issuance of a statement expressing its approval of UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338, its acceptance of Israel's right to existence, and its declaration of renunciation of the use of violence.<sup>48</sup> In reality, the dialogue with the PLO was not substantially aimed at finding a just settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Rather it was an attempt to persuade the PLO to stop the intifada and abandon its claim that it was the only legitimate representative of the Palestinians.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, the period following the October 1973 War was one of the most influential periods for the U.S. in managing the Arab-Israeli conflict. However, the progress that was made in resolving the conflict was not obviously the result of a real American desire. Rather, it was a result of developments in the region, including the Egyptian victory in the October war, the outbreak of the Palestinian intifada and the difficulty of controlling it. This means that although there was a shift in U.S. policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict and a genuine desire to achieve peace in the region, it was clear that this was aimed at protecting Israel's interests, security, and existence, rather than a desire to achieve a



just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. This behavior was evident in the U.S. administration's retreat from the implementation of Reagan's plan, its pressure on the PLO to recognize Israel as a precondition for negotiations, and its refusal to establish a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza.

### ***The Collapse of the Soviet Union and the U.S.' Control of the Conflict***

By the time George H.W. Bush became President of the U.S., a new phase of the conflict had begun. The new administration not only had to deal with the problem of starting the dialogue, but it had to make the dialogue work. Therefore, the beginning of the Bush presidency witnessed dramatic shifts worldwide, during which the collapse of Soviet power left the U.S. as the only player in the international arena. In addition, the U.S. waged a war against Iraq, during which Iraq's military power was weakened. The U.S. believed that the time had come to start solving the Palestinian conflict. Hence, President Bush announced his initiative to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict in a press statement on March 6, 1991.<sup>50</sup>

The U.S. began to call for an international peace conference.<sup>51</sup> Then Secretary of State, James Baker, undertook shuttle rounds to the Middle East, during which he invited all the parties of the conflict, including the Palestinians as a part of the participating Palestinian-Jordanian delegation, to the negotiating table in Madrid on October 30, 1991. The objective of the conference, as stated in the letter of invitation, was to achieve a comprehensive, lasting and

Then U.S. President, Bill Clinton, speaks after the signing of the Oslo Accords, which was signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in September 13, 1993.

MARK REINSTEIN / Getty Images

## The post 9/11 regional arena was primed more than ever for transformations in favor of Israel, and towards greater Western control over the Arab community

approval of the PLO in Madrid on March 12, 1991. The Palestinians set out the principles according to which they were prepared to participate in the peace process. These included the recognition of the PLO as the legitimate and sole representative of the Palestinian people, the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza with its capital in East Jerusalem, and the UN Resolutions which were the basis of the peace process. They also agreed to hold an international conference as a mechanism to push the peace process forward. However, these principles collided with the Israeli position, which refused to respond to them. Consequently, no final agreement was reached during these negotiations.

When President Bill Clinton<sup>53</sup> was elected to the presidency in 1993, there was a shift in conflict management due to the opening of secret channels between the PLO and Israel under the auspices of the U.S. These channels had begun in 1991, and bore fruit in August 1993, where the Declaration of Principles, i.e. the Oslo Accords, were agreed upon. These accords resulted in the declaration of principles on the interim self-government arrangements and an agreement on the formation of the Palestinian Authority. This declaration included some aspects of how Israel would redeploy, hold Palestinian elections, determine the number of Palestinian Authority soldiers, and similar matters.<sup>54</sup>

Clinton recognized the importance of settling the Palestinian cause, because it was a source of tension in the region.<sup>55</sup> The U.S. policy at that time was accepted by the Palestinian Authority represented by Arafat. The Clinton Administration differed from its predecessor, and Clinton's visit to the Palestinian territories in 1996 was a positive sign of the shift in U.S. foreign policy. It indicated that the U.S. was pursuing a new policy toward the Palestinians with the intention of reaching a solution for the Palestinian cause. During that time, the U.S. sponsored direct bilateral negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis to implement the Oslo Accords. Israel, however, tried to eliminate the Accords, and then refused to implement what had been agreed upon. Despite the progress that had been made, the U.S. could not pressure Israel effectively. As a result, the U.S. proved ineffectual in implementing the Oslo Accords, which required the resolution of all final status issues including Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements, borders, relations, cooperation with other

just peace settlement through direct negotiations, taking two tracks, the first one between Israel and the Arab States, and the second between Israel and the Palestinians.<sup>52</sup>

The Palestinian position on the peace process was presented by the negotiating delegation with the ap-

neighbors and other issues of mutual interest, which would ultimately lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state. The process remained at a stalemate.<sup>56</sup>

Therefore, Clinton decided to invite the parties to final status negotiations at Camp David II in 2000. During these negotiations, the U.S. exerted great pressure on the Palestinian side to accept the summit conditions.<sup>57</sup> However, Palestinian leader Arafat refused to sign the Accords because they did not meet the aspirations of the Palestinians. Clinton's term ended, with little or no results of what had been agreed upon in Oslo.<sup>58</sup>

### ***The September 11 Events and Changing American Priorities***

At the beginning of the millennium, global and regional events occurred that formed a crossroads for U.S. policy. One of these was September 11, which astonished not only the U.S., but also the world at large. As a response, the U.S. launched war on Afghanistan, and later on Iraq, claiming that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. Although the international community opposed the war on Iraq, those developments were consistent with U.S. policy and Israeli ambitions in the Middle East.

From this point of view, the convergence of interests and strategies between the U.S. and Israel in relation to the various conditions of the region post 9/11 have become more profound and comprehensive than ever before. It is possible to say that the post 9/11 regional arena was primed more than ever for transformations in favor of Israel, and towards greater Western control over the Arab community. The U.S. behavior aimed at undermining the Arabs' unity by adopting policies of normalization, especially in economic fields. That behavior also aimed at eliminating the regimes that sought to acquire weapons of mass destruction, support terrorism, and threaten Israel's security and U.S. interests. Removing Iraq from the sphere of Arab influence was part of this system.<sup>59</sup>

Amid these changes, the U.S. administration saw that the regional and international conditions were right for imposing its ideas and resolutions on the issues of conflict in the Middle East. These conditions ensured that America could dominate the oil wells and secure Israel as well as its own strategic interests. During this era (2001-2008), the U.S. policies aimed at pushing the Arab countries into many negotiations with Israel, based on the process of normalization in all fields. Therefore, this process covered future economic and security arrangements, arms control, regional security, economic cooperation, water, and environmental and refugees issues.<sup>60</sup>

The American administration's position towards the Palestinian cause witnessed a new development as George W. Bush's Administration sought to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. For the first time, a U.S. administration declared

U.S. President Donald Trump's son-in-law and chief Middle East adviser, Jared Kushner, meets with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu at his office in Jerusalem on June 21, 2017.

AMOS BEN GERSHOM / GPO / AA Photo



that resolving the conflict would require the establishment of a sovereign and geographically coherent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as the capital of both states.<sup>61</sup>

Bush's vision was to establish a Palestinian state that was territorial, sovereign and governed by democratic institutions. The refugees would be resettled in Palestine, not in Israel, based on the outcome of the final status negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis.<sup>62</sup> In this context, Bush announced the "Roadmap" plan, through which he wanted the U.S. to exert its influence with the help of mediators to establish a small, neutral and demilitarized Palestinian state.<sup>63</sup>

To achieve that vision, the Bush Administration sought to further the peace process by hosting the Annapolis Peace Conference on November 27, 2007, with the participation of 52 countries and organizations, including 16 Arab states. Annapolis was not a new settlement project, but it contributed to advancing the peace process by combining two processes in one track: a recourse to the Roadmap as the basic reference, and the implementation of its stages in the logical order set by this document, which included the initiation of final status negotiations with no timeline for the transition from one phase to another.<sup>64</sup>

The Bush era ended with the Palestinian people still dreaming of establishing a Palestinian state without any hope of achieving it in practice. Barack Obama's election coincided with the entry of the Palestinian cause into a cycle of inaction. This made Obama unsure of where to start addressing this conflict. The administration puzzled over the need for renewal, which would mean ignoring the previous U.S. policy adopted by Bush, and the inevitability of adhering to the American principles towards the peace process. These principles were spearheaded by the commitment to protecting Israel's security and the two-state solution, which was leading to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Ultimately, Obama made up his mind to follow the same approach that Bush had taken with some minor changes in form, not content.



## **The U.S. administration used Israel to protect oil wells in emergency situations, and as a strategic bridge between the African and Asian regions**

The Obama Administration moved forward with a vision based on collective diplomacy, diversifying political and military options, building alliances and working with friends and regional and international allies. That approach aimed to alleviate the field, political, and economic burdens on an administration overburdened with many responsibilities and commitments. Obama called for working with allies not only in the Palestinian-Israeli case, i.e. the peace process and the war on Gaza, but also in other critical cases such as Syria and Iraq, fighting ISIS, Afghanistan, and Iran's nuclear weapons.

The new reality set by the September 11 attacks made the U.S. reconsider its national security strategy in terms of protecting its internal and external security. This strategy has made it difficult to prevent U.S. diplomatic and military intervention in the domestic issues of the Middle East countries.<sup>65</sup> This policy has also kept the Palestinian cause out of its priorities. Nevertheless, the Palestinian cause has remained a part of the parameters of the new U.S. policy.

In the post 9/11 period, Israel succeeded in bringing the Palestinian resistance to the core of the international campaign against terrorism. From Israel's perspective, al-Qaeda's actions in New York were the same as the actions taken by the Palestinian Authority and Hamas in Tel Aviv. From this perspective, the threat to the security of the U.S. was the same as the threat to the security of Israel.<sup>66</sup>

In fact, the actions after September 11, namely the U.S. war against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the overthrow of this regime, the military invasion of Iraq and the overthrow of its political regime, and the beginning of encroachment on Iran to besiege and pressure it under the pretext of contain-

## The U.S. administrations, with their various affiliations and political orientations, have failed to impose practical solutions on the Arab-Israeli conflict

its easy victory in Iraq and enhance its international status as a country capable of solving intractable international problems. There was no doubt that the Arab-Israeli conflict was at the forefront of the intractable international problems. The U.S. used its great weight and ability to pressure the Israeli state to agree to the establishment of a Palestinian state by the end of 2005, in accordance with the provisions of the Roadmap. The warring parties passed over various and gradual stages to reach a comprehensive and final solution for the conflict.<sup>68</sup>

Although the right wing U.S. administration had been replaced with a democratic one, Israel was still an advanced U.S. military base in the Arab world according to U.S. strategic thinking. The U.S. administration used Israel to protect oil wells in emergency situations, and as a strategic bridge between the African and Asian regions. Despite Obama's statements at the beginning of his first term on the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, his administration did not actually do anything for the Palestinian people towards settling the conflict on the ground.<sup>69</sup> Obama's policies showed that he would not emerge from the steadfast American position towards Israel. In his speech before the AIPAC (The American Israel Public Affairs Committee) in 2008, Obama emphasized his firm commitment to Israel's security as the most powerful ally of the U.S. in the Middle East and the only democratic state in the region. Therefore, Obama's position indicated that he was consistent with the dominant American vision of maintaining Israel as an important strategic ally.<sup>70</sup>

The American view of the nature of the conflict under Obama, then, was only a form of stretching its interests through "conflict management." The Obama Administration considered the two-state solution a vital necessity dictated by its political and economic interests. At first, Obama sought to manage the conflict, hoping to resolve it,<sup>71</sup> but at the end, his policies confirmed that he was a part of the American capitalist and military establishment and not a part of the change he promised to make.

From this perspective, the focus of the U.S. policymakers towards the peace process was, and is, centered on Israel. America has maintained its strong relations with Israel and sought to deepen them, in part by meeting all of Israel's

ing nuclear power, reveal the era of the American Empire. This empire seeks to impose its will on the entire world, and in particular on the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>67</sup>

The significance of this American attitude was clear, and emblematic of a desire to reap the rewards of

security requirements and removing the barriers that threaten Israel's security. These concessions include the formation of the Palestinian armed forces, full control over Palestinian airspace, and control of entry and exit points from the Palestinian territories.

## **Conclusion: What Now?**

As we have seen, the U.S. policy to settle the conflict has not changed through the various administrations. In addition, the quest to find a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict has fallen within the balance of power which emphasizes harmony between America and Israel. Efforts to resolve the conflict have compromised on details to avoid arriving at a consensus on the security and economic aspects of the future of the Palestinian state. This leads to the conclusion that the U.S. position regarding the two-state solution was a deceit, aimed at aborting the national rights of the Palestinian people and achieving Israel's security by replacing the principle of the peace process with the staying of Palestinian power.<sup>72</sup>

It is possible to say that the U.S. administrations, with their various affiliations and political orientations, have failed to impose practical solutions on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Most of the changes and shifts in the U.S. positions have functioned in an ad hoc way to preserve the peace process and prevent the countries of the region from engaging in wars and bitter conflicts. Therefore, we can say that the U.S. has adopted a series of programs to provide urgent economic and humanitarian relief for the Palestinians, without any political regard for their cause.<sup>73</sup> The security and protection of Israel were the main objectives of the U.S. policy, whereas the peace process and the establishment of a Palestinian state were a secondary priority at best.

Indeed, the recent decisions made by President Trump in November 2017 reflect this continuing commitment, starting with his refusal to renew the license of the PLO office in Washington, only hours after threatening to close the office unless the PLO drops its efforts to file suits against Israel before the International Criminal Tribunal, and enters into peace negotiations with Israel.

In addition, Trump officially recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in a historic resolution that turned the page on decades of American policy and revealed complete indifference towards the Arab and Islamic reactions, whether official or popular. Trump's statement has provoked a new wave of anger among the Arab and Islamic peoples in Palestine, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco and most other Arab countries, as well as Turkey, Pakistan and other Muslim countries, which rejected Trump's declaration. These countries are expected to rise up if the U.S. embassy is actually relocated to Jerusalem.

## Trump continues to assert the U.S. bias towards Israel, although such a rash decision and position could destroy the peace process, and with it, the American role in the Middle East

In addition, the declaration of what is known as the “deal of the century,” aims at the complete elimination of the Palestinian cause and the declaration of Israel’s control over all the Islamic sacred sites in the West Bank in return for the declaration of a contiguous Palestinian state. Trump continues to assert the U.S. bias towards Israel, although such a rash decision and position could destroy the peace process, and with it, the American role in the Middle East.

Therefore, the restoration of the U.S.’s role in settling the Arab-Israeli conflict will require intensive efforts to achieve a genuine and just settlement of the conflict. Any comprehensive settlement must be accepted by the Arab peoples and governments not only to preserve their status and interests in the Middle East, but also to regain the confidence that they have lost over the past two decades.

In order to achieve this, it is necessary to deal impartially with the settlement of the conflict and not to bow to the pressures imposed by the Zionist lobby on the decision makers in the U.S., whether in Congress or the executive branch, and to adopt choices that balance Israel’s interests with those of the Arab countries.

The Arab countries must align their positions towards the Palestinian cause and sing a different tune regarding the American interests in the region. They must also put pressure on the U.S. through their leverage, especially oil, to find a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict in general and the Palestinian cause in particular. ■

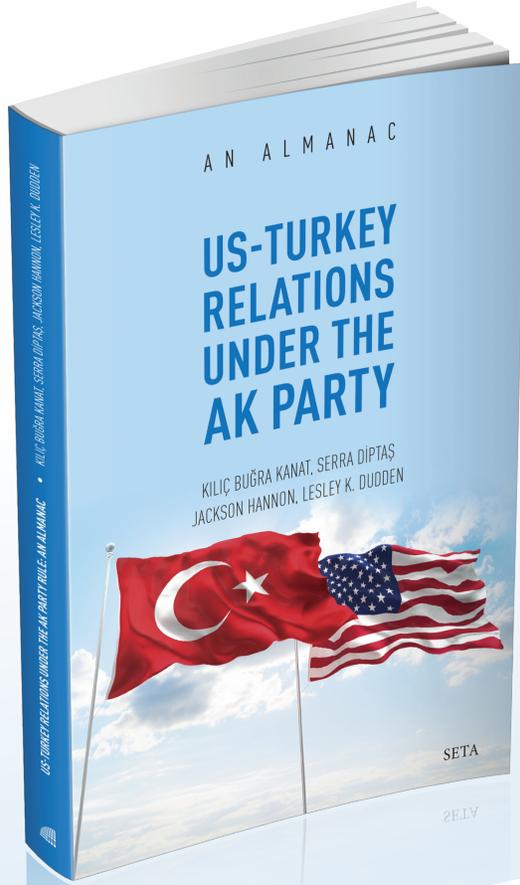
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## US-Turkey Relations Under the AK Party

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*This almanac provides the synopsis of bilateral relations between the US and Turkey during the past fifteen years of AK Party rule in Turkey, starting with the March 1st crisis. During this period, AK Party governments have engaged with different US administrations headed by the presidents from different political parties (Bush, Obama and Trump) and different party majorities in the US Congress.*