

THE UNITED STATES AND THE ROAD TO PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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ABSTRACT

This paper was designed to explain why the Middle East conflict has remained resolution resistant, despite the determined efforts of the United States to end the crisis. Our major aim was to use a new theory to explain an old conflict. We anchored the study on the theory of intractable conflict which revealed that certain conflicts such as the Middle East conflict are endless, hopeless, deep rooted, enduring and therefore impossible to resolve. The study further revealed that apart from bilateral and multilateral efforts, the United States was behind some of the best strategies to end the conflict such as the Rogers plan of 1969, the Jarring Mission of 1970, Camp David Accords of 1978, the Madrid Conference of 1991 and the Oslo Conference of 1993 among others. The paper argues that since the conflict can never be resolved, the only road to peace in the Middle East is for the United States to pursue the policy of power parity between the Arab States and the State of Israel. Our argument is that even after the creation of the Palestinian state, if the Arab States have the upper hand in the military equation, their collective attack on the state of Israel will become inevitable.

INTRODUCTION

How can we explain the persistence of the Israeli – Palestinian conflict despite more than quarter century efforts of the United States to resolve it? Put differently, is there any relationship between the inherent nature of the conflict and its inability to respond to treatment? More importantly what specific strategies has the United States adopted to resolve this conflict and why did they fail? Finally what should be done by the United States to ensure peaceful coexistence between and among the contending stakeholders in the endemic conflict?

These questions have been necessitated by three interrelated reason. First, recent studies have effectively confirmed that certain conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are intractable and therefore, impossible to

resolve (Burgese and Burgese, 2005, Maisse, 2005, Jameson 2005). As Kriesberg (2002) observed, intractable conflicts are those conflicts that are doing substantial harm, yet, the parties seem unable to extricate themselves, either alone or with other side's help. These conflicts are paradoxical, as they cause disputants to destroy themselves and the things they value in an effort to destroy others. In most cases, these conflicts are endless, hopeless, destructive, deep-rooted, resolution resistant, intransigent, identity based, complex, malignant and enduring. The central question is, how can this intractable theory of conflict help us to adequately understand the nature, process and strategies of conflict management in the Middle East?

The second reason is perhaps more important. For a quarter of a century, the consequences of Arab-Israeli conflict have been felt in virtually every nation of the world. As Onuoha (2004) noted, more than 80 percent of all the terrorist groups in the world derive their support from or are formed in the Middle East. While the Palestinian liberation organization and HAMAS have been reining terror on the Israelis to protest their domination, Osama Bin Laden used the opportunity to mobilize the entire Arab world against the United States. Consequently; the search for peace and security in the Middle East has been the main concern of most nation states, especially, the United States of America. Over the years, the United States determined efforts to end the crisis have failed due to mutual distrust, non-recognitions complicated tangle of interests, and the continued struggle for self-determination.

Finally, apart from the efforts of the United States and other countries, the United Nations has been in the league vanguards seeking the end of the Middle East conflict. For instance, just two years after its formation, the United Nations adopted the famous resolution 181, which called for the partition of Palestine into two states, one for the Arabs and the other for the Jews. Since then, other resolutions have been passed such as resolution 212, 338, and 1402 among others. Despite these efforts, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has remained the most controversial, intractable and most expensive conflict in the contemporary international relations.

This study has been designed to achieve three specific objectives, namely to apply the intractable conflict theory to the explanation of Israeli-Palestinian crises. Secondly, to critically examine the strategies so far adopted by the United States to resolve the conflict. Finally, to map out the road to peace in the Middle East.

To achieve the above stated objectives, the study has been partitioned into four sections. Section one, examines the theoretical framework for understanding the Middle East conflicts. Section two x-rays the genesis of the conflict. In section three, we critically analyzed the United States diplomacy and the road to peace in the Middle-East. We summarized and concluded in section four.

nation controls the piece of land, the other will not. While sharing is possible in theory, contending sides usually regard compromise as a loss. This is especially true in societies, such as the Middle East, where natural fear and hatred is so ingrained that opposing groups cannot imagine living with or working cooperatively with the other side. Instead, they are often willing to take whatever means necessary to ensure group survival and protect their way of life.

The complexity of the Middle East conflict will become clearer as the demands of the numerous actors or stakeholders are analysed. To resolve the Middle East crises, the United States made a proposal with the following provisions;

- ❖ No peace can be achieved without the Palestinians.
- ❖ The Palestinian representatives are the PLO.
- ❖ A new state should be set up in the West Bank and Gaza to provide a homeland for the stateless Palestinians. This proposal was rejected.

Twenty years after it was rejected by the Arabs, a modified partition scheme for Palestine has been reintroduced to satisfy in part the aspirations of the "have nots" – the Palestinians.

Those who advocate a homeland for the Palestinians do this for a variety of political reasons. They hope the plan will fulfill the wishes of most Palestinians who would have, for the first time, a say in their own political fate. They believe that this can be achieved without harming Israel's security or undermining the pro-western Jordanian Monarchy. They seem to minimize both the influence of those Palestinians who oppose the idea and the possible strategic danger that such a homeland might pose. Let us examine how intractable the conflict is, by analyzing the contradicting positions of each actor.

Israel's Position: Israel's contention is that this future state would necessarily become uncontrollable, hostile, turn into Soviet base and harm the interest of Israel, Jordan and the United States.

The Arab Countries Attitude: To the Arab states, the creation of the new proposed state is a major component of the new Arab strategy of regaining occupied Arab territories by stages. The idea is to cut Israel back to a more vulnerable size. Thus, with the exception of Jordan, all the Arab countries basically want the state, although they differ over the tactics for achieving it.

The Palestinian Position: There is no agreement among the Palestinians on the question of homeland. Some support the scheme as a solution to their predicament – remembering where extreme stands led them in the past. Others see it as the first step on the road to achieve the final goal – a secular democratic state covering all Palestine. Both groups find it difficult to come

Palestine was a part refused the request, various alternative locations such as Uganda, Australia and Latin America were suggested.

During the First World War, British officials promised the Arabs independence in exchange for their support against Turkey. The 1916 Anglo-French (Sykes-Picot) Agreement broke this promise and the region was divided into spheres of influence between France and Britain. Meanwhile, influential Jews continued to campaign for homeland and succeeded with the Balfour Declaration of 1917 which states that Britain would:

...view with favour the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people. It being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine (Europe Publications).

The 1919 King – Crane commission appointed by President Wilson of the united states to determine who should administer the Palestinian mandate also took note of the declaration, and stated that a national homeland for the Jewish people was not equivalent to turning Palestine into a Jewish state.

In 1920, the league of Nations gave Britain the Palestine mandate with the proviso, under Article four that, an appropriate Jewish Agency be established to advise and co-operate, in matters affecting the Jewish national home and to take part in the Development of the country. At the time in question, the Arabs owned 98 percent of the land and constituted 92 percent of the population.

The persecution of the Jews particularly in Germany and across Western and Eastern Europe, led to mass illegal migration to Palestine. In 1942, an extraordinary Zionist conference in New York urged that the gates of Palestine be opened and called for the establishment of Jewish commonwealth.

After the war, Britain unable to deal with the situation referred the problem to the United Nations that had replaced the League of Nations. The report of a special UN commission proposed two plans. The majority plan proposed two states, one for the Jews and one for the Arabs, with economic union. A minority plan advocated for a federal state. In 1947, the General Assembly adopted the majority plan by 33 votes to 13 with 20 abstentions (Sodipo, 2005). This proposal divided the mandate territory into six parts, three of which comprising 56 percent of the land became Israel, while three with the enclave of Jaffa, comprising 43 percent, were assigned to Arab Palestine.

It is important to note that when the United Nations took up the question of Palestine, President Harry Truman explicitly said the United States should not use threats or improper pressure of any kind on other delegations. Some pressure was nevertheless exerted and the United States played a key role in securing support for the partition resolution. U.S.

offensive was a response to signs that the Arab countries were preparing to invade Israel again. The attacks were spectacularly successful. Israel conquered the Golan Heights from Syria, the Sinai peninsular and Gaza strip from Egypt and the west bank and east Jerusalem from Jordan (Gilbert, 1998). The United States and Soviet Union immediately pushed resolution 242 through the United Nations Security Council, calling for Israel to withdraw from "territories occupied in the recent conflict" (Surret, 2000).

Since then, Israel has embarked on a policy of what has been termed "creating facts on the ground", i.e. building Jewish settlements in the occupied territories. These now number about 200 with 370,000 settlers of which about 170,000 are in Jerusalem.

In the aftermath of the 1967 war, exiled Palestinians began organizing themselves into resistance groups, led by Arafat and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Since then, the PLO has been receiving assistance and encouragements from many countries and organizations including Egypt, Iran, Iraq among others.

In 1987, Israel's image suffered another blow, when a grassroots rebellion began among Palestinians in the west bank and Gaza. What became known as the Intifada grew out of the Palestinians anger at what they regarded as unfair Israel policies in the occupied territories? The revolt was organized and carried out by young adults and children, who harassed the Israeli army and police mostly by throwing stones at them. The Israelis found it impossible to contain the unrest and resorted to more violent methods to put down the revolt. This situation attracted more sympathy for the Palestinians.

After several efforts, the United States made possible for Arafat and the Israelis to start secret negotiation in Madrid. Real progress was not made until both sides began meeting secretly in February 1993 in Oslo Norway, outside the media spotlight, the two delegations agreed to an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the city of Jericho in the west Bank, giving the control of these areas to Arafat and the PLO. The final status of the remaining occupied territories was to be decided in talks over the next five years.

In September 1993, Arafat and Rabin signed the deal in Washington and for the first time, an Israeli leader and his Palestine counterpart shook hands in public in the white House Rose Garden. The following year, Arafat returned to the occupied territories after 27 years in exile and established the Palestinian authority. Since Arafat took over the occupied territories, series of negotiations have been going on between the two contending parties.

Despite the efforts so far made, the four most difficult issues that have made the endemic conflict intractable are:

- ❖ The status of Jerusalem
- ❖ Israeli settlements in occupied territories
- ❖ The right of return for Palestinian refugees, and
- ❖ Final borders of a Palestinian state.

apparently irresolvable puzzle. Each president sought a resolution of the intractable ARAB-Israeli dispute and each failed. The central question is what has been the strategies adopted by the United States towards the resolution of the Israeli-Arab crisis and why did they fail? Let us briefly examine some of the efforts so far made to resolve the conflicts. The first was the Versailles peace conference. This was followed by the Rogers plan, Gunner Jarring mission, the Geneva conference, the Camp David conference, the Madrid conference and the Oslo conference among others.

The Versailles Peace Conference: The United States has been involved in Palestinian – Israeli affairs. Since 1919, when President Wilson asked the Allies at the Versailles peace conference to send the King-Crane fact-finding mission to the area. The mission's report had proposed a radical change in the Zionist programme in favour of the Palestinians. However, in the 1940s, the United States supported Jewish migration into Palestine.

Eisenhower was the first United States president to exert pressure on Israel. After the Suez war, he demanded in a televised speech on February 20, 1957, that Israel should withdraw from the territories it occupied (Sinai and the Gaza strip), or it would be subjected to sanctions.

American policy on the Arab-Israeli conflict began to shift in the middle of the 1960s, under the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson, who had previously led the Jewish lobby in congress. It entailed financial and military aid, strategic co-operation and America's vetoes in the UN Security Council in support of Israel.

The Rogers Plan and Jarring Mission: On December 9, 1969, the United States secretary of state, William Rogers announced a two track settlement plan: an Israeli-Egyptian element involving Israeli withdrawal from Sinai, demilitarized zones and true peace between the two countries; and an Israeli-Jordanian one, involving Israeli withdrawal from the west Bank. Israel rejected the plan because of the Israeli-Jordanian element, while Egypt accepted it as a basis for negotiations. On 19 June 1970, Rogers put forward a second plan to halt the dangerous drift. This plan proposed a three-month cease-fire, the acceptance by all the parties of UN Resolution 242 and the resumption of Jarring mission. It will be recalled that the UN secretary General had designated the Swedish Ambassador, Dr. Gunnar Jarring to proceed to the Middle East as a mediator. Jarring's first mission in 1968 failed due to Israel's refusal to withdraw fully from the occupied territories.

On the anniversary of the 1952 Egyptian revolution in July 23, 1970, Gamal Abdel Nasser announced his acceptance of the Rogers plan; three days later, Jordan followed suit. On August 1, Israel accepted the second Rogers plan, and Jarring resumed his mediation on September 6. However, the Palestinians rejected the Rogers plan and resolution 242, since they felt that they ignored the existence of the Palestinian people and its national rights.

Two serious events caused the Rogers plan to fail, namely, the Jordano-palestinina war of September 15-27, 1970, and the death of Gamal Abdel Nasser on September 28 of the same year (Udeagwu, 2002). Nasser had earlier adopted two options; namely the military option (Grante plan) and the political option (Rogers plan). The period between Nasser's death and the October 1973 war was one of "neither war nor peace" (Massalha, 1994).

Jarring finally abandoned his mission in 1972 after several fruitless attempts at settling the Arab-Israeli conflict. The United Nations consequently failed to secure the implementation of resolution 242 on Israeli withdrawal from Arab territories occupied in 1967.

The Geneva Conference: After the demise of the Rogers plan and Jarring mission, the new United States secretary of state, Henry Kissinger took up the Middle East question and advocated a policy of stalemate in order to neutralize the Soviet Union in the region. As Udeagwu (2002) noted, many events ensued leading to the adoption of the Security Council resolution 338 on October 22, 1973 which was originally a joint US-Soviet text. The resolution;

- ❖ Calls upon all parties to the present fighting to cease all fighting and terminate all military activity immediately, no later than 12 hours after the movement of the adoption of this decision, in the positions they now occupy;
- ❖ Calls upon the parties concerned to start immediately after the cease-fire the implementation of Security Council resolution 242 (1967) in all of its parts.
- ❖ Decides that, immediately, and concurrently with the cease-fire, negotiations shall start between the parties concerned, under appropriate auspices, aimed at establishing a just and durable peace in the Middle East.

Resolution 338 was immediately accepted by Egypt, followed by Syria and Israel. Kissinger went to the Middle East to prepare the Geneva Convention in order to promote the implementation of the resolution. The conference opened in Geneva on December 21, 1973, under the auspices of the United States and the Soviet Union. Following the Geneva conference, agreements were signed on January 18, 1974 by Egypt and Israel for the disengagement of their forces along the Suez Canal front on one hand, and between Israel and Syria on the other.

As second Egyptian-Israeli disengagement agreement was signed on September 4, 1974 after Israel had received a set of American commitments in return. These incentives include military and economic assistance, oil, diplomatic support, co-ordination on the issue of the Geneva conference to ensure that the negotiations were conducted on bilateral basis, a refusal to negotiate with or recognize the Palestinian liberation organization (PLO) so long as it did not recognize Israel's right to exist and refused to accept

resolution 242 and 338, and the rejection of the Palestinian participation at the Geneva conference. These Israeli conditions, accepted by the United States, effectively blocked the peace process which had been set in motion in Geneva.

The Camp David Conference: A merican foreign policy took a new turn after the failure of the Geneva conference when President Carter invited the Israeli prime minister, Menachem. Begin, and the Egyptian president, Anwar Sadat, to participate in a summit at the United States presidential resort, camp David. The summit lasted from September 5 to 7, 1978 with Carter playing the main role as intermediary. On the basis of resolution 242, the three leaders adopted a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Among its successes was a separate peace treaty between Egypt and Israel which enabled Egypt to recover the Sinai peninsular while Israel obtained full diplomatic recognition from Egypt. This Israeli-Egyptian treaty was signed on March 26, 1979. The negotiations on Palestinian autonomy or more precisely the modalities for establishing the elected self-governing authority in the west bank and Gaza, began on Monday 25, 1979.

However, certain misinterpretations marred the Camp David Accords. For instance, Israel understood the accords to mean the "Israeli military authority would remain the source of any authority devolved to the administrative council". By that interpretation, land and water resources, security and public order would remain under Israel's control, while negotiations continue. Egypt rejected Israel's claims, while putting forward its interpretation that autonomy was a transitional phase to ensure transfer of power to the Palestinians as a step towards sovereign independence (Lauren, 1991).

On July 30, 1980, Israel annexed east Jerusalem. President Sadat responded by suspending the talks on Palestinian autonomy, after eight negotiation sessions. The Palestinians also rejected all the provision in the accord pertaining to autonomy. The Palestinians argued that these accords did not bind them, since they were not party to them. Baron (1984) explained the issues in the following words:

As was the case sixty years earlier with the Balfour Declaration, the Palestinians were confronted with decisions which would determine their destiny without their being consulted and without their being given the chance to decide freely on their future... The Camp David Accords not only afford them merely a secondary role, but perhaps more seriously, divide them into categories, each of which is promised potentially a different solution. There are those from the west bank and Gaza; those of 1984, the refugees; and lastly, those from east Jerusalem, who are completely

the military option against Israel and made peace possible. The third factor was the strategy of open-mindedness and unilateral concessions pursued by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) since 1988, in line with the realistic objective of the intifada.

The United States presented the parties at the Madrid conference with a *fait accompli* by proposing Washington as the place and December 4, 1991, as the date for the second phase of the peace conference. However, the second round of the bilateral negotiations of peace conference, lasting December 10-18 1991, became deadlocked. With the emergence of president bill Clinton the peace process started again.

The Oslo Conference, September 1993: After secret negotiations at Oslo, Norway, Israel and the PLO signed a mutual recognition agreement with the PLO recognizing Israel's right to exist and Israel recognizing the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. More importantly, Israel promised to withdraw from the Gaza strip and West BANK CITY OF Jericho and allow limited Palestinian self-rule. The agreement sets a five-year deadline for additional withdrawals and for a "final-status" agreement on issues such as borders, Jewish settlements, and the return of Palestinian refugees, Palestinian statehood, and the status of Jerusalem.

The OSLO negotiations culminated in the drafting of two letters of recognition at the Hoel Bristol in Paris, in the presence of Norwegian Foreign Minister Holst. In a historic gesture, Yasser Arafat appended his signature to the document recognizing the state of Israel in Tunis on September 9, 1993.

The Washington agreement of 1993, which followed the Oslo agreement, stipulated the following calendar (Table 1). According to the time table for the implementation of the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of principles and self-government, the PLO and Israel agreed that the Palestinian liberation Army – renamed the High Committee for Palestinian national security- would be responsible for law and order in Jericho and Gaza after the Israeli army had withdrawn.

In general, the agreement provoked enthusiasm in the west, satisfaction in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe, reticence in Israel, a feeling of acquiescence among the Palestinians and measured support in the rest of the Arab world.

This journey to harmonious co-existence was however threatened when a Jewish settler opened fire with an assault rifle inside a Hebron Mosque. HAMAS responded with suicide bombings. Despite this development Israel and the PLO implemented the Oslo agreement. Subsequently, the PLO leader, Yasser Arafat moved to Gaza to head the new Palestinian authority administration. When Colin Powel took over as the secretary of state, he embarked on a shuttle diplomacy to promote the peace process. For instance, on April 12, 2002, Powel went to the region in search of peace.

Soviet Union. Israel must provide these immigrants shelter, food and employment. The task is even more challenging when it comes to absorbing Jews from relatively underdeveloped countries like Ethiopia, who often must be taught everything from using a flush toilet to how to withdraw money from the bank. This influx of immigrants into Israel may make the withdrawal of Israel from the occupied territories very difficult since the population of Israel is increasing and the land is not increasing. There is no reason, therefore, to believe the conflict will end soon.

The status of Jerusalem also raises a big question on whether the conflict can ever be resolved. Jerusalem's strategic position, geography and history have made it a focal point for some of the most ancient sources and memorial sites. It is a place where people seek their personal roots and which contains some of the most fundamental symbols of the cultural identity and perhaps even of the destiny of individual Jews, Christians and Muslims; each one of whom cherishes an image of Jerusalem in their hearts. Jerusalem is the holy city of all the children of Abraham – Jews, Christians and Muslims and the symbol of their unity and faith. Will the creation of the Palestinian state solve the problem of Jerusalem?

Jordan and Israel have a common interest in preventing the establishment of a state between them. Both fear the Palestinians intention to expand east or west once given a state. The PLO members are also troubled by the same questions, but seen from side of the fence. If the state is allowed no army, they argue, but has an Israeli forces stationed along its eastern border range of hills, what does its sovereignty amount to? Such an Israeli presence is inconceivable to the Palestinians but it is the absolute minimum Israel is likely to demand. If the Palestinians want peace, she argues, why should they want an army?

On the whole, it seems the new state would be a precarious creation whose very existence would depend on the course of events. For example, a bomb fired from the new state against Israeli towns could become a *casus belli* or reason enough for Israeli's forces to enter and occupy the area.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In spite of the intractable nature of the Middle East Crisis, the United States has made significant efforts towards the resolution of the endless conflicts. The United States diplomacy played a major role in the conclusion of the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty (1979) the Israeli-Jordanian Peace Treaty (1994) and a series of Israeli – Palestinian agreement that resulted in limited Palestinian self rule over 70% of Gaza and approximately 40% of the West Bank in the 1990s. More importantly the United States facilitated the Israeli-PLO mutual recognition agreements (1993), Declaration of Principles of Interim Self-government (1993) Agreement on the Gaza Strip and Jericho Area (1994) and the Washington Declaration (1994) among other.

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