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**The Israeli-Palestinian road towards peace: The Camp
David-Taba case study, 2000-2001.**

Degree: MA in Governance, Leadership and Democracy Studies

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Abstract

The Israeli and Palestinian narrative dispute has led to a fowl conflict between the two. Each side's narrative contains diametrically and incompatible interpretations of past and future. The presence of international and third-party actors also seems to play a contributing role. Although there have been several attempts towards peace resolution, each ended with a series of tactical mistakes and unforeseen developments that eventually led to the talk's termination. The Oslo talks 2000-2001 process, in which Clinton's Camp David conference produced the best basis for a potential Israeli-Palestinian agreement so far formulated, was no exception. With such a solid-ground proposal and (what seemed to be) strong hopes for diplomacy on both sides, what has led to the discourse of past and continuous peace talk attempts since Camp David and Taba brings about the focus of this thesis.

Key words: Israel-Palestine conflict, Oslo peace negotiations, Camp-David conference, Taba, Israel, PLO, clashing narratives, conflict-resolution

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To all of those who continue to fight for a more prosperous world

To my mom and sisters, for the endless guidance and support

To Prof. Dr. João Pereira Coutinho, for his invaluable insights and suggestions

To Dr. Fernando Demeé de Brito, for his mentorship

To my dad in heaven, a constant reminder of eternal love.

“Change the way you look at things and the things you look at change.”

-Wayne Dyer

Introduction

The Israelis and Palestinians are two peoples with two stories that go over many millennia ago. Both of their stories were intersected in the late 1880s and clashed because both claimed the same land as theirs by indisputable right. Both stories are distinct in narrative in its terms.

The Israeli narrative begins as the Jewish population were expelled from their land in Judea circa 70 CE¹. By the 1870s, the Jewish emancipation in most Western countries allowed Jews to have, for the most part, the same rights as other citizens. But in Eastern Europe, and most specifically in Ottoman Russia where anti-Semitism prevailed, the hatred for Jewish population during the rule of Alexander III (1881-94) had reached its limit. By the end of the year of 1881 the number of massacres increased and 215 Jew communities in southern and southwestern Russia were vanished ². The ideology of Zionism rose as the scale of persecutions increased from 1882 onward and the implementation of anti-Semitic measures became an official policy. Waves of Jewish immigration or *aliyahs* into Palestine followed under the leadership of the Chaim Weizmann and as the result of the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which gave the Jews the green light to the creation of its national homeland under Britain’s protection.

The Palestinian narrative tells a different story. The Palestinians were the indigenous people of Palestine without interruption for 1,500 years. For more of 600 of those years, from 1516 to 1923, Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire. For much of the nineteenth

¹ “Brief History of Israel and the Jewish People”, <https://www.science.co.il/israel-history/>.

² O’Malley, *The Two-State Delusion*, 12.

century, Jews from Europe and Russia first came to the land in small numbers. Palestinian natives welcomed them warmly. During the beginning of 1882, however, Jews started to show up in larger numbers: 25,000-35,000 in the first Aliyah (1882-1902), following thousands more in the Aliyah's prior to the beginning of World War I in 1914³. Due to the Balfour Declaration near the end of the war, the number of Jews in Palestine raised to 66,000, representing nine percent of the entire population. Palestinian natives were not consulted on the matter. More Aliyah's followed the end of World War I and the Jews and Palestinians lived on the same land in relative peace. In August of 1929, a clash between Muslims and Jews over Jewish prayer rights in the Western Wall in Jerusalem led to 133 Jews and 110 Arabs killed, and to 339 Jews and 232 Arabs injured in Hebron, Jerusalem, and Safed⁴. Shortly after, on the 29th, an Arab riot in Hebron killed 67 Jews, amid them women and children. Jewish businesses were plunged, and synagogues desecrated. The aftermath of such violence had changed the dynamics of the Jewish-Arab relations forever.

During World War II, Jewish immigration increased significantly due to increasing Nazi oppression in Germany. The number of Jews in Palestine had increased from 84,000 in 1922 to 450,000 in 1939. Britain resigned its mandate over Palestine and handed it over to United Nations. In result, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 181, which called for a mandatory partitioned Palestine into two states by allotting 56 percent of the land to Jews and 43 percent to Palestinians, with Jerusalem and Bethlehem to remain an international zone. The Jewish leadership accepted the partition plan with some

³ Ibid, 13.

⁴ Ibid, 14.

reservations, whereas the Palestinians perceived it as a betrayal from the General Assembly. As the result of Palestinian grievances, conflict escalated into war.

The war, perceived as the *War of Independence* for Israel and the *nakba* for Palestinians ended with the Zionists ultimately gaining control of the land allotted to them in the partition plan. On May 14, 1948 David Gurion announced the foundation of the state of Israel and the war escalated until the year of 1949, when both states signed the armistice agreements providing Israel and additional 23 percent of Palestine and part of the Sinai desert. The Israel state now included 78 percent of Mandatory Palestine. At this time, about 750,000 Palestinians had left their homes between December 1947 and March 1949⁵, either voluntarily or, as the Palestinian narrative describes, as result of expulsion.

The 1947-1949 war had severe consequences for the Palestinian population, which would later describe some of the aspects and their positions on the conflict. The correlation between this war with the concept of *Al-Nakba* or the massacre upon their population is very influential in the narratives of the Palestinian nationalism. Another very important consequence of the war was the status of Jerusalem that ultimately became divided into two areas, which according to the partition plan, it should have remained an international zone in its entirety. To this day and age, both Israeli Jews and Palestinians claim as the legitimate owner of the same land. Both have different narratives to the same story. Both live in the same land and constantly act as enemies rather than neighbors. Despite peacebuilding efforts, a peaceful resolution seems to remain unforeseen.

Contextualization

The causes of the failure of the Oslo peace process and the violent escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict dating to the beginning of September 2000 have been extensively

⁵ Ibid, 16.

discussed by the architects and negotiators present at the Oslo talks and thoroughly analyzed in several academic studies. Some connected the peace process failure to the nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as an ungovernable and insoluble conflict, while others acknowledged the unwillingness of both actors to make the necessary concessions for reaching a settlement. Additional interpretations make reference to the mismanagement of the negotiations; the ineffective American presence as mediator; the ill-conceived focus on an interim agreement rather than on a permanent agreement; the failure to address Israeli and Palestinian narratives; and the lack of leadership skills by both Israeli and Palestinian leaders in elaborating a coherent and lucid peace strategy or simply gathering public support for the peace process itself.⁶ Nonetheless, the existing lack of trust between the Israelis and Palestinians has not only supported the stagnation of the peace process itself, it has also sharpened a growing and permanent multifaced societal and political divide separating those who support Palestinian narratives from those who support Jewish claims.

Some of the “Palestinian-supporter narratives” argue that the failure of the Oslo process redirects essentially to its faux pas in addressing the widespread injustice that Israel had perpetuated against the Palestinian population since the beginning of the conflict, and with particular attention to the events after the 1947-1949 war. Additional narratives mention that had the Israelis accepted specific and rightful Palestinian demands, such as the recognition of expulsion of Palestinians in the aftermath of the 1947-1949 war, and the implementation of the right of to return, the result of the peace talks would have not been as disastrous. An impartial solution to the conflict (or, in their view, a “just peace”) thus relied on Israel’s compliance to these Palestinian demands.⁷

⁶ Ben-Ami; Sher; Miller; Ross; Bar-Siman-Tov, 2005

⁷ Said, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2006; Karmi, 1996; Peled & Rouhana, 2004; Rouhana, 2006.

On the other hand, “Israeli-supporter narratives” claim that accepting such demands as preconditions for the conflict resolution would be wrong as the Arab countries should be the ones to bear the responsibility for the outcomes of war since they were the ones to cause it. In their view, what led to the historic “injustice” perpetuated against the Palestinians was (and still is to this day), the Arabs’ refusal to recognize the 1947 Partition Plan, as well as their initiation of a war that was intended to prevent, by force, the establishment of the State of Israel. Moreover, the Palestinian’s insistence on the right of return places itself as a barrier to conflict resolution, as it essentially means the end of Israel as a Jewish state.

From a political standpoint, the enlarged distrust between the two has not only contributed towards the stagnation of the peace process itself (as both Israelis and Palestinians have come to recognize the other as unwilling to honor any agreements made), but it has also presented some signs of lack of leadership willingness to make the necessary concessions to seek a lasting solution.⁸ On the Israeli side, they are adamant about reaching a negotiated solution with a major political force in Palestine (at the time of Oslo the PLO, and at present PA Fatah in Palestine, and Hamas in Gaza) that does not recognize its existence. From the Palestinian perspective, the main source of distrust being Israel’s actions in the Palestinian territories. Within and across both political spectrums, there has been and continues to be a “growing pessimism”⁹. These factors have become more and more visible not only throughout the entire Oslo process but also at later times after its failure.

Despite numerous attempts in the years following the Oslo and Taba talks, (the Arab Peace Initiative, the Bush Initiative, Road Map, Nusseibeh-Ayalon Initiative, Geneva

⁸ Wilcox, David J. 20202. “The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process: Lessons from Oslo”

⁹ Ibid,2.

Initiative, Saudi peace plan, Annapolis Peace Conference, and the Trump Peace Plan), none of these proposals seemed to depict practicable strategies towards a peaceful resolution framework that would neutralize the barriers and put an end to this conflict. In fact, most of these barriers remain today, and have, for the most part, seem to have been intensified since the beginning of Oslo, its failure, and its ensuing violence. Although from top-military and political leaders to academics and students of IR and conflict resolution argue that the Oslo achievements were merely illusory, others still remark with clarity about President Clinton's Camp David Summit in 2000 as the most prominent basis for a potential agreement so far formulated. With such deep political and societal divides, and despite cautious international presence moderation with (what seemed to be) the foundation to a possible peace-resolution framework, what led to the collapse of the 2000-2001 Oslo Palestinian-Israeli peace process?

Chronology

1516-1918 Ottoman rule over Palestine

1882-1902 First Aliyah: 25,000-35,000 Jews immigrate to Palestine

1897 Theodor Herzl assembles First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland;

World Zionist Organization (WZO) is founded with the goal of creating a home for the Jewish people in Palestine

1904-14 Second Aliyah: 40,000 Jews immigrate to Palestine, account for 12 percent of Palestine's population; HaShomer (the first Jewish defense organization in Palestine) is founded

1914 World War I

1917 Balfour Declaration

1919-23 Third Aliya: 40,000 Jews immigrate to Palestine

1920 San Remo conference assigns mandate for Palestine to Great Britain

1920-21 Arab attacks on Jewish areas of Jerusalem and Jaffa; the Haganah is formed (later absorbed into the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) in 1948)

1922 British White Paper restates Balfour Declaration and restricts Jewish immigration to limited capacity in Palestine; British Mandate ratified by League of Nations includes Balfour Declaration

1923 Paulet-Newcombe Agreement defines boundaries of Palestine

1924-29 Fourth Aliyah: more than 80,000 Jews immigrate to Palestine

1925 Hebrew University of Jerusalem opens

1929-39 Fifth Aliyah: more than a quarter of a million Jews immigrate to Palestine

1929 Palestine Office is renamed the Jewish Agency and designated to represent the Jewish people provided for in the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine; riots at Western Wall, Jerusalem, Safed, and Hebron

1930 Shaw Commission investigates causes of riots and creates Hope Simpson Report to address immigration, land settlement, and development issues; the same report recommends limiting Jewish immigration based on economic capacity of Palestine; Passfield White Paper (new statement resulted from the Hope-Simpson Commission's investigation) halts Jewish immigration and land sales

1933-45 Holocaust

1936 Arab Higher Committee (AHC) is formed

1936-39 Arab revolt: seven years after Hope Simpson Report, Jewish population has risen by more than 150 percent and an additionally sixty-two settlements have been formed; Arab and Jewish clashes in Jaffa

1937 Peel Commission recommends partition of states

1939 British White Paper rejects Peel recommendations and proposed a unitary state under majority rule; Jewish immigration is restricted; World War II begins

1942 Zionist conference held in New York; Baltimore Declaration (statement regarding affirmation of Christian orthodoxy) calls for the existence of a Jewish state throughout Palestine

1945 Arab League is formed in Cairo; World War II ends; United Nations is created

1946 Stern Gang (Zionist extremist organization in Palestine) bombs British headquarters at King David Hotel in Jerusalem, aiming to extract British authorities from Palestine; U.S. President Harry Truman announces support for partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states

1947 British cabinet decides to refer to the question of Palestine to UN General Assembly; UN establishes special committee on Palestine (UNSCOP); UNSCOP proposes partition of Palestine; UN General Assembly votes to partition Palestine into a Jewish state and a Palestinian state and to leave Jerusalem for international rule; Jewish Agency accepts the report; Arab Higher Committee rejects it

1947 Israeli-Palestinian intercommunal war; *Nakba*, creating Palestinian refugees

1948 Termination of the British Mandate in Palestine; USA proposes UN trusteeship in Palestine; Israel declares independence; United States extends de facto recognition; Arab armies attack Israel; UN resolution 194 calls for return of 750,000 refugees who were expelled or fled from Palestine (the *Nakba*) and the internationalization of Jerusalem

1949 Israel signs armistice agreements with Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt; conflict ends

1950 West Bank and East Jerusalem annexed by Transjordan; Israel becomes member state of UN

1951 Assassination of King Abdullah

1953 Hussein becomes king of Jordan

1955 Israel attacks Gaza

1956 Nasser nationalizes Suez Canal Company; Israel invades Sinai; Britain and France bombs Egyptian airfields late Oct.; Britain and France invade Egypt Nov. 5; Israel, Britain and France agree to ceasefire November 6-7

1957 British Prime Minister Anthony Eden resigns and withdraws Britain's troops; Israel agrees to withdraw from Sinai; Egypt agrees to deployment of UN emergency force on the border between Gaza Strip and Israel and at-Sharm al-Sheik

1958 Monarchy overthrown in Iraq; Civil War in Lebanon;

1964 First Arab summit; Founding conference of Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)

1965 Al-Fatah undertakes first guerrilla raid against Israel

1967 Clashes between Syria and Israel; Aqaba closed to Israeli shipping; Egypt and Jordan sign defense pact; Arabs and Israel mobilize for war; Israel attacks Egypt; June 5 Six-Day War begins; June 10 Cease-fire Israel in possession of East Jerusalem, West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Sinai, and the Golan Heights; Nov. 22 UN Security Council passes Resolution 242

1970 Cease fire along Suez Canal; Nasser dies, Al-Sadat becomes Egyptian president

1973 Egypt and Syria attack Israel; Yom Kippur, or Ramadan War begins; Oct. 21, Cease-fire; UN Security Council Resolution 338 calls for direct negotiations based on Resolution 242; Dec. 21, Geneva Conference

1974 Arab League summit at Raba recognizes PLO as sole, legitimate representative of Palestinian people

1975 Suez Canal reopens after eight years; UN Security Council allows PLO to participate in debate on Arab-Israeli question

1978 Israel completes withdrawal from Lebanon; Camp David peace accords signed

1984 Labor-Likud unity government with Shimon Peres as PM

1985 Israel completes withdrawal from Lebanon; Peres calls for Middle East peace conference

1986 Yitzhak Shamir takes over as Israeli PM

1987 Intifada begins

1988 King Hussein renounces claims to West Bank

1988 Israeli general elections; Shamir as PM forms coalition government Dec.17; Arafat addresses UN, says that PNC accepts Resolutions 242 and 338, renounces terrorism; US opens dialogue with PLO

1990 Shamir government falls on no-confidence vote; Shamir forms new Likud government on June 8

1991 Arab-Israeli peace conference opens in Madrid; bilateral and multilateral talks begin

1992 Yitzhak Rabin (Labor) forms coalition government after Israeli general elections; Shimon Peres as foreign minister; August 24. 6th round of bilateral talks; Nov. 16. 50,000-100,000 Jewish settlers and protesters in Tel Aviv riot against Israel possible withdrawal from the Golan Heights; Dec. 17. Israel deports 415 militant Palestinians and suspected Hamas members to South Lebanon

1993 Israel and PLO sign Declaration of Principles on Palestinian Interim Self-Government in Washington; Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho

1994 Israel transfers control of Jericho to PLO, hands over Gaza Strip on May 18; formal peace treaty signed between Jordan and Israel; Rabin, Peres and Arafat receive Nobel Peace Prize

1995 Agreement on Palestinian interim self-rule at Taba; the Oslo II or Taba accord is signed in Washington on September 28; Yitzhak Rabin assassinated

1996 Elections for Palestinian Legislative Council: Arafat elected President; April 24, Palestine National Council declares it will amend its covenant and cancel clauses calling for the destruction of Israel; April 27, cease-fire agreement between Lebanon and Israel; May 29, Israeli elections, Benjamin Netanyahu of the Likud party elected PM

1997 Hamas bombings in Jerusalem kills 14 people and wounds 170

1998 UN General Assembly votes to upgrade status of PLO delegation; Wye River memorandum

1999 King Hussein of Jordan dies, succeeded by oldest son Abdullah; Ehud Barak elected PM in Israel; Sep. 14 Sharm al-Sheikh memorandum signed between Israel and PLO, sets Feb.15, 2000 as target for declaration of principles on outstanding issues and Sep.2000 as date to reach permanent settlement

2000 Clinton Camp David Summit; Ariel Sharon visits Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, riots begin

2001 Joint Israeli-Palestinian statement made at the conclusion of the Taba Summit; George W. Bush elected U.S. President; Ariel Sharon elected PM in Israel, assembles national unity government with Shimon Peres as Foreign Minis

Chapter 1: The State of the Conflict

ORIGINS

“Today, the leadership of Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization will sign a Declaration of Principles on Interim Palestinian Self-Government. It charts a course toward reconciliation between two peoples who have both known bitterness of exile. Now both pledge to put old sorrows and antagonisms behind them and to work for a shared future, shaped by the values of the Torah, the Koran and the Bible”

-Clinton, 1993 ¹⁰

Understanding The Context: From 1947 to War of Independence/Nakba

Between May 1946 – November 1947, events moved in the direction of the UN Partition Resolution (that would define the legal framework for a Jewish state in Palestine) and the termination of the British mandate. Despite efforts to prevent violence, and with the Arab leadership at odds with reality, it seemed as if the passage of this resolution was merely the approval of a principle. In January 1948, the volunteer Arab Liberation Army (ALA), organized, trained, and armed by Syria in December 1947, began entering Palestine. The War of 1947/49, known as the *War of Independence* for the Jewish population, and the *Nakba* or *Catastrophe* for Palestinians, had begun.

The War of Independence

The UN’s decision in 1947 to partition British Palestine into two states (one Arab and one Jewish) was for the Jewish resistance groups’ a cause for celebration, mainly as the Jewish community would now receive 55 percent of the land. The Arab community rejected the compromise and declared war, believing the entirety of Palestine was rightfully theirs. As the war erupted, 750,000 Palestinians were displaced into neighboring Arab countries. In

¹⁰ Remarks at the Signing Ceremony for the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles, 1993, September 3.

the decades to come, hundreds of thousands of Jews immigrated to Israel from bordering Arab states.

The Nakba

As briefly mentioned before, when the British assigned UN with the task of remediating the existing quarrels, they proposed the division of Palestine. The 1947 Partition Plan would take over half of the Palestinian's land and hand it over to the Jewish community (that at the time comprised only 33 percent of the population). Arab leaders, not considering the partition a fair compromise, declared war. In turn, millions of Palestinians escaped or were forced to leave their home by the Jewish forces. The Palestinian narrative maintains that they were victims of acts of ethnic cleansing, their story today still refers to the 1948 War as a defining historical event known as the *Nakba* or the catastrophe.

Converging facts: Palestinian vs. Israeli Perceptions

There is disagreement on almost every aspect of the origin and outcome of the Arab-Israeli conflict. From historian's accounts on former official records and contemporary events, to the media coverage and its increasingly bitter and hard-rhetoric content, to the third-actors involved (international/governmental actors, think-thanks, NGOs, etc.) exposing partisan perspectives on the Palestinian/Israeli relations; it seems as if the conflict is becoming more confusing and alarming. While on one side, fixed statements and counterarguments are continuously claimed, on the other, such one-sided supporting narratives (either Palestinian/Israeli) sustain existing gaps and the almost impossibility to reach conclusions that are not being thoroughly disputed. A clear example, and perhaps one of the most controversial refers to the *Nakba* outcome, or to the number of Arab Palestinian misplaced people on the aftermath of the 1947 war, and to whether Israel had intentionally planned to expel the Arab population through *ethnic cleansing*. Ultimately,

these mixed perceptions of reality at the form of national narratives¹¹ continue into the *post-conflict* period, and with prominent implications and barriers towards a peace resolution stability and mechanism attempts in the years following, as in the case of Oslo I/ II and its continued efforts in Taba/Camp David until today.

Extensive research by historians, policy experts and academic scholars has detected the refugee issue as a core element in the conflict and one significant obstacle to a peaceful settlement.¹² One of the most apparent narrative inconsistencies relies on the counting of misplaced Arab Palestinian people in the aftermath of the 1947 war. Most Palestinian officials report a number rounding at 900,000 or one million refugees¹³. Historians such as Ilan Pappé (2006) calculate between 750,000 and one million¹⁴. Others tend to cite the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) figure of 800,000¹⁵ or the UN agency for refugees (UNRWA) figure of 726,000¹⁶. In a meeting between British diplomats¹⁷ on April 13, 1949, first Secretary of State Michael Wright accounted for a total of 700,000¹⁸ refugees. An additional report by the British Foreign Office, however, depicts a distinct amount: from 600,000-760,000¹⁹ misplaced people. In a letter addressed to the UN

¹¹ Wilcox, David J. 2020. "The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process: Lessons from Oslo"

¹² Landman, Shiri. 2011 "Just and Durable Peace by Piece," *European Commission*, <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/217488/reporting>

¹³ Bickerton, I. J. and Carla L. Klausner.2010. *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 102.

¹⁴ Pappé, I. 2006. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*.

¹⁵ *Special Statistical Bulletin*, "On the 68th Anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba", Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS)

¹⁶ Gabbay, Political Study, 175.

¹⁷ Transmitted to the Department by London in dispatch 702, April 21. The dispatch notes a series of conversations regarding, the Arab refugee problem in the presence of the following British diplomats: John Troutbeck (former British Middle East Officer in Cairo); Norman Young (former British Treasure); Beith, Maitland, and Waterlow (former Foreign Office); McCloy (former President, International Bank); McGhee (former Department of State); Lewis Jones (American Embassy, London). For more details:

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1949v06/d590>.

¹⁸ "Foreign Relations Of The United States, 1949, The Near East, South Asia, And Africa, Volume VI", 867N.48/4-2149.

¹⁹ UN Conciliation Commission document (A/AC.25/Com.Tech/7/Add.1)

Technical Committee on Refugees on 24 June 1949, the Israeli Diplomat Mr. Comay stated:

In accordance with the Palestine Government Village Statistics of April, 1945, and assuming that it had remained in 1947/48 and deducting from it a figure of 165,000 (the estimated present Arab population), one gets a figure of 561,800, which would be the theoretical maximum of non-Jews who could have left the territory in question (...) It cannot be surmised that the whole of this number would be Arab refugees. It would include a small proportion of non-Arabs, also non-Palestinian Arabs who returned to their places of origin in surrounding countries (...) The actual figure is estimated by our experts to be about 520,000²⁰.

Historian Benny Morris (1988), in his study *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, mentions that in February 1949, 320,000 Palestinians moved into, or already resided in the eastern portion of Palestine, which was controlled by the Arab Legion, and into Transjordan²¹. Academic scholar Mason (2019) in a study about Palestinian refugees in the context of global politics and international law points out:

As a result of al Nakba, around 400,000 Palestinians were dispossessed to the West Bank (controlled from 1949 to 1967 by Jordan – then known as Transjordan); 150,000–200,000 to Gaza (under Egyptian military rule between 1949 and 1967)”; 100,000–140,000 to Lebanon; 100,000 to Transjordan proper; 75,000 to Syria; 7,000–10,000 to Egypt and 5,000 to Iraq.²²

Today, the Israel Democracy Institute accounts for 700,000-750,000 displaced Palestinian people.²³

But the refugee-counting inconsistency is not the only fragmented part the 1947 war story. Political analyst Jeremy R. Hammond (2016) best illustrates the Palestinian narrative of 1947 that resulted in the dispossession of their people and loss of their

²⁰ Israeli reply to Cttee’s questionnaire re. refugees/broken families – UNCCP’s Technical Cttee on Refugees – Letter from Israel, United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-210572/>

²¹ Bickerton, I. J. and Carla L. K, *A History of the Arab-Israel Conflict*, 102.

²² Mason, V. “The liminality of Palestinian refugees: betwixt and between global politics and international law”, *Journal of Sociology*, (2019)

²³ “Implications of the 'Nakba Law' on Israeli Democracy”, The Israel Democracy Institute, <https://en.idi.org.il/articles/10132>

homeland at the expense of Israel: “the means by which the ‘Jewish state’ of Israel came into existence—via the ethnic cleansing of the Arab population of Palestine—must be brought out of the darkness and into the light”²⁴. As the terminology and memory of Nakba remains a defining historic event that has deeply been catalyzed into the Palestinian national narrative, the demands on the right of return or for those who choose not to return, to accept compensation (in accordance with the UN General Assembly Resolution 194), lie at the core of the Palestinian’s priorities. Essential for an honorable resolution of this issue is thus the Israeli unilateral recognition of its complete moral responsibility to the Palestinian refugee issue.

However, from Israel’s perspective, the Arab Palestinian refugee problem is rather a regrettable consequence of their missed window of opportunity. Not only did they fail to accept the UN 1947 partition plan, but their leaders also showed signs of unwillingness in compromising / present other viable solutions as well as to collaborate with their neighboring Arab countries in assimilating the refugees into their societies. This war, alike most wars, brought consequences to the land and to its people in the form of political instability, public health; and in this case, it brought issues with misplaced people from Jewish and Arab Palestinian ethnicities. Samuel Katz similarly asserted this perception in 1985: “The Arab refugees were not driven from Palestine by anyone. The vast majority left, whether of their own free will or at the orders or exhortations of their leaders, always with the same reassurance—that their departure would help in the war against Israel.”²⁵

Central to the refugee issue and how it is sparking discourse and feeding into the narrative-clash dispute is the undeniable presence of third-party actors in the conflict, starting with intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations (UN). Although

²⁴ Hammond, Jeremy R. (2016) “Benny Morris’s Untenable Denial of the Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine”, *Foreign Policy Journal*, <https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2016/11/14/benny-morriss-untenable-denial-of-the-ethnic-cleansing-of-palestine/>

²⁵ Katz, S. (1985). *Battleground: Fact and Fantasy in Palestine*, 14.

aware and involved in the density of the conflict, UN's agencies such as the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) or the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) often tend to symbolize a faulty exaggeration of reality, reflecting systematic statistics at the local level and increasing rather than decreasing the number of refugees, thus preventing plausible accounts.²⁶ Such reports portrait entire chapters, publications, or even press releases about the Arab-Palestinian refugee perspective that only seem to coincide with one-sided (Palestinian) narratives. Following UN's faulty accounts on the depth of the conflict, it appears that several think-thanks follow the same contradictory pattern. For instance, The Global Conflict Tracker from the Council of Foreign Relations ²⁷ states that the 1947 war "ended with Israel's victory, but 750,000 Palestinians were displaced"²⁸, while at the same referring to *Nakba* as "the exodus of some 700,000 Palestinians who left or were forced to flee their homes when Israel was founded."²⁹ The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR)³⁰ most recent poll (2019) found that although less than half of Israelis and Palestinians supported the two-state solution at the time (with the former growing more reconciled to annexation and the latter to armed struggle), the symbols of "good faith" can be erratically decisive: "If Israelis would recognize the Nakba"—and "Palestinians would make clear that, with peace, Israelis could visit the Temple Mount—the Haram al-Sharif—then almost half of the Israeli Jews opposed to two states, and about forty per cent of the Palestinians, would

²⁶ Karsh, (2011), *How many Palestinian Arab refugees were there?*, 227

²⁷ Interactive guide to ongoing conflicts around the world of concern to the United States, covering thirty conflicts with background information and analysis resources on each conflict <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker>.

²⁸"Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", *Center of Preventive Action*, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/israeli-palestinian-conflict>

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ PSR is a Palestinian independent nonprofit institution and think tank of policy analysis and academic research that acts with the collaboration of the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research (TSC), Tel Aviv University and the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) in Ramallah with funding from the European Union (EU)

change their minds.”³¹ A report by the academic Rempel (2006) at the Forced Migration Review (FMR), states “despite international recognition of the gravity of the problem, there remains a considerable lack of popular knowledge and/or misinformation about the world’s largest refugee population”³². In fact, the Refugee Studies Centre for the Department of International Development (DFID) confirms these findings, remarking that many of those familiar with the Palestinian case tend, “to see them as a case apart from other refugees in the region and, indeed, the global context generally”³³.

The widely recognized global movement on human rights, Amnesty International is yet another example, depicting reports on *Israel’s violations* and/or its ensured *apartheid* system, with accusatory and bold headlines that read the following: “Israel’s refusal to grant Palestinian refugees right to return has fueled seven decades of suffering” (press release 2019)³⁴; “Israel/Occupied Territories: Israel must facilitate, not hinder, relief for the occupied population” (research 2004)³⁵; “Israel/OPT: Israel must dismantle its system of apartheid” (research 2022)³⁶, and more material located on their platform. In 2021, the Human Rights Watch released a meticulously research report, “A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution”³⁷, with accusatory charges and placing emphasis on Israeli’s authorities as methodically privileging Jewish Israelis and discriminating against Palestinians. Or globally relied upon to be informative media instrument sources such as The Guardian or the British

³¹ “The Palestine/Israel Pulse, a Joint Poll Summary Report”, PSR, <https://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/823>.

³² Rempel, “Who are Palestinian refugees”, *Forced Migration Review*, August 2006, <https://www.fmreview.org/palestine/rempel>.

³³ www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/PDFs/Policy%20Approaches%20to%20Refugees%20and%20IDPs%20RS-C-DFID%20Vol%20II.pdf

³⁴ Full report, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2019/05/israels-refusal-to-grant-palestinian-refugees-right-to-return-has-fuelled-seven-decades-of-suffering/>

³⁵ Full research, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/036/2004/en/>

³⁶ Full research, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/?qlocation=2031>

³⁷ Full report, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>

Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), or other entities such as Al Jazeera, whose news title at one point in 2022 read: “Why Israel hates the Palestinians so much.”³⁸

But there are examples of ‘pro-Israel narratives’ as well. In a report by members of the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine (BRICUP), Professors John Chalcraft and James Dickins (2021), point out for the deliberate distortion of historical data and political facts relating to the conflict in two Pearson-published upper-secondary school history textbooks in the UK. The professors, after releasing a report listing 294 revisions to the original books, concluded:

We show how the revisions have consistently under-played and explained Jewish and Israeli violence, while amplifying and leaving unexplained Arab and Palestinian violence. They have left intact accounts of Jewish and Israeli suffering, while downplaying and editing accounts of Arab and Palestinian suffering.³⁹

There is no doubt that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has created long involved actors outside the region. With such rivalry and discording narratives transcends an interest from the outside world as to what exactly is transpiring between the two conflicting nations. This is where the role of third-party actors involved as is the case of the various UN human right’s agencies or other intergovernmental organizations, think-thank sources for analysts, academics and researchers, and media coverage platforms is crucial. As these sources of information are today considered and used as major supplies of evidence, critically effecting public opinion and its perception on reality, then they ought to be first and foremost be more impartial. It is not so astonishing, after all, that the Israeli narrative elements of the 1947 war contrasts with Palestinian accounts and vice-versa. It is possible that neither will reason that perhaps both actors might be equally responsible, at some

³⁸ Full article, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/8/8/why-israel-hates-the-palestinians-so-much>

³⁹ Chalcraft and Dickins, “Serious Concerns’: UK Education Row as Israel-Palestine Textbooks Pulled”.: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/jun/08/uk-history-education-row-israel-palestine-textbooks-pulled>.

degree, for the launching and conflict escalation into war. As scholars Daoudi and Barakat (2013) mention in *Israeli-Palestinians: Contested Narratives*, “Though both traditions have much in common, yet each reflects a passionately partisan perspective that neither makes any effort to wide.”⁴⁰

As Israeli/Palestinian narrative-construction is directly linked with past-memories, terminology incoherence remains the major issue towards a shared and foreseeable peace agreement for the future. And as the case of third-actors and its active presence in the conflict, contributing towards a peaceful solution begins with responsible reporting and to reshape the contours of unnecessary myths and stereotype information that ultimately provoke the upside side effects of what’s pretended through public discourse and its internalization into policy alternatives to compromise. Diving into what has failed at the peace talk attempts is also to take these notions into account.

From 1950-1967

As previously mentioned, to the Jewish population the year of 1948 was the most hopeful as U.S. and USSR key world powers supported establishment of Israel as a State; and to the Arab population, 1948 and the years following were disastrous and overwhelming, leading to a ‘forceful displacement’ of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and to a lost homeland at the expense of the creation of the Jewish state.⁴¹

With the UN Resolution 181 (also known as Partition Resolution) in 1947, in which voted in favor of the partition of Great Britain’s former Palestinian mandate into Jewish and Arab states, the de-colonialization of the British Empire in the same year and the continuous raging after Israel’s declared independence had led to the vision that the partition plan was moving into opposite directions. Groups of Palestinian Arabs attached

⁴⁰ Daoudi, Mohammed S., and Zeina M. Barakat. “Israelis and Palestinians: Contested Narratives.” *Israel Studies* 18, no. 2 (2013): 62

⁴¹ Ibid.

to local units of the Arab Liberation Army began launching attacks against Jewish cities, settlements, and armed forces. The Jewish troops under Haganah, the underground militia of the Jewish community in Palestine, and Irgun and LEHI retaliated, hoping to gain control. Fighting intensified on the eve of May 14 as Arab forces launched air attacks on Tel Aviv, which as the Israel narrative describes it, despite Israel's resistance, it led to yet another invasion by Arab armies from Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt. After tense and early fighting, Israeli forces were able to gain the offensive.

Unsurprisingly, the Palestinian narrative accounts for a different turn of events, beginning with the declaration of the state of Israel as the main war trigger and as well as the massacre on Deir Yassin a few weeks before ⁴². Despite the usual narrative-discrepancy on some parts of historical events, two cease-fires implemented by the UN did occur during this period. Nonetheless, fighting transitioned into 1949, and the Jews and the Arab Palestinians were only able to reach a formal armistice agreement in February, giving Israel some of the territory (that was formerly granted to Palestinian Arabs under the United Nations resolution in 1947), and Egypt and Jordan control over the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, respectively. However, the armistice lines only held until 1967.

This time marked the beginning of what would later become known as the *refugee issue* in the present conflict. The high influx of Palestinian refugees became a new factor in the politics of the Arab countries: the kingdom of Jordan, now including the West Bank with the annexation of Transjordan in 1950, grappled with a new influx of Palestinian population. An identical scenario emerged in the regimes of Syria and Lebanon. In Egypt, with a change of order and new military leaders, defied former colonial rulers Britain and

⁴² The massacre on the village of Deir Yassin on April 9, 1948, that accounts with more than 100 Palestinian residents were killed by members of the pre-Israeli-state Irgun and Stern Gang Zionist militias. The Palestinian narrative is that this massacre proved to be a pivotal moment in Palestinian history that came a few weeks before the foundation of the State of Israel.

France by seizing the Suez Canal, thereby setting in motion a chain of events that brought about a second war with Israel in 1956. Although the 1949 Rhodes armistice agreements led to the drawing of temporary boundaries and four demilitarized zones (DMZs)⁴³ between Israel and Palestine, the disputes remained unresolved. Except for the border with Lebanon, raids into Israel by Palestinian refugees from Jordan, Syria and the Gaza Strip were frequent after the termination of hostilities in 1949. These raids revealed the uncertainty of the armistice lines. The authors of *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Bickerton and Klausner (2010) account, “Palestinians crossed over into Israel to reclaim possessions, harvest their crops, steal, smuggle, and sometimes kill Israelis”⁴⁴. Violence escalated on all borders and a cycle of raids soon carried out.

The economic boycott imposed by the Arab states against Israel by the closure of the Suez Canal to Israeli shipping and the removal to Tripoli, Lebanon, of the Haifa refinery by the Iraq petroleum company led to a series of internal upheavals throughout the Arab world in the next decade. The first of many coups, *The Syrian Coup D'état* in March 1949 overthrew the country's democratically elected government. Later, on 20 July 1951, a Palestinian nationalist assassinated king Abdullah, and on May 2, 1953, his eighteen-year grandson Hussein assumed power. In July of the following year a group of army officers led by Muhammad Naguib deposed King Farouk in Egypt, and in October 1954, Gamal Abdul Nasser took over the presidency of Egypt. In 1957 PM Golda Meir declared that any closure to Israeli shipping along the straits of Tiran would be a declaration of war⁴⁵. On June 5, 1967, Israel attacked Egyptian airfields, and the subsequent conflict decimated Egyptian forces.

⁴³ DMZs: north along the former Palestine-Syrian border; another surrounded the Hebrew university and Hadassah Hospital; a third zone in the high commissioner's former palace; and a fourth around al-Auja on the Egyptian border.

⁴⁴ Bickerton, Ian J. and Carla L. Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (2010), 115.

⁴⁵ Barak, “Between reality and secrecy: Israel's Freedom of Navigation through the Straits of Tiran”, 657.; Meir, 1957.

Britain and France were completely discredited by the war and found their power influence weakened throughout the Arab world in the aftermath of Suez. Understanding the reasons of the Suez war is beyond the scope of this thesis, but part of its outcome is crucial when depicting the parts of the conflict resolution barriers. First, the Suez crisis made Gamal Abdul Nasser the symbol of pan-Arabism cause. In the next decade, the ideology of Arab nationalism would be an important factor in the domestic politics of most Arab countries, and the idea of Arab unity under Nasser became a compelling goal. Second, USA and USSR became directly involved in the area after the war. Both presences did not remain invisible.

From 1967-1993

Major events took place from 1967 to 1993, starting with the Six-day war on June 1967 that intensified the conflict and ended with Israel taking control of the Gaza Strip, Sinai, the West Bank, the Golan Heights, and predominantly Arab East Jerusalem. Then in October of 1973, a coalition of Arab nations led by Egypt and Syria, launched a surprise attack on Israel, but were ultimately driven back by an Israeli counteroffensive aided by supplies from allies, including the United States. A few years later, in 1977, a historic visit to Jerusalem by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and the talks at the presidential retreat at Camp David (Camp David accords) in 1978 with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat both agreeing on Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza. Potential Palestinian peace proposals were discussed, but never carried out. In December of that same year, a Palestinian uprising (the first intifada), carries clashes and protests aimed at Israel ⁴⁶. Hamas was established as an alternative to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) during the 1987 intifada, and despite the

⁴⁶ Naser-najjab, "Palestinian Leadership and the Contemporary Significance of the First Intifada", 62

Palestinian narrative on Camp David's frustration, attacks on Israeli civilians and military intensified from 1989 throughout the 1990s. The uprising decayed existing relations between Palestine and Israel, changed internal political Palestinian dynamics, and fundamentally revised the international perception of the entire conflict.

1993-2001

After the Persian Gulf War of 1991, the Madrid Peace Conference launched in October at Madrid envisioning to revive the peace process and to the historically unprecedented event that led, for the first time towards a multilateral platform. The premises of the conference stipulated that direct, bilateral negotiations would follow, and that multilateral talks on other issues, such as of economic nature, the environment, water, refugees, arms control and regional security would proceed in parallel. The Palestinian representation vexing issue was solved by the creation of a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation. Although the Madrid Peace Conference did not offer substantial answers to the most pressing issues that divided the nations involved, it paved the way for all peace processes from that point on.

After a political deadlock in 1992, new elected prime minister of Israel, Yitzhak Rabin held secret and informal negotiations with Palestinian leaders, in what came to be known as the 'Oslo process' or 'Oslo' because of the initial location of the talks. The talks came to an end in the summer of 1993, leading to mutual recognition between the Israeli government and the PLO, an exchange of letters between Rabin and PLO chairman Arafat, and the Declaration of Principles (DOP) of September 1993. The DOP, which was essentially an agenda for negotiations in which both parties committed themselves to a gradual process by peaceful means, was a scheme based almost verbatim on the previously signed at Camp David 1978. The framework agreement envisioned a Palestinian self-governing authority that would rule the West Bank and Gaza Strip during

a five-year transitional period before a permanent solution. To this end, the PLO renounced any further use of violence to promote its political goals. A final status of negotiations no later than 3 years after the beginning of the Palestinian autonomy, including the 'core' and most challenging issues regarding the final agreement (Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees, borders, final security arrangements between the parties, and the ultimate status of the emerging Palestinian political entity) were to be addressed.

Following the DOP, a series of interim agreements were signed between Israel and the PLO in the period of 1993-1999. During the Rabin administration (1992-1995), the 1994 Cairo Agreement was signed on providing autonomy in the Gaza Strip and the Jericho area (of the West Bank), mas was the Oslo II (September 1995 Interim Agreement or Taba) dividing the West Bank into areas under direct Palestinian control (area A), civilian Palestinian control (area B), and Israeli control (area C, including settlements self-defined "security-zones"). Two further agreements were signed to follow up the Oslo II during the Netanyahu administration (1996-1999): the 1997 Hebron Protocol dividing the city into two regions (Israeli and Palestinian), and the 1998 Wye River Memorandum aimed to resume the implementation Oslo II. Later, under the brief administration of Barak (1999-2001), the Sharm-el-Sheikh Memorandum was concluded in September 1999 on the stipulations and timetable of the final status negotiations of Oslo II as well as to implement all other agreements between the PLO and Israel since September 1993: Protocol on Economic Relations (1994); Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area (1994); Washington Declaration (1994); Agreement on Preparatory Transfer of Powers and Responsibilities Between Israel and the PLO (1994); Protocol on Further Transfer of Powers and Responsibilities (1995). The Oslo process came to a halt after the failure of the camp David summit in July 2000, the eruption of the second intifada in late

September 2000, and the failure of the Taba talks in January 2001. There has been no significant political progress on the bilateral level ever since.

Distinct Narrative Interpretations

From the Palestinian perspective, the Oslo process implied the Palestinian recognition of Israeli control over 78% of the land, based on the assumption that the Palestinians would be able to exercise sovereignty over the remaining 22% (which according to them, had been under Israeli occupation since 1967).⁴⁷ For Palestinian supporters and their Israeli counterparts, the Oslo process took place as the result of the first intifada and on the premise of gradual territorial devolution in exchange of security of Israel. It was envisioned that the Palestinians would thus gain an independent Palestinian state in the occupied territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, including East Jerusalem, as well as the “legitimate and fair” recognition of the right of return of 1947-49⁴⁸. Nonetheless, and as the process evolved over the years, so did reality and interpretation for not only the Palestinian leadership, but also for their people at home. In an article to the New York Times, Arafat (2002) pointed out that although the 1993 Oslo accord had promised the Palestinians freedom by May 1999, it brought instead the temporary division of the West Bank that caged and endured the Palestinian people through the “doubling of Israeli settlers, expansion of illegal Israeli settlements on Palestinian land and increased restrictions on freedom of movement.”⁴⁹ With the peace process stagnation after 1995, the acceleration of confiscation policies, continuing settlement’s growth, and economic deterioration, the Palestinian support for peace dwindled accordingly. As for

⁴⁷ Palestinian Liberation Organization (2001) “Camp David Proposals.” PLO Negotiations Affairs Department.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Arafat, Y. (2002) “The Palestinian Vision of Peace.” *The New York Times*, February 3.

their view of Camp David and Taba, they saw the offers as “inadequate, condescending, and alienating”⁵⁰

From the Israeli perspective, the reason behind Oslo was based on the gradual devolution of territory legitimacy and political authority to the Palestinians in the occupied territories, in exchange for security and peace. Although the logic of Oslo I and Oslo II greatly differed in terms of assessments and perspectives of Israeli leaders involved in the peace talks, both shared the same vision about the Palestinian leadership and how their role involved the preparation for a peace resolution by accepting the inevitability of partition, a two state-solution, and the exclusive management and resolution of the conflict. In terms of the Israeli view on Taba/Camp David 200-2001 negotiations, from a critical perspective, most Israeli negotiators pointed out the general lack of preparations, lack of trust, the imposition on the Palestinians and upon the U.S. of convening the summit at Camp David, and the mismanagement and mistakes made at the summit.

To be continued...

If the events leading towards a more heightened disengagement between Israeli/Palestinian relations provides any lessons to the conflict, and consequently to its peace resolution attempts, is that it reflects different realities and narratives upon its people, based on which only some of the truth is told. While on one side, continuous competitive narrative perceptions, as in the case of Holocaust and Nakba denial, on the other shaping concerns for security and resolution of the refugee problem issue remain unsolved. An additional contributing factor towards terminology inconsistency and agreement seems to

⁵⁰ Kacowicz, Arie M. (2005). “Rashomon in Jerusalem: Mapping the Israeli Negotiators’ Positions on the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process, 1993-2001”, *International Studies Perspectives*, 254.

be the clear and enduring presence of uninformed third-actors and its partisan assessments on the conflict.

These interpretations thus raise a series of perplexing questions: Can narratives be evaluated? Is there only one plausible truth or only a set of different narratives, reflecting different collective perceptions/memories? And if so, are there possible mechanisms to overcome the narrative barrier to conflict resolution and move from a past and present conflicting relationship to a future and enduring relationship?

Perhaps if there is one lesson to be retrieved at this point about the substance and dispute of what has failed in this conflict resolution, would be consistent with the scholars Bickerton and Klausner (2010) who once stated, “the distinction between the past and the present, while real enough in one sense, it is in part an artificial one. While we are aware of and conscious of the past, only the present exists in experiential terms”

Chapter 2: The Road to Oslo

“Negotiations are not an exercise in asking questions. Obviously, negotiations have to be forced on him. After eight months, eight weeks and eight days, Arafat has not even started to negotiate. I did not come to sell out the State of Israel or bring it to bankruptcy.”

-Ehud Barak, 2000⁵¹

With the collapse of Camp David II, violence outburst once again. In a nutshell: Barak publicly stated about the absence of a Palestinian peace partner; Ariel Sharon’s visit to al-Haram al-Sharif perceived as provocative; riots that spread over to other Arab areas in East Jerusalem. As a result, the riots heightened into a full-scale uprising– what would be known as the *Al-Aqsa intifada*. Israelis and Palestinian negotiators continued to meet in small groups nonetheless, and setting further talks in Washington and Cairo, and later in Taba.

The Talks Continue

In order to accelerate the pace of negotiations and to avoid claims by the Palestinian team about lack of commitment towards the summit that was already scheduled for June 23, Barak urged his ministers to soften Palestinian public opinion by taking unilateral steps and release prisoners who met certain criteria. The Israeli team additionally generated a document, *“Toward the Summit: Toward a Framework Agreement on Permanent Status”*, listing the positions on each side and possible proposals for the continuing and betterment of negotiations. At the same time, warnings about violence eruption started to become clear. In the light of these developments President Clinton saw the need to push the summit a few days earlier. Clinton’s rushed decision and uncalculated move was a risk for the course of the talks, its counterparts, and its own political reputation. With the American elections pending, a failed summit would reflect the end

⁵¹ Sher, *“The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Negotiations, 1999-2001”*, 91.

of the peace process entirely as well as a flawed image towards Clinton's leadership. For Barak, who was currently facing a minority government of 42 out of 120 members, failure would mean a costly no-confidence percentage from the Israeli population. A summit would also put pressure on Arafat, especially with the possibility of being compelled to accept significant concessions on Israel's part that felt short of Palestinian aspirations.

The last phase of preparations for the summit (now with the presence of members on the American team), exposed signs of regression. Abu Ala suggested further discussions on Jerusalem, stating "on Jerusalem, we will not be satisfied with general declarations without talking about details"⁵². Chief negotiator at camp David and senior adviser to Barak, Gilad Sher proceeded to mention that the final map would be very similar to what Abu Ala had seen in the most updated draft of the Israeli proposal relating to territory:

No other Israeli government has offered you what we are offering you today, particularly on territory, thus considering the dismantling on settlements. This is something in the order of a domestic political earthquake in Israel. What are you afraid of? We will negotiate now for a week, maybe two, and then attend the summit. You are here-so close to an agreement – thanks in large part to your own political struggle rather than international law, which was supposedly on your side for the past fifty-two years. Do you want another UN resolution or rather an agreement?⁵³

To this statement, Abu Ala made clear that if that was the case, the Palestinians would not accept the offer. Despite the Palestinian's frustration to move forward, the talks continued the following day.

Several scholars and even Oslo participants such as former deputy chief, Israel Hasson, Ambassador and director-general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Avi Gil, secretary and coordinator of the Israeli team, Gidi Grinstein, Colonel Shaul Arieli, and Chief negotiator Gilad Sher, argue that the U.S. intervention as mediator and its inefficient management

⁵² Sher, 44.

⁵³ Ibid, 45.

skills compromised the entire outcome of the peace process⁵⁴. They argue that, at some point, the U.S. team true ambitions were clear: to rush over a shared agreement while ensuring a safety net for the president. At the same time, the Israeli team was adamant to advance the talks and reach any shape or form of positive reaction on the Palestinian side. The negotiators were aware that no progress would stall unless Israel demonstrated flexibility in its positions. Since the strongest position Palestinian counterparts held were the security arrangements and the end of conflict, Israeli negotiators predicted that Palestinians would be willing to let Israel retain two to three percent of the territory, without land swaps.⁵⁵

The U.S. intervention was specifically noticeable when Clinton requested the Israeli team to draft a possible agreement before the summit, instructing the team that “in light of the complexity of the issues, they should not include the issues of water, economics, law enforcement, and other ‘generic issues’”⁵⁶. According to the chief negotiator Gilad Sher (2006), this episode depicts well the American administration’s attention on its own political campaign and absence of definite decision-making mechanisms by the respective leaders, that only contributed to compromise and subjugate every existing effort to achieve an agreement. Nonetheless, despite its impact upon the recreation and reconstruction of reality, and while there is much controversy on whether the American administration lost track of their role as mediator rather than negotiator at the talks, it seems that their presence and intervention is very much recognized.

The opportunity

The Camp David summit took place July 11, 2000, after 15 days of intense negotiations and nearly seven years after the signing of the first Oslo Accords. The U.S. president,

⁵⁴ Kacowicz, Arie M. (2005), “Rashomon in Jerusalem”, 262.

⁵⁵ In fact, it was the American team, during a meeting with Israeli negotiators, who requested that Israel get “rid of” gray areas and reduce the size of required territory.

⁵⁶ Sher, 59

the secretary of state, the national security adviser, and the rest of the American team were once again present as mediators. Barak and Arafat sat across from them, one on the left side and the other on the right. The members of each delegation sat beside their respective leaders. Clinton, looking at both leaders, began the talks:

This is an historic opportunity. We look to the future we want to build in your region. I am glad to be here. I have gone over the material, night and day, in preparation for this summit- the geography, Jerusalem- and I am sure that one stage or another you will test my knowledge of the material. However, resolutions and decisions are yours alone. The United States is here to enable the process.⁵⁷

It is recounted on few memoirs that except for a brief trip to Japan to attend the G8 summit, President Clinton took an active role through the entire process (along with Albright, Sandy Berger, the U.S. national security advisor, and Dennis Ross).

Although it was also in Barak and Arafat's best interest to speed the course of the talks due to their own ongoing domestic and political crisis at home, additional enclaves to the conversations were reflected on several occasions when the negotiators presented different assessments and set priorities in a different way. For the Palestinian leadership representative Abu Mazen, the refugee problem was the pivotal issue to be addressed at the summit. His presence and attention at the talks were guided by considerations of territory, sovereignty, and equality on all dimensions of the possibility of two sovereign states, living side by side. A permanent member of the Palestinian negotiating team on security issues, Mohammed Dahlan, placed focus on security, independence, and symbols of sovereignty, as well as in the short term- full release of all security prisoners.⁵⁸ On the other hand, PLO's chief negotiator Erekat believed that Jerusalem was the uppermost priority.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 63.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 61.

In the matters of land settlements, Barak envisioned an independent Palestinian state over Gaza Strip and most of the West Bank, but with the settlement blocs of the 1967 border being annexed to Israel. The Jordan Valley, once considered to be Israel's security border, would be assigned to exclusive Palestine control. Altogether 20.5 percent of the West Bank was to remain in Israel's possession, where 10.5 percent was to be annexed outright and the remaining 10 percent was to be under Israeli military occupation for a period of twenty years. Concerning refugee rights, Barak agreed and was adamant to the return of Palestinian refugees, but only under the context of family reunification and involving 500 people per year. Regarding Jerusalem, Barak proposed an enlarged "Greater Jerusalem"⁵⁹ where all the Jewish settlements that had been built throughout Arab East Jerusalem since 1967 would be incorporated, as well as those in the city's suburbs. On the remaining Arab neighbors in East Jerusalem, Barak proposed sovereignty to be given over to Palestinians and they would be able to establish their capital in these areas. The Palestinian delegation was divided. Some saw in this proposal an opportunity for the end of the continuous dispute, whereas others felt that it would compromise their essential natural rights (particularly the right of return)

All agreed that on the issue of territory and borders, the Palestinians were determined to create an area with reasonable geographic continuity. They were adamant to receive no less than the other Arab countries (e.g. Egypt and Jordan) had received on their own peace agreements with Israel. Israel suggested the withdrawal from over 90 percent of the West Bank, but wished to annex those parts of the West Bank and Gaza with major Jewish settlements, and possibly uphold part of the Jordan Valley. Israeli settlements not annexed by Israel would be evacuated. The Palestinians insisted nonetheless on Israel's withdrawal from all the territory captured in the aftermath of the

⁵⁹ Slater, "What Went Wrong? The Collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process", 183.

1967 war, including all the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. Under the security issue, Palestinian ambitions reflected signs of national pride in the form of power. Their definition of border consisted in a land that “must be under the sovereign control of the government of the territory, meaning Palestine”.⁶⁰ A military-sounding term for the Palestinian police force was also often mentioned, as well as the use of the statement: a “state with limited arms,” instead of a “demilitarized state”⁶¹. Nonetheless, they were willing to agree to foreign-non-Israeli- control part of borders and passages, even if for a limited period.

Regarding Jerusalem, Israel proposed to turn over Abu Dis and other suburbs of East Jerusalem to the Palestinians for the capital of a Palestinian state. But while Israel would offer municipal autonomy to Palestinians in parts of East Jerusalem, including Muslim and Christian holy places, it would not grant its sovereignty of East Jerusalem to the Palestinians. Under the matters of refugees, Palestinians saw it as their duty to prove that the suffering of the refugees was over, and that the “dream” would be fulfilled, even if only formally. Arafat demanded the right of return of all the refugees and their descendants displaced by Israel’s creation in 1948 along with a term of responsibility by Israel for their plight.⁶²

However, practical aspects for solving the refugee matter, such as the essence of which was compensation⁶³ and the principle of “family unification”, remained pending. The Palestinian team stated that Israel had to be hold accountable and take full responsibility for creating the refugee problem by agreeing to the principle of “right of return”, along with a quota of 5,000-10,000 refugees per year. They maintained this condition until the end. In fact, on the eve of the Camp David Summit, the Palestinian

⁶⁰ Ibid, 75.

⁶¹ Ibid, 65.

⁶² Bickerton, I. and Klausner. “A History of the Arab Israeli Conflict”, 322.

⁶³ Sher, 86.

team made clear to the U.S. team that they would not accept any agreement that did not include a “just solution” to the refugee problem.⁶⁴

On the second day of the summit, Clinton’s National Security Advisor, Sandy Berger, and Special Assistant for Arab-Israeli Affairs, Rob Malley informed the negotiators about a U.S. draft document that would “serve as the basis for further discussions”. The intention was for the talks toward the conclusion of the agreement to take place between Friday, July 14 and Sunday, July 16. Although by most Palestinian counterparts the document was perceived as a “primitive framework agreement”, and presenting “Jerusalem in a limited manner”, some argue that it was one additional effort on the U.S. team to push for the rest of the issues and to re-establish a possible direction in bridging existing methodological gaps.⁶⁵ Arafat declined the draft, and later the head of the PLO's Negotiations Support Unit, Saeb Erekat, informed U.S. Secretary of State and supporting Clinton’s efforts at the time, Madeleine Albright that the Palestinian team would not accept a document that was drafted in coordination with Israel.

Despite Arafat’s accusations, the Israeli team did convey a meeting upon receiving the draft to analyze and discuss the preliminary reactions of the proposal. The general feeling, according to the negotiator Gilad Sher (2006), was that the American team was trying to push them beyond their positions, and without requiring a similar movement from the Palestinians⁶⁶. They further pointed three elements the document failed to address: the first was the fact that the safe passage between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank was defined as an integral part of the comprehensive territorial package; the second was that the proposal of the eastern border and the adjacent security area to

⁶⁴ Hanieh, “The Camp David Papers.” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 30(2), 75-97.

⁶⁵ Sher, 86.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

remain under Israeli sovereignty for an extended period; and the third was the notion that land swaps would also be a part of a comprehensive package⁶⁷.

Thus far in the summit, the Palestinian team withdrew from all the understandings reached in the Swedish channel (Stockholm talks) and re-opened topics for discussion (including refugees, end of conflict and finality of claims). Concerned with no signs of flexibility on the Palestinian side, President Clinton offered each commission the opportunity to select two representatives on their behalf to engage in a secret discussion unbeknown to the other delegation members, and without interfering with the timetable for the negotiations. Barak appointed Major-General Shlomo Yanai and Gilad Sher, and Arafat nominated Mohammed Dahlan (permanent member of the Palestinian negotiating team on security issues) and Saeb Erekat (PLO's chief negotiator). Former Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami, Professor Israel Shahak and Israeli politician and former Deputy chief of the Security Service and senior negotiator under the Barak administration, Israel Hasson were later let in on the discussions. The purpose of the discussions was to make progress and move forward with the negotiations and to write a proper framework laying out what had already been agreed upon.

According to Gilad Sher (2006), there was no breakthrough: "We narrowed the gaps, especially on territory, and went in depth into the issue of Jerusalem. But this was far from being enough"⁶⁸. The general concept presented by the Israeli team was as follows: separation from the southern and northern Arab neighborhoods of Jerusalem, and a special regime in the Old City, which would be premeditated "in accordance with its holy and unique character."⁶⁹ Israeli sovereignty and complete management by the Palestinians of the Temple Mount was also laid out for discussion.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 74.

⁶⁹ Ibid,79.

The response was short and bleak from the Palestinian team. They argued that the Israelis “had not moved forward on anything, except for the proposal to create a special regime in the Old City.”⁷⁰ The negotiators pointed out that Israel demanded to annex four settlement blocs totaling twelve percent of the territory as well as control over other ten percent in the Jordan Valley for an additional twelve to thirty years, giving an account of sixty-three settlements to remain under Palestinian territory. This argument turned out to be the main reason why the Palestinian team declined the proposed package deal and waited for Israel to make all the concessions.

During an intense following-up meeting on the next day, Clinton demanded clear answers from Arafat about the proposed main points: 1) Would he agree to the Israeli demand to annex 10.5 percent of the territory; 2) Would he agree to limited Israeli presence on the Jordanian border; 3) Would he agree to an agreement that would constitute the end of the conflict, even though some issues remained unsolved at that point. Clinton made clear that if Arafat were not to agree at least with one of the proposed points, there would be no use in continuing Camp David.

While the American participants present in the meeting described a “tense” environment, the Palestinian participants had another perception, recalling that the meeting took place in a “pleasant atmosphere”.⁷¹ Despite different annotations, the agreement proposal included the division of territory by Israel; the no Right of Return of refugees to Israel; transfer of the peripheral and outskirt neighborhoods of Jerusalem and eastern border (with Jordan) to Palestinian sovereignty. Under the topic of refugees, when talking about the 130,000 Palestinians living along the outskirts of Jerusalem, Israeli former Diplomat Oded Eran, who was also present in these negotiations, pointed out:

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Hanieh, “Camp David Papers”, 79.

We have no historic or religious interest in the northern bloc which reaches up to Shoafat; in the southern bloc, east of Har Homa; and in the international bloc. We have to avoid bringing thousands of Palestinians under Israeli sovereignty. Not doing so would be equivalent to accepting the Right of Return and would cost the Israeli Ministry of Finance US\$ 200 million, annually.⁷²

According to the chief negotiator Gilad Sher (2006), Yossi Ginossar, who served as back-channel envoy to the Palestinians, added that Jerusalem would be the only issue capable of making or breaking the agreement. He warned that the Palestinians would not support a solution that did not yield some Palestinian sovereignty in Jerusalem, more specifically, in the Old City (or part of it, at least in the Muslim Quarter). In another words, according to the Palestinian's personal envoy, it would be a tactical mistake to discuss and conclude the issue of Jerusalem separately.

With the help of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and IDF attorney's office, the Israeli team started to prepare for the resolution of serious legal issues related to the framework agreement. They began by examining the required mechanism for two coordinated municipalities in Jerusalem, then assessed their minimalist position regarding the augmented area of Jerusalem; looked into different aspects of functional religious autonomy on the Temple Mount, and finally prepared for separation by establishing a border regime, possible definitions of sovereignty and arrangements on the Temple Mount.⁷³ The work was based on precedent documents around the world, which focused on ending war, territorial, financial and property claims⁷⁴, and even on the mechanisms for settling mutual claims in the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel.

⁷² Sher, 77.

⁷³ Ibid, 79.

⁷⁴ The Israeli team used a document entitled "*Legal Claims in Regard to a Framework Agreement*" where precedents were detailed, beginning with the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947 through the agreement between Switzerland and Poland of June 1949 regarding financial claims, to the arrangements that were concluded in the agreement between Canada and Bulgaria in January 1966.

When the discussion shifted to the issue of Palestinian custodianship of the Temple Mount, the Israeli team proposed a formula that could neutralize the major reasons why the Palestinians wanted formal sovereignty (including security, archeology, and law enforcement). Such formula assumed that if there was a body responsible for the custodianship, it was possible that the Arab world and international community would support the agreement. As for the Arab neighborhoods of Jerusalem, the northern and southern suburbs were not mentioned. Amidst these proposals, Arafat was not adamant to accept these conditions: “I cannot go back to my people without Al-Quds Al-Sharif. I prefer to die as someone who has been occupied, rather than as someone who yielded and gave up.”⁷⁵ Within hours of the discussion, the American team announced the cease of the summit, “unless a real breakthrough was to happen”⁷⁶. With the ongoing political crisis at home, the situation was tragic on both ends: for Barak, returning to Israel, would leave him no choice but to create a national unity government or call for elections; and for the Palestinians, who were left with signs of leadership paralysis as well as personal and structural failings continued to prevent a compromise. President Clinton tried one last attempt and reached out to the Arab leaders Ben Ali, Mubarak and King Abdullah. Although he tried to convince them to persuade Arafat into accepting one of the offers on Jerusalem and move forward with the agreement, his efforts were trivial.

Clinton parameters

On 23 December 2000, just before his presidency came to an end, Clinton presented a final attempt to amend the course of negotiations. He gathered all parties once again and presented a new proposal. His team accounted with the following representation: US Secretary Madeleine; Alright; John Podesta (White House chief of staff); Samuel Berger

⁷⁵ Ibid, 82.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

(appointed National Security advisor); Steve Richetti (Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations); Bruce Reidel (senior advisor on South Asia and the Middle East); Dennis Ross (US special Middle East coordinator); Aaron Miller (US Middle East analyst, author, and negotiator); Robert Malley (special Assistant to the president for Arab-Israeli Affairs); and Gamal Helal (senior advisor to the Middle East Special Coordinator for Arab-Israeli Negotiations at the US Department of State). The following attendees on the Palestinian side: Saeb Erakat (PA lead negotiator); Mohammad Dahlan (permanent member of the Palestinian negotiating team on security issues), Samih al-Abid (head of the Committee for Borders and Territory); Ghaith Al-Omari (advisor to the Palestinian negotiating team). The Israeli representatives were the following: Shlomo (Chief negotiator); Gilead Sher (Chief negotiator and senior adviser to Barak); Shlomo Yanai (Major-General and Security head of the team during the talks); and Gidi Grinstein (secretary and coordinator of the Israeli team).

In terms of territorial issues, Clinton proposed 94-96 percent of the West Bank to the Palestinians, forcing Israel to remove 20 % of Jewish settlers. He argued that the land annexed by Israel should be compensated by a land swap of 1-3 percent, in addition to the arrangements such as the Permanent Safe Passage. He additionally proposed the parties to develop a map consistent with the following criteria: 80 percent of settlers in blocks of settlements; contiguity; minimum annexation of territory to Israel; and minimum number of Palestinian to be affected by the annexation.⁷⁷ The Palestinians insisted on only a 2% swap, compelling Israel to uproot most settlers outside of Jerusalem. Under security matters, Clinton proposed the withdrawal of the Israeli presence within a period over 36 months, with the presence of an international authority replacement in the

⁷⁷ “Clinton Proposal on Israeli-Palestinian Peace”, <https://www.inss.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/7-12.2000-Clinton-Proposal-on-Israeli-Palestinian-Peace.pdf>

area. According to this proposal, after such transition, a small Israeli presence in specified military locations in the Jordan Valley (always under the authority of international force) was to be placed for another 36 months.⁷⁸ When acknowledging early warning stations, Clinton proposed that Israel maintained the three stations in the West Bank under Palestinian liaison presence as subject to review after 10 years, and if any change in status to be mutually agreed.

For emergency and development areas, Clinton understood that the parties needed to develop maps of relevant areas and routes. Concerning airspace, although the Palestinians would have full sovereignty over it, special arrangements would still have to be agreed by both parties for Israeli training and operational needs. As of the issue of refugees, Clinton argued that the fundamental gap in the positions of the parties related to the right of return lacked mutual understanding and compromise. Although the president made clear that Israel was prepared to acknowledge the moral and material suffering caused to the Palestinian people in the result of the 1948 war, he also pointed out what Israel had defended all along: accepting Palestinian demands on the right of return would mean endangering the Jewish existence altogether. Despite such gap in communication and cooperation, Clinton proposed the implementation of international forces on ground as mediators (only if indirectly), by urging the international commission to implement compensation, resettlement, and rehabilitation to the refugees in need.

Clinton recommended to address both sides according to the perspective “two states for two peoples”, where the Palestinian state would be the “focal point” for Palestinians to return to the region, without ruling out the possibility that Israel would accept “a number of refugees”.⁷⁹ Clinton also stressed the importance of the parties to reach and to

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

adopt a formula that would make clear that although there would be no specific right of return to Israel itself, these terms would not negate the aspiration of the Palestinian people to return to the area. In this context, the president proposed two alternatives: (1) Both sides recognize the right of Palestinian refugees to return to historic Palestine; or (2) Both sides recognize the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland.

Reinstating that the agreement between the parties should define actualization of this right in a way that would follow with the pattern of two-state solution, he also proposed five alternatives for permanent residence for refugees: (1) The Palestinian state; (2) Areas that Israel transfers to the state of Palestine in the context of territorial exchange; (3) Host countries; (4) Third countries; (5) The State of Israel. In noting these alternatives, the agreement would make clear that a return to the West Bank and Gaza, or to the territories that Israel would transfer to the Palestinians in the context of territorial exchange was a right entitled to Palestinian refugees, while their resettlement in third countries or absorption into Israel would depend upon policies of these countries. Furthermore, Israel was allowed to indicate in the agreement (if it intended) to establish a policy allowing several refugees into Israel, consistent with its sovereign decision. The parties would also agree that implementing these steps would set the principles of U.N. Resolution 194 regarding Palestinian refugees into practice.

Regarding Jerusalem, Clinton proposed the division of the city along ethnic lines, with Jewish neighborhoods belonging to the Israeli side and the Arabs to the Palestinian. However, the Palestinians did not accept Israeli sovereignty over the Har Homa and part of the Armenian Quarter. Further under the holy sites issue, the parameters envisioned a “vertical sovereignty” of the Temple Mount/Noble Sanctuary. The Palestinians demanded exclusive sovereignty over this area⁸⁰.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Further negotiations took place under U.S. supervision on 11–25 July 2000. Barak offered Arafat a deal that included the establishment of a Palestinian state on more than 90% of the West Bank; the evacuation of most Israeli settlements from the West Bank; the division of Jerusalem and recognition of the Al-Aqsa Mosque area as the capital of the Palestinian state; co-ownership of the Temple Mount area; and permission for refugees to return to the Palestinian state⁸¹. Nonetheless, at the end of the summit, Arafat rejected the terms and the process failed. The 13-day summit at Camp David ended on July 26 with no agreement. Despite much anger and public finger pointing, negotiating sessions between the parties in different parts of the globe continued. At the same time Israeli settlements in the West Bank continued to upsurge, the Palestinian economic situation continued to deteriorate, and in September the second Intifada broke out.

Amid these events, elections were approaching. The polls showed an increasing margin of victory for Ariel Sharon (Barak's opponent at the time). It is important to note nonetheless that Barak attended the summit without Israeli confidence and with only 42 members of the Knesset left in his coalition⁸². Although he managed to stay in office upon his return to Israel, he also won a no-confidence motion with 54 votes in his favor and 52 votes against him⁸³. While Barak kept his promise to withdraw from Lebanon, he lost public and coalitional support with the outbreak of the second Intifada in September 2000. Despite attempts to save his position, gain public support, and save the peace process at the Taba Summit from 21 to 27 January 2001 (further discussed in the following chapter), Arafat still rejected the terms.

⁸¹Sher, 93-104; 105-12.

⁸² Topor, 5.

⁸³ Cohen-Almagor, R. (2012). *Between Autonomy and State Regulation: J.S. Mill's Elastic Paternalism*. *Philosophy*, 87

Chapter 3: The Last Effort

“There are those who claim that I am not a partner in peace. In response, I say Israel's peace partner is, and always has been, the Palestinian people”

—Yasir Arafat, 2002 ⁸⁴

Turning Point

In mid-January, three weeks before Israeli elections, one more negotiation session would take place from 21 to 27 January 2001 at Taba, in the Sinai. The hard lessons of Camp David II and the Clinton compromise parameters were on the table. At the same time, the facing imminence of Ariel Sharon as Israel's PM: if ever there was a time to reach an end to the negotiations, this was the last momentum. Facing an 18 percent gap at the polls two and a half weeks before the election, did Barak have a better political move than to come to the Israeli electorate with an agreement in hand? Though many of the negotiators were dubious about Arafat wanting any deal after Camp David II, others believed that his strategy was to stall the negotiating process until achieving the best package deal. Surely, he would see that Taba was the end of the negotiating road and the place to make such deal. Although most negotiators entered the negotiations with skepticism, the evidence suggests that some thought a full agreement was possible, while others aimed at a framework agreement. The Palestinians were reluctant if negotiating with a probable election-losing PM was worth the effort; or worse, they worried that a negotiation could pressure them into making concessions that would not lead to a binding agreement.

The opening at Taba began with speeches about ‘seizing the moment’, as both sides acknowledged the inevitable calamities if the negotiations were to fail; the parties’ joint commitment to a two-state solution; the uniqueness of the opportunity; and the need for perseverance. The question on whether the Clinton parameters would be the starting point

⁸⁴ Arafat, Y. (2002) “The Palestinian Vision of Peace.” *The New York Times*, February 3.

for the negotiations came to surface. Although no answer was achieved at the plenary, the Clinton parameters were in practice the basis for much of the week's negotiating. The teams had agreed to break into four groups, focusing on borders (including the question of settlements), Jerusalem, security, and refugees. Discussions about borders and settlements were conducted by representatives appointed from each side and by top negotiators. Jerusalem was not discussed⁸⁵.

According to Gilad Sher's memoir (2006) in *The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Negotiations, 1999-2001*, despite what seemed to be an Israeli team confident about agreement resolution on security and borders, once 2 Israelis were killed at the Palestinian town of Tulkarm that same week, Barak fired the gun, ordered the cabinet ministers back to Jerusalem and agreed to retreat from the conversations⁸⁶. But while it was implied that no further negotiations were to take place in the absence of the Israeli cabinet ministers, Chief negotiator Gilad Sher and other members of the Israeli and Palestinian staff team continued to meet. In fact, in his memoir, Sher (2006) accounts that, on Wednesday evening of that same week in Taba, the Israeli team initiated a dinner meeting declaring it the "moment of truth". At the dinner, the Israeli team urged the Head negotiator of the Palestinian team, Abu Ala, to meet with Arafat and prove his commitment about reaching an agreement⁸⁷. To this day the Israeli negotiators maintain that Abu Ala declined the offer, saying: "the master of the house does not want an agreement."⁸⁸ However, in a series of interviews with Taba negotiators for the conduct of the study "Trying to

⁸⁵ "Clinton Proposal on Israeli-Palestinian Peace", <https://www.inss.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/7-12.2000-Clinton-Proposal-on-Israeli-Palestinian-Peace.pdf>

⁸⁶ Sher, 138

⁸⁷ Sher, 140.

⁸⁸ Matz. (2003). "Trying to Understand the Taba Talks", *Palestine-Israel Journal*.

Understand the Taba Talks”⁸⁹, Professor David Matz (2003) mentions that Abu Ala denied the statement (although he did not deny that the Israelis had raised the question).⁹⁰

It was only after eight months that a story about this meeting was delivered to the public. Although it is unclear whether the meeting was as described, the lack of coordination and disengagement on the Palestinian side to collaborate with the Israeli team up until this point is eminent.

The negotiations resumed Thursday after Barak decided to return to Taba. Dan Reisner, legal counsel to the Defense Ministry and veteran of many Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, left the following day saying that he saw no progress in the negotiations. Eventually, the Minister of Tourism and former Chief of staff, Amnon Lipkin-Shahak presented the same argument. The Palestinians, on the other hand, added three negotiators on Thursday. The process resumed the same pattern from the prior days, except that now conversations about Jerusalem became central-focused. The work continued until Saturday midday, after an announcement calling for the end of negotiations.

Progress? Any, at all?

When professor Matz (2003) asked the negotiators if an agreement could have been reached on their assigned topic had they had more time to negotiate, the answer was almost uniformly positive. Although some negotiators intended to reach a “full agreement” at the beginning of the summit, by mid-week it shifted towards a “framework agreement”⁹¹. According to the professor (2003), the parties failed to acknowledge each other’s criteria on how to pull together all the potential agreements and review the entire package deal. While the Palestinians wanted an end of conflict to occur officially when

⁸⁹ An in-depth analysis of what happened at the Taba peace talks, and why they failed conducted by Professor David Matz, the director of the Graduate Program in Dispute Resolution at the University of Massachusetts.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

the main agreement was implemented, the Israelis wanted it to occur with the signing of the full agreement.

Additionally, EU Special Representative to the Middle East Process Ambassador Moratinos and his team prepared a systematic account as a third-party present at the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at Taba, covering all permanent status issues including territory, Jerusalem, refugees and security.⁹² Despite showing that “both have gone a long way to accommodate the views of the other side and that solutions are possible”⁹³, the report confirms about the existence of serious gaps and differences between the perception, terminology and trust on both negotiating teams as well as its dialogue mechanisms toward conflict resolution. The report presents the following description of the negotiation’s outcome on the permanent issues at Taba:

1. Territory

West Bank: The two sides agreed that in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 242, the lines would be the basis for the borders between Israel and Palestine. Both teams presented for the first time their own maps over the West Bank: 2 maps on the Israeli team, and illustrative maps on the Palestinian side detailing their understanding of Israeli interests in the region. The negotiations also included other aspects of territory such as settlements and how the needs of each party could be accommodated. Nonetheless, different interpretations regarding the scope and meaning of the Clinton parameters (acting as basis for the discussion) emerged. While the Israeli team stated that the parameters provided for annexation of settlement blocs, the Palestinian side argued that the blocs would cause significant harm to their interests and rights, particularly to the Palestinians residing in areas Israel wanted to annex. While the Israeli team maintained

⁹² “Moratinos’ ‘Non-Paper’ on Taba negotiations – Non-UN document”. (2001) *UN, The Question of Palestine*, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-200101/>

⁹³ Matz (2003), 1.

their argument about their right and entitlement to continuity between and among their settlements, the Palestinians maintained their disapproval over further settlements in the west bank, stating that any growth should occur within the borders of Israel.

Additionally, although both sides accepted the principle of a land swap, its terms of proportionality remained under discussion. The Palestinian team presented a map that incorporated 3.1 percent on the settlers. Israel initially proposed to incorporate 6 percent annexation, and only after proposing to count certain “assets” such as the “safe passage” (even though the proposal did not provide Palestine sovereignty over these "assets"), it agreed to the 3 maximum percent land swap as per Clinton proposal.⁹⁴ Moreover, The Palestinian maps had a similar conceptual reference as it stressed the importance of a non-annexation of any Palestinian villages and the contiguity of the West Bank and Jerusalem. They also followed the principle that the land swap should be equitable in size and value and in areas adjacent to the border with Palestine, and in the same vicinity as the annexed by Israel⁹⁵. The team also maintained that land not under Palestinian sovereignty such as the Israeli proposal regarding a "safe passage/corridor" as well as economic interests was not included in the calculation of the swap.

These meetings concerning Ma'ale Adumim, a large Israeli settlement (25,000 people) in east of Jerusalem blocking considerable north-south traffic for the new state of Palestine, illustrate some of the difficulties in determining where the parties were when the negotiation ended. The Palestinians feared that Ma'ale Adumim would divide the new Palestinian state by Israeli lands and roads, leaving it without a coherent land mass. At one point during the negotiations, the Palestinian team agreed that Ma'ale Adumim would be annexed to Israel as part of the overall percentage. When the Israeli team asked for

⁹⁴ Moratinos, 2.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

more land around the settlement and connection to other settlements, the Palestinians rescinded their agreement. It was only “unofficially” that the Palestinians approved Ma'ale Adumim to be included in the annexation, and only if the parties could work out the scope of the surrounding area. By the time the negotiations ended, the official Palestinian position refused Israeli annexation of Ma'ale Adumim albeit “unofficially” both sides had already discussed an agreement.

According to Matz’s report (2003), the mutual understanding was that the Palestinians would receive land from Israel, in return for the percentage of the West Bank ceded to Israel. Although the mutual understanding specified on the amount of Israeli land to be ceded, it failed to mention its location. Furthermore, additional questions were left open: did the percentage figures include East Jerusalem or the "bridge" linking Gaza with the West Bank? How about the allocation of the disputed piece of land at Latrun? Both sides wrongly assumed that these questions would be resolved within a few days’ work.

Gaza Strip: Neither side presented any maps over the Gaza Strip. It was implied that the Gaza Strip would be under total Palestinian sovereignty, but such details were never formally discussed. All settlements would thus be evacuated, in which the Palestinian side claimed it could be arranged in 6 months (a timetable not agreed by the Israeli side).

Safe passage/corridor from Gaza to the West Bank: Both agreed about the existence of a safe passage from the north of Gaza (Beit Hanun) to the Hebron district, and that the West Bank and the Gaza Strip would be territorially linked. The nature of the governing regime to the territorial link and sovereignty over those regions was never agreed.

2. Jerusalem

Sovereignty: The discussions on Jerusalem focused on the partition of the city, its administration, and the control of the holy places. The division the city was based on the

Clinton parameters, which projected Palestinian ownership over the Arab areas, and Israeli ownership to the Jewish areas. The Palestinian said to be ready to discuss Israeli sovereignty over the Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem that were constructed after 1967, but not Jebel Abu Ghneim and Ras al-Amud. On the same topic, they rejected Israeli sovereignty over settlements in the Jerusalem Metropolitan Area, namely of Ma'ale Adumim and Givat Ze'ev. At the same time, the Palestinian team understood that Israel was ready to accept Palestinian sovereignty over the Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem, including part of Jerusalem's Old City, as well as Palestinian property claims in West Jerusalem, and the Israeli side understood that the Palestinians were ready to accept Israeli sovereignty over the Jewish Quarter of the Old City and part of the American Quarter. Both sides felt the results were clear by time the negotiations ended.

Open City: Both sides favored the idea of an Open City. The Israeli side suggested the establishment of an open city whose geographical scope encompassed the Jerusalem's Old City plus an area defined as the "Holy Basin" or "Historical Basin".⁹⁶ The Palestinian team rejected the Israeli proposal regarding the geographic scope of an open city and asserted that the open city would only be acceptable if its geographical scope would encompass the full municipal borders of both East and West Jerusalem. However, the lack of agreement in conceptual terms over such definitions created a barrier to the continuing of the negotiations.

Capital for two states: Israel accepted Jerusalem as the capital of the two states: Yerushalaim, capital of Israel and Al-Quds, capital of the state of Palestine. The Palestinian argued that East Jerusalem would be the capital of the state of Palestine.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 3.

Holy/Historical Basin and the Old City: There was an attempt to develop an alternative concept that would relate to the Old City and its surroundings, in which the Israeli team put forward several alternative models for discussion, including the creation of mechanisms for close coordination and cooperation in the Old City. The idea of a special police force regime was also discussed, but not agreed upon. Israel also expressed its interest and concern to the Holy Basin, which included the Jewish Cemetery on the Mount of Olives, the City of David and Kivron Valley. The Palestinians made clear about Palestinian sovereignty over these areas. Another option for the Holy Basin, suggested informally by the Israeli side, was to create a special regime or to suggest some form of internationalization for the entire area or a joint regime with special cooperation and coordination. Palestinians disapproved of the ideas.

Western Wall/ Wailing Wall: Both accepted the Clinton's principle of religious and administrative control over each respective holy site. The Palestinian side acknowledged Israel's request for an affiliation to the holy parts of the Western Wall but maintained that the question of the Wailing Wall and/or Western Wall wasn't entirely addressed, rephrasing the importance of distinguishing between the Western Wall and the Wailing Wall segment (recognized in the Islamic faith as the Buraq Wall).

Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount: Both sides were close to accepting Clinton's ideas regarding Palestinian sovereignty over Haram al-Sharif despite Palestinian and Israeli reservations. There was progress in terms of practical arrangements regarding evacuations, building and public order in the compound. An informal proposal was also presented: Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount would be under international sovereignty of the P5 plus Morocco (or other Islamic presence) during the period of 3 years, whereby the Palestinians would be "the guardians". At the end of this period, the parties would

revise the agreement as to create a new solution or to extend the existing conditions, and in the absence of an agreement, the parties would return to implement Clinton's proposals. Neither side accepted nor rejected the suggestion.

3. Refugees

Although the Palestinian team seemed reluctant to Clinton's parameters and was adamant as to not serve it as the basis for the next talks at Taba, they did indeed serve as such. The negotiations on the refugee issue, headed by Yossi Beilin and Nabil Sha'ath, were in fact, the most substantive negotiations since the beginning of the Oslo process. Moratino's report states that non-papers were exchanged and that it was regarded as a "good basis for the talks."⁹⁷ The document also depicted both team's awareness in the issue of Palestinian refugees as central to the Israeli-Palestinian relations as well as an issue of central importance in reaching a comprehensive and just solution. Both sides thus suggested that, as basis, the parties should agree that a just settlement in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 242 would lead to the implementation of UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (UNGAR 194).

Return/ repatriation, and relocation/rehabilitation

In the practicalities of resolving the refugee issue, the Palestinian side reiterated that the refugees should have the right of return to their homes in accordance with the interpretation of UNGAR 194. In this sense, the Israeli team expressed its understanding that the return as stated in UNGAR 194 would be implemented within the framework of one of the following programs:

A. Return and repatriation

1. To Israel
2. To Israel swapped territory
3. To the Palestinian state

⁹⁷ Ibid, 5.

B. Relocation and rehabilitation

1. Rehabilitation in host country
2. Relocation to third country

They also mentioned that the preference in these programs would have to be accorded with the Palestinian refugee population in Lebanon. The Palestinian team stressed that the above would thus be subject to the individual free choice of the refugees, and that it shall not prejudice their right to their homes in accordance with its implementation of UNGAR 194. Additionally, the Israeli team informally suggested a “three-track 15-year absorption program” (which was discussed but not agreed upon). The first track referring to the absorption to Israel, no numbers were determined, and contained a non-paper referring to 25,000 in the first three years of this program⁹⁸. The second track, the absorption of Palestinian refugees into the Israeli territory, stated that it should be transferred to Palestinian sovereignty, and the third, referred to the absorption of refugees in the context of family reunification scheme. The Palestinian negotiators never presented a number and argued that they would not start the discussion without an opening position from Israel. They also maintained that Israel’s acceptance of the return of refugees should not prejudice existing programs within Israel such as those of family unification.

Compensation: Both sides agreed to the creation of an International Commission and an International Fund, where it was established that a “small-sum” compensation would be paid to the refugees in the “first-track” phase. Claims of compensation for property losses below a certain amount should also be subject to “first-track” procedures. There was also progress in terms of Israeli compensation for material losses, land and assets expropriated,

⁹⁸ According to Moratino’s report, 40,000 in the first five years of this program did not appear in the non-paper but were raised verbally (Moratinos 2001, 5).

including an agreement on a payment amount to be agreed upon the international fund (although no actual monetary value was discussed).

UNRWA: Both teams believed that UNRWA should be suspended in accordance with an agreed timetable of five years as a targeted period. The Palestinians reinforced a possible adjustment to this period to ensure it would be subject of implementation on other aspects of the agreement dealing with refugees and with termination of the Palestinian refugee status in the various locations.

Former Jewish refugees: Israel proposed compensation to former Jewish refugees from Arab countries. Palestinian side maintained that the issue was not a subject for a bilateral Palestinian-Israeli agreement.

Restitution: Palestinians raised the issue of restitution of refugee property. Israel rejected.

End of claims: Clinton suggested that the implementation of the agreement “shall constitute a complete and final implementation of UNGAR 194 and therefore end all claims”.⁹⁹

4. Security

Early warning stations: Israel agreed with Clinton’s proposal that envisioned that Israel would maintain three facilities in the West Bank with a Palestinian Liaison presence and that the stations would be subject to review every 10 years with any changes in the status to be mutually agreed. The Palestinian side was prepared to accept the continued operations under certain conditions. It was thus agreed that such mechanism would have to be detailed and formulated in further negotiations.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 6.

Military capability of the State of Palestine: The Israeli team maintained Clinton’s proposal in the definition of Palestine as a non-militarized state. The Palestinian position was prepared to accept these terms but continued to propose it to be a “state with limited arms”¹⁰⁰. Although both sides did not reach a conclusion on the scope of arms limitations, they began exploring different options. Both agreed that this issue was not concluded.

West Bank and Jordan Valley withdrawal: Israel accepted the withdrawal from the West Bank over a 36-month period with an additional 36 months for the Jordan Valley under the authority of international forces (and maintaining that a distinction should be made between the withdrawal in the Jordan Valley and elsewhere). The Palestinian team, however, did not accept the terms and conditions on the 36-month withdrawal process from the West Bank, expressing concern that a lengthy procedure would “exacerbate Palestinian-Israeli tensions”.¹⁰¹ The team proposed instead an 18-month withdrawal under the supervision of international forces. In regard to the Jordan Valley, the Palestinians said to be prepared as to consider the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces for an additional 10-month period. But although they were also ready to consider the presence of international forces in the West Bank over a longer period, they continued to refuse ongoing presence of Israeli forces on the ground.

Electromagnetic sphere: Israel recognized Palestine’s sovereignty over the electromagnetic sphere and conceded that it would not seek to constrain Palestinian commercial use of the sphere but sought control over it for security purposes. On the other hand, Palestine sought full sovereignty rights over the sphere, but was prepared to

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid,7.

accommodate reasonable Israeli needs within a cooperative framework in accordance with international rules and regulations.

Additional concerns

Although the parties seemed to have reached a level of agreement in many crucial points, there were still unresolved issues that needed to be addressed.

Symbols of Sovereignty

Probably the most important concern, it had to do with gaps not related to practical administration but rather to symbolic issues of sovereignty. Such obstacle included the need for implementing a mechanism that would bridge the gap on different perceptions and beliefs from each side:

In security cooperation: Although both sides said to be fully committed to the promotion of security cooperation and fighting terror at Taba, no evidence shows further and more detailed discussions on the matter.

In borders/ international crossings: Although the Palestinian team was confident that the agreement would recognize its sovereignty over borders and international crossing points, the two sides had not yet reached a conclusion regarding this issue, mainly the question of monitoring and verification at Palestine's international borders (Israeli vs. international presence).

On emergency deployment: Regarding emergency deployments or locations, Clinton had stated that both sides would have to develop a map of the relevant areas and routes. He also proposed a definition of emergency ("the immanent and demonstrable threat to Israel's national security of a military nature that requires the activation of a national state

emergency”¹⁰²) that in such case, the international force would need to be notified of any determination. Although there is no indication on further discussions over a clear definition and detailed maps proposing relevant areas and routes after the summit, the Israeli team did propose at Taba to maintain and operate five emergency locations on Palestinian territory, mainly in the Jordan Valley. The Palestinian response allowed for the maximum of two emergency locations conditional on a time limit for the dismantling, and in addition, they also considered that these two emergency locations would be managed by international presence and not by Israel. Additionally, the Palestinian team declined the deployment of Israeli armed forces on Palestinian territory during emergency situations but said to be prepared to take into consideration other ways in which international forces could be summed in such capacity, particularly within the context of regional security cooperation efforts.

On air space control: As suggested on the parameters, the general idea was for Palestine to have sovereignty over its airspace. Both sides agreed. Israel was also willing to accept all civil aviation rights according to international regulations but requested a unified air control system overriding control to Israel. Despite Clinton’s proposal that the that the two sides should work out special arrangements for Israeli training and operational needs, the Palestinian side rejected such request, arguing it as “inconsistent with the neutrality of the state of Palestine”, and refusing to grant Israel such privileges while dismissing its Arab neighbors.

Ma’aleh Adumim: Regarding the dispute of Ma’aleh Adumim, it is important to reiterate each side’s perception: for Israel, the importance on the recognition of the June 4, 1967,

¹⁰² Foundation for Middle East, “Clinton parameters”

border is that since 1967 (and to this date), Israel's official position had been that the UN Security Council Resolution 242 mandated the withdrawal from "territories" seized in the Six Day War; for Palestinians, the resolution requires withdrawal from the "territories".

At the time of Taba, Israel's refusal was an obstacle to Foreign Minister Shimon Peres in his efforts to reach an agreement with the chairman of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Abu Ala. However, there was no Palestinian confirmation of Peres's claim confirming the Palestinian's approval towards the formulation of the final-status agreement to be based on Resolution 242. At Taba, the Israeli team said to agree to recognize the June 4, 1967, border as the basis for the border between the two states if the Palestinians would agree in principle to further discuss territorial swaps in the West Bank (as proposed by Clinton), and that would enable Israel to annex parts of the West Bank adjacent to the Green Line (excluding Gaza). But the maps the Palestinian team presented at Taba gave 3.1 percent of the West Bank to Israel (less than the lower limit proposed by the Clinton plan, under which the Palestinians would receive 94 to 96 percent of the West Bank). Israel demanded 6 percent (the upper boundary of Clinton's plan), plus an additional 2 percent in the context of a leasing agreement. The Palestinians also rejected Israel's request that the "no man's land" around Latrun should not be considered part of the West Bank.

According to Moratino's report, Israel disclaimed all the Jordan Valley settlements, focusing instead on its security interests in the area. The dispute centered on the territory between Ma'aleh Adumim and Givst Ze'ev (areas that contained a large Palestinian population and East Jerusalem's most important land reserves). The same report suggests that the Palestinians rescinded on the earlier readiness to include these two settlements in the same settlement blocs that would be annexed to Israel, only later to find out that Israel had also insisted on the latter, which would mean that Palestinian citizens would find

themselves in sovereign Israeli territory. As a result, Barak instructed Sher to inform the Palestinian team that the map presented by (at the time) foreign minister Shlomo Ben-Ami, whereby reducing the area of the settlement bloc (including Ma'aleh Adumim-Givat Ze'ev tract) to only 5 percent of the West Bank, had no longer validity.

An additional unresolved dispute resulted from Israel's refusal to accept the Palestinian team's suggestion for a 1:1 ratio between the areas of the West Bank annexed to Israel and the parts of Israel that would be granted to the Palestinians in exchange. Israel rather proposed a ratio of 1:2 in its favor. Moreover, the Palestinians rejected Israel's proposal that the Halutza Dunes in the Negev, the "safe passage" area between West Bank and Gaza, and part of Ashod Port, would be set aside for Palestinian use and thus considered part of the land swap. The negotiators argued that their land should be contiguous with either the West Bank or Gaza, and that it must not include a land that would merely be set aside for their use, over which they did not hold sovereignty over.¹⁰³

Western Wall dimension: Although the Clinton parameters envisioned new strategies to reach common grounds over Jerusalem, it also created room for the strongest dispute between the parties. The agreement, as previously mentioned, was that East Jerusalem (which would be called Al-Quds) would be the capital of Palestine. Other understandings such as the division of Jerusalem's neighborhoods into Jewish and Arab areas, as well as parts of the Old city (the Muslim Quarter, the n Quarter and part of the Armenian Quarter) destined to Palestinian sovereignty were determined. But Clinton's parameters did not facilitate the parties in terms of drawing mutually accepted borders between the Open City (in which both sides were in agreement) and the surrounding Palestinian areas on

¹⁰³ Eldar, "The Refugee Problem at Taba", <https://pij.org/articles/160/the-refugee-problem-at-tab>.

one side, and the Israeli areas on the other. As the Open City being territory on which both sides were allowed to enter without passing through checkpoints, Palestinians wanted it to encompass all of Jerusalem, whereas Israelis proposed to limit it to the Old city only. The most sensitive issue on the negotiations after Clinton's parameters was, nonetheless, the Western Wall. When Clinton referred to the "holy parts" of the wall, he allowed an opening for the Palestinian claim that only exposed part of the Wall (Wailing Wall) was considered as holy to the Jewish population, and thus only such part should be placed under Israeli sovereignty. The Palestinian team, and mainly Arafat expressed signs indifference about the holiness significance and magnitude of the Temple Mount for the Jewish population and claimed that the Western Wall tunnels were part of Haram al-Sharif (Temple Mount).¹⁰⁴

Narrative: As previously analyzed in past chapters, the Israeli and Palestinian narratives of Oslo and Taba seem to reveal a similar and deep disillusionment with the behavior of the other. The very gradual objectives of the peace process indented to build trust and confidence, while at the same time deferring the most sensitive issues to the end of the discussions. The result was the opposite in practice: confidence undermining instead of confidence building. Although some scholars, political actors and members of both teams at the negotiations believe that the ultimate formula of peace and security for the Israelis in return for territoriality, freedom, and independence for the Palestinians remains the most coherent and rational idea, the fact is that such vision did not seem to ever be transpired on the ground. Once again, and in order to properly analyze what failed through the entire process without falling into biased paths, one must take into account the different narratives explained.

¹⁰⁴ Moratinos, 11.

Additional Scholarship

A study conducted by IR professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Arie M. Kacowicz (2005)¹⁰⁵ depicts well these findings. In this study, Kacowicz (2005) lays out a map of the divergent Israeli positions throughout the route of the Oslo peace process, including the negotiations at Camp David and at Taba. The study, based on content analysis of 20 in-depth interviews conducted in 2002/2003 to Israeli negotiators (who were directly involved in the peace process), provides insight of the different perceptions and expectations during the course negotiations, the strategies and tactics adopted on each side, as well as possible explanations to its failure. Although the list does not include Palestinian or American counterparts, professor Kacowicz (2005) makes sure to include their narratives.

The 20 Israeli participants were clustered into six groups. These groups can be placed on a continuum ranging from empathy and some degree of acceptance of the Palestinian interpretation of the course negotiations all the way to a complete lack of empathy and an antagonistic attitude towards Palestinians. The clustering was also formed as a function of the bureaucratic and political roles fulfilled by the Israeli participants, which directly affected their roles in the negotiations. The group's categories are as follows:

- (1) ***The original architects of the Oslo process*** of 1993, the then-deputy foreign minister, Dr. Yossi Beilin, and two university professors who started at initial formal talks at Oslo, Dr. Ron Pundak and Dr. Yair Hirschfeld;
- (2) ***Senior officers in the Israeli Security Service (Shin Bet)***, including its former head, Admiral Ami Ayalon, its former Deputy Chief Israel Hasson, and Yossi Ginossar (former security service officer and personal envoy to the Palestinians under PMs Rabin, Peres, and Barak);

¹⁰⁵ Kacowicz, Arie M. (2005). "Rashomon in Jerusalem: Mapping the Israeli Negotiators' Positions on the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process, 1993-2001", *International Studies Perspectives*, 6, 252–273.

- (3) ***Former senior military officers***, who followed the peace process since the Rabin administration and were involved in both managing negotiations and implementing their results, including Colonel Shaul Arieli (deputy secretary to the defense minister under Netanyahu and Barak), Lt. General and former Chief of Staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, and Major General Dany Rothchild;
- (4) ***Diplomatic/security civil servants***, such as Dr. Oded Eran, director general of the Israeli foreign ministry Avi Gil, and Dr. Allan Baker, former security officer Pini Meidan and Major General Shlomo Yanai. This group is defined as the “center” of the continuum;
- (5) ***All the prime-ministers’ men***, from the administrations of Rabin, Peres, as Barak, most specifically Eithan Haber (personal adviser to the late PM Yitzhak Rabin) and Avi Gil (Rabin and Peres’s political aides); and on Barak’s side, Pini Meidan, Gidi Grinstein, Major General Danny Yetom (also a military aide to Rabin), and Giliad Sher;
- (6) ***Senior politicians***, Lt. General and former PM Ehud Barak, and Dan Meridor.

The first interesting finding was that the notion of “Rashomon effect”, or in this situation, that the same story can be recreated and reinterpreted by its protagonists from different angles, holds true. The participants presented clashing narratives to the same story. Throughout the study, it was possible to detect these results on the following themes: 1) the degree of empathy toward Palestinian counterparts; 2) their assessment of successes and failures of the negotiations; 3) the degree of Israel’s responsibility; 4) whether the conflict could be resolved/better managed by the parties; 5) the degree of continuity among different agreements and negotiations; and 6) what solution is feasible, assuming that the emergence of an independent Palestinian state as not viable.

“What went right?”

When given the introductory question of the study “what went right”, Pundak (member of the negotiation team led by PM Shimon Peres) and Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin argued that its premises were based on clear Zionist and rational principles that are

still valid today: the need to end the Palestinian occupation, as to safeguard Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. Yair Hirschfeld (one of the original architects of the Oslo process) stressed that the most positive aspect of Oslo is that it has opened the door to an eventual peace and that it changed the political landscape and reality in the region nowadays. Other participants described it as a “cognitive quantum leap” (Arieli), a “turning point in the direction of peace” (Gil), and the fact that the “Oslo process did not fail, but it was failed by its opponents, and it is still relevant” (Ginossar).¹⁰⁶ Foreign Ministry legal adviser and part of Barak team’s negotiation administration, Allan Baker also points out that paradoxically, and from a legal standpoint, the Oslo agreements never formally withdrew, and that both sides still demand implementation from each other, while complaining about each other’s violations.

“What went wrong?”

This study further suggests that at the core of the “Rashomon effect”, and regarding to Israeli approaches to the Oslo process, alternative explanations can be grouped in terms of allocating responsibility to the Israeli team itself, the Palestinian team or the American team while mediators.¹⁰⁷

Israeli responsibility for the failure of the process

Lack of coherence/definition of clear national interests: Israeli negotiators pointed out that the successive Israeli governments lacked a clear sense of the final goals of the negotiations: “The Israelis do not know what they want” (Pundak, Hasson); “There has

¹⁰⁶ Kacowicz, 257.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 258.

been no discussion at the government level of strategic goals” (Beilin); and “There is a lack of grand vision in the formulation of Israeli policies” (Alayon) ¹⁰⁸.

Misperceptions of core Palestinian positions: Many of the participants underline the lack of empathy and misunderstanding of the fundamental Palestinian positions as a major failure in the process. While negotiators Ayalon, Ginossar, Hasson, and Arieli pointed out about Barak’s wishful thinking that the Palestinian team would agree with less than their minimum demands, Barak bluntly admitted about his false expectation of a “possible and fair” deal. ¹⁰⁹ Arieli also mentioned about the Zionist misperception implemented since the Peel Commission in 1937, leading Israelis to believe they could draw the territorial reality, and that the Palestinians would eventually accept this as a “fact of life.”¹¹⁰ Additionally, other participants also expressed acknowledgement on the effects of the unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon on the morale and motivations of Palestinian leadership that still sought for the discourse of peaceful negotiations, stressing the arrogance, lack of goodwill and condescension from the Israeli conduct of negotiations (Hasson, Hirschfeld, Rothchild, Gil). According to participants Pundak, Beilin, Ayalon, Ginossar, Hasson, Arieli, Lipkin-Shahak, Hirschfeld, Rothchild, Gil, Eran, and Meidan, the need for developing empathy remains paramount for the success and possible future resume of the talks.

Mismanagement of the negotiations

Netanyahu administration, 1996-1999: Participants on the left side of the continuum (Hasson, Lipkin-Shahak, Gil) tend to agree that Netanyahu should not be held accountable for the failure of the process as his signs of “reciprocity” between

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

advancing the political process and the Palestinian campaign against terrorism showed commitment throughout the talks. On the other hand, Arieli pointed out that “it was obvious that Netanyahu tried to procrastinate on implementing a political process that he openly disliked.” In another perspective, Meidan and Hirschfeld argue that the signing of the Hebron Protocol in 1997 and the Wye Memorandum in October 1998, along with its partial implementation, instead of strengthening the legitimacy of the talks for its entirety, it only undermined more the low trust levels between the parties. Additionally, Pundak refers to Netanyahu’s period administration as a “lost one”; Ayalon describes it as a “minor event”; and others believe that the “political process came to a halt under him” (Grinstein) and that “he is partially responsible for its failure” (Yetom).¹¹¹

Barak administration, 1999-2000: Although there was a consensus among all the participants about Barak’s willingness and courage to reach a final peace agreement, other participants claimed that the leader “did not know how to do it properly” (Pundak, Beilin, Ayalon, Arieli, Lipkin-Shahak, Hirschfeld, Rothchild). In fact, a number of critics presented in this study (Barak’s binary vision for all or nothing; failure in developing a reasonable relationship with Palestinian opponents, particularly Arafat; detour toward Syria; insistence on reaching the end of the conflict; lack of clear red lines regarding territory and Jerusalem) by most of the participants, except for Barak himself and his political entourage, are presented as the ultimate wrecking of the entirety of the process.¹¹² The other negotiators argued that the political process derailed completely after the continuing of negotiation rounds (that took place despite the uprising of the second intifada) and point out that the lack of differentiation by the

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid, 260.

IDF between Palestinian terrorists and civilian population, (and especially, Lt. General Shaul Mofaz), notability contributed to the escalation of events.

Palestinian Responsibility for the failure of the process

Arafat's role: The study shows a consensus among all Israeli participants in terms of Arafat's lack of leadership skills. They all argue about the leader's strategic mistake by using violence as a bargaining option, and by not controlling and suppressing the Islamic fundamentalist of Hamas and Islamic Jihad within the Palestinian-controlled territories. However, a strong disagreement among the Israeli participants as to whether Arafat was the main cause of the talk's failure is visible. On the left side of the continuum, the security officers tend to dismiss the overall importance of Arafat's leadership role: "not a strong leader" (Ayalon); "too simplistic an argument" (Ginossar); "not capable" (Arieli); "Mr. Nobody in the Islamic world" (Rothchild); "not a Pentium IV mind as depicted by Israeli military intelligence" (Gil)¹¹³. As one moves to the right continuum, the more Arafat's responsibility rises: "he missed an historic opportunity" (Eran); "he failed as a leader and instead of rising to the occasion he openly turned to terrorism" (Sher, Barak, Yetom, Yanai). Although not all the participants exclusively blame Arafat, they recognize that his leadership became irrelevant as the situation on ground deteriorated. More specifically, that the leader did not "act with integrity" (Baker); had a "serious, perhaps intrinsic problem in recognizing the Jewish link to the land of Israel and the holy places in Jerusalem" (Hasson, Meridor); or that "he failed to prepare his public for peace" (Eran, Ginossar).

Mismanagement and failure in implementation: Several participants argue that the Palestinians failed to properly implement their side of the interim agreements. Ayalon

¹¹³ Ibid.

mentioned that their performance in 1993-1999 was “miserable”. Meridor used the term “catastrophic”. Hirschfeld said how PA had failed as the “government of an embryotic future state”¹¹⁴, Rothschild mentioned about its corruption and Barak argued about their failure in maintaining a monopoly as use of force to stop the terrorism spread. When discussing about the negotiations with Israel (especially at Camp David), the participants argued that the Palestinian team contributed to the failure of the talks by their mismanagement, failure to counter proposals, and by “alienating the Israelis in terms of their Jewish link to the Temple Mount, followed by their insistence on the right of return for four million Palestinian refugees” (Pundak, Beilin, Lipkin-Shahak, Eran, Yanai, Barak).

Misperceptions of core Israeli positions: The participants acknowledged that Palestinians also had misperceptions of the core positions of the adversary team. For one, Ayalon, Ginossar, Hasson and Arieli argued that they misinterpreted the Israeli unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000 as a sign of weakness¹¹⁵. Baker and Meidan pointed out that they developed their own illusions about Israel’s implementation, most specifically the expectation that by the third redeployment they would get 90% of the West Bank. Grinstein and Meridor mentioned about their misread in Israeli domestic politics and how they downplayed Israeli concerns about security and demographic threat posed by the right of return (Pundak, Meridor).

Cleavages within the Palestinian leadership: A few participants argued about cleavages within the Palestinian leadership, especially between Arafat and his entourage, ultimately contributing for the failure of the Camp David negotiations (Ginossar, Arieli, Hirschfeld,

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 262.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

Rothchild, Meridor). The participants also point out that despite a few Palestinian negotiators' (such as Dahlan, Rashid, and Asfur) effort and commitment to reach an agreement, with such domestic Palestinian ruptures, it became challenging to reach a deal with Arafat.¹¹⁶

Turn to violence: Most participants also believe that the Palestinian's main responsibility for the failure of the process lied in their "ineffectiveness in preventing and fighting terrorism" (Ayalon, Ginossar, Hasson). For Barak, Sher, Grinstein, Yanai, and Meidan, the failure of the peace process was also due to the Palestinian's deliberate turn to violence after Camp David by launching the second intifada.

Palestinian response

From a Palestinian standpoint, the Oslo accords symbolized, amongst many other factors, their recognition of an Israeli sovereignty over 78% of the land and based on the assumption that the Palestinian state would have control over the remaining 22%¹¹⁷. Such premise of gradual territorial devolution in exchange for Israel's security would thus also bring an independent Palestinian state in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza strip (including east Jerusalem) and the acquisition of legitimate and fair recognition of the right of return.¹¹⁸ However, as the Oslo process evolved over the years, so did the Palestinian's perception and expectations about the conflict. As far as territorial control, they argue that the temporary division of the West Bank into areas A, B, and C became an "apartheid system" that placed the Palestinian population into 13 different areas isolated from each other. Ultimately, Palestinian support for peace decreased significantly

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ "Camp David Peace Proposal of July 2000: Frequently Asked Question", PLO Negotiations Affairs (July 10, 2000).

¹¹⁸ Arafat, 2002.

with not only the stagnation of the peace process after 1995, but with all the factors that came with it: the acceleration of confiscation policies, the continuing growth of Israeli settlements, economic deterioration, and high levels of unemployment.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, with the doubling of Israeli settler population between 1993 and 2000, Palestinians saw the continuing Israeli presence as a fragmentation of their territory by Israeli roads and checkpoints- a clear evidence of Israel's intent to perpetuate the occupation of the territories by other means necessary¹²⁰. In procedural terms, the Palestinians interpreted Camp David as "nothing less than an attempt by Israel to extend the force it exercises on the ground to (the political) negotiations."¹²¹

A report by the PLO Negotiations Affairs on July 10, 2000, answers some of the most debated questions about the talk process and its failure. One of the questions being "*Why didn't the Palestinians ever present a comprehensive permanent settlement proposal of their own in response to Barak's proposals?*", their main argument centered around the concept of the UN resolution 242 and 338 as part of the comprehensive settlement package that failed to be incorporated in the key permanent status issues. In their own words:

The Palestinian negotiating team presented its concept for the resolution of the key permanent status issues [...] Israel seeks broad concessions from the Palestinians [...] Israel has not offered a single concession involving its own territory and rights. The Palestinians [...] seek to establish a viable, sovereign State on their own territory, to provide for the withdrawal of Israeli military forces and colonies (which are universally recognized as illegal), and to secure the right of Palestinian refugees to return to the homes they were forced to flee in 1948. Although Palestinian negotiators have been willing to accommodate legitimate Israeli needs within that context, particularly with respect to security

¹¹⁹ Kacowicz, 254.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Kacowicz, 255.

and refugees, it is up to Israel to define these needs and to suggest the narrowest possible means of addressing them¹²².

As to “*Why did the Palestinians reject the Camp David Peace Proposal?*”, PLO’s main argument suggested that “Israel’s Camp David proposal presented a ‘re-packaging’ of military occupation, not an end to military occupation.”¹²³ About the uprising of the intifada, “*Doesn’t the violence which erupted following Camp David prove that Palestinians do not really want to live in peace with Israel?*”, the response is that despite Palestinian’s recognition of Israel in 1988 and again in several other occasions including the Madrid conference in 1991 and the Oslo Accords September in 1993, Israel nonetheless failed to “explicitly and formally recognize Palestine’s right to exist” and continued building colonies in the occupied territory, pointing out that Israeli housing units in OPT had increased by 52% since the signing of the Oslo Accords and that the settler population more than doubled.¹²⁴ As a last statement to this question, PLO states, “The Palestinians do indeed wish to live at peace with Israel but peace with Israel must be a fair peace – not an unfair peace imposed by a stronger party over a weaker party.”¹²⁵ Finally, and perhaps the most controversial question, “*Isn’t it unreasonable for the Palestinians to demand the unlimited right of return to Israel of all Palestinian refugees?*”, the narrative about Israeli’s indifference about the seriousness of the issue persists: “The refugees were never seriously discussed at Camp David because Prime Minister Barak declared that Israel bore no responsibility for the refugee problem or its solution”¹²⁶

¹²² PLO (2001),” Camp David Peace Proposal of July 2000”
<http://www.miftah.org/Display.cfm?DocId=702&CategoryId=4>

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

U.S., the Mediator

A new theory on war narratives and its duration by professor C. William Walldorf Jr. (2022) examines a new concept: *strategic narratives*, that are, at the broadest level, “collective national or public-level stories that form out and center around traumatic events for a group.”¹²⁷ Because these events are interpreted in existential terms as traumatic memories or as a threat to the group and to the national way of life, they often develop an existence of its own in ways that determine national interest to pursue abroad and shape policy debates over time. Out of a vast form of narratives, this is when the strategic narrative applies, and in this case as *liberal narrative*, distinguished by its lesson to notably “safeguard liberal political order abroad, either by promotion (i.e., expanding democracy and liberal rights) or protection (i.e., preventing the spread of counter-ideologies to liberalism)”¹²⁸ The liberal narrative thus aims to restore order by explaining the pain, conveying blame and by setting lessons to avoid the repetition of the same scenarios. As these narratives affect policy through the contested nature of democratic politics, at the same time it prevails narratives that embody agents to gain influence by promoting shared commitment to protect liberal political order through the means of protection and prevention of counter-ideologies from spreading. Reflecting upon professor Walldorf’s argument perhaps helps to explain part of Clinton’s intentions at Camp David.

From previous accounts in this thesis, it is clear that in the beginning of the discussions, the Palestinians saw in Clinton a sympathetic person who shared their concerns. Arafat seemed particularly impressed with Clinton’s awareness about key factors of the conflict, such as the difference between Kufr Aqab and Wadi al-Juz, the organic relationship

¹²⁷ Walldorf Jr., William C. (2022). “Narratives and War. Explaining the Length and End of U.S. Military Operations in Afghanistan”. *International Security*, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00439, 94.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

between the Musrara and Shaykh Jarrah quarters, and between Salah al-Din Street and Jerusalem's Old City.¹²⁹ These perceptions quickly shifted when the traditional approach of the U.S. State department seemed (and which prevailed throughout most Barak's tenure) to adopt the position of the Israeli Prime Minister. The Palestinians believed that the American government appeared to be working for the Israeli PM, as it tried to convince and pressure the Palestinian team to accept Israeli offers.

Additional scholarships suggests that Clinton exercised his personal influence throughout the Summit rather than adopting a more diplomatic pattern. In "*The Camp David Papers*" (2001)¹³⁰, a first-hand account of the July 2000 summit, the editor in chief of the Palestinian daily *al-Ayyam* and close adviser of President Arafat, Hanieh, analyzes the U.S. involvement at the negotiations. The author argues that Clinton played a role according to the traditions of American political work vis-à-vis the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which can be defined in three points: (1) the notion that Washington exercises its role according to the needs, requirements, and concerns of the present Israeli government; (2) the idea that Washington accepted Israeli demands as facts that were not to be discussed, hence "Clinton and his team did not refute any major Israeli request in any issue for negotiations, and if Clinton attempts to intervene, it will be to make a secondary amendment which does not change the main principle"¹³¹. The author mentions that the American team was committed to Henry Kissinger's "infamous pledge"¹³² by arguing that no proposal had been presented without Israel's notice beforehand, ultimately leading the U.S. negotiators falling into a pattern of bias towards the actual roots of the conflict. Lastly, Hanieh (2001) points out that although the American peace

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Hanieh, A. (2001) "The Camp David Papers", 29.,
<http://www.miftah.org/Doc/Reports/2011/CampDavidPapers.pdf>

¹³¹ Ibid 33.

¹³² Ibid.

team acknowledged demanding equal amounts of “flexibility” and “concessions” from both the Israeli and Palestinian side, it seemed as if they continued to pressure the Palestinian side to accept Israeli proposals.

Conclusion

“Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it”

–George Santayana, 1905 ¹³³

In the year of 2021, I had the opportunity to work at the Portuguese Office of Representation in Ramallah for an internship program (PEPAC-MNE V Edition), under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Portugal. The distance between Jerusalem and Ramallah is approximately 19 km. My daily commute involved border crossings via the checkpoint al-Jeep near the Palestinian town Algdurah. Although much is debated about the “restricting movement” Israel employs to enforce its “occupation regime” over the Palestinian population in the Occupied Territories, these checkpoints are there for a reason: to secure settler-colonies and prevent higher conflict escalation. The security fence established in 2006 build for this purpose is not enough. There were more times I recall Palestinians near this checkpoint, setting trashcans and tires on fire, throwing rocks, and limiting the passage also to their own, than I wish to remember; but that is a story for another time.

With such daily journey and overall experience that year, came the heightened realization upon dystopian narratives of political, social, cultural, and of economic character, along with the exceptionally in-depth view of the importance and necessity of the diplomatic presence in conflict zones. I was assigned as the direct assistant to the Head of the mission, Dr. Fernando Demeé de Brito, and my duties consisted mainly in the analysis and assessment of daily reports of current political issues that ultimately impacted the diplomatic works and efforts of the Portuguese active-presence in the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) in regard to the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

¹³³ The Life of Reason, 1905. From the series Great Ideas of Western Man.

I actively participated in meetings with EU members of other diplomatic missions based in Ramallah and/or Jerusalem with this same purpose. Of the many contributing events to conflict escalation, from human right's violations to democracy promotion concerns, these are some of the challenges we encountered in 2021:

1. The indefinite postponement of the first Palestinian elections in 15 years as well as the increasing authoritarian modus operandi of the Palestinian Authority (PA);
2. The struggle against evictions in the East Jerusalem neighborhood Sheikh Jarrah and the erosion of the status quo of the holy sites that catalyzed Palestinian anger over Israel's "settler movement", given that evictions, demolitions, and settlement expansion remain unabated;
3. The flare-up in April-May that led into a series of missile strikes, which spread from East Jerusalem to the West Bank and Israel's mixed cities, triggered military confrontation in Gaza, and ultimately led to a high human and physical toll;
4. The establishment of a broad Israeli left-to-right coalition government that lacked appetite to resume the peace process.

Just a quick background on these points, the first portrays the countless efforts by the EU towards a fair democratic and electoral participation in Palestine, which seemed to be moving towards the right direction until PA President Mahmoud Abbas ultimately settled for the indefinite postponement of the 2021 Palestinian Parliamentary Legislative Council (PLC) elections, citing Israel's refusal to authorize the inclusion of East Jerusalem. Following the postponement, the PA also arrested several PLC candidates for defaming president Abbas. Many other civilians were arrested throughout the year based on the same ground.

The second point refers to the protest of Palestinians over the eviction of six Palestinian families, living at Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, that anticipated the major outbreak of violence in April-May (rocket attacks on Israel by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), followed by Israeli airstrikes in the Gaza Strip). Adding to these events, Israel was

also facing its own political crisis at home with four inconclusive elections, which left PM Benjamin Netanyahu trying to persuade several extreme-right politicians to form a coalition. The result was the formation of a broad Israeli left-to-right coalition government that was not looking to resume peace talks. Amid these events, tensions heightened, and Jerusalem became an environment of strained and heavy clashes that soon spread to the al-Aqsa Mosque, Damascus Gate, Lod, other Arab localities in Israel, and the West Bank. Just in East Jerusalem alone, between 10 and 14 May the number of casualties accounts on approximately 1,000 Palestinian protesters injured ¹³⁴ and 23 protesters arrested. ¹³⁵

That year proved to be the closest portrait of the Arab-Israeli conflict I have yet experienced. These series of perplexing conflict escalation events, from one side to the other, were a constant reminder as to why the conflict remains unsolved. Beginning with the Sheikh Jarrah controversy, also described as a “property/real estate dispute” by Israelis or as “expulsion/displacement/ethnic cleansing”¹³⁶ by Palestinians; to the discouraging failure of PA elections and the formation of the new Israeli government; to the protests and police riot control and rocket attacks that followed; these events all showed not only a more nuanced and modernized version of the conflict and its complexity, but also an important finding about its nature: a narrative continuously recreated and reinterpreted by its protagonists from different angles.

¹³⁴ "Killing blockaded civilians and destroying infrastructure on a massive scale: Israel is committing war crimes in the Gaza Strip". *B'Tselem*.

https://www.btselem.org/press_releases/20210515_israel_commits_war_crimes_in_gaza

¹³⁵ Boxerman, Aaron (10 May 2021). "25 wounded, 23 arrested in Arab protests in Jerusalem and across Israel". *The Times of Israel*

¹³⁶ "Evictions in Jerusalem Become Focus of Israeli-Palestinian Conflict". *The New York Times*. (8 May 2021) <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/07/world/middleeast/evictions-jerusalem-israeli-palestinian-conflict-protest.html>

So, What?

The main focus of my thesis consists of grasping what led to the failure of the 2000-2001 Israeli-Palestinian Oslo talks, and to whether a second chance for peace is foreseen. So far, and as analyzed in previous chapters, a few concerns for the impediment and rupture of the talks are notorious. From a more pragmatic and constructive perspective, and when referring to the negotiation process itself, a lack of understanding and compromise, at times by both, but ultimately heightened by the Palestinian team; Barak's confusing politics; U.S. intensifying pressure at home; lack of effort in terminology agreements over terms, definitions and symbols of sovereignty; a fragmented Palestinian governance led by internal divisions and instability that ultimately delegitimized the Palestinian position throughout the entire peace negotiations; and the outbreak of the second intifada. From a more conceptual perspective, a narrative construction based on past-memories that sustains divergent and incoherent views of the conflict itself; one-sided supporting narratives sustaining gaps and the almost impossibility to reach conclusions that are not being thoroughly disputed; and the undeniable presence of third-party actors feeding into the narrative dispute.

From its very start, the Oslo accords were supposed to set in motion a process leading to a peaceful coexistence (the Permanent Status Agreement) between Israel and the PLO. Despite the uncertainty as to whether such agreement would bring about solutions to the most pressing issues outlined in the Oslo accords (including Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements, borders, water control, etc.), the alternative was an agreement under which these challenging issues would be postponed for further negotiations. This notion also accounts as Oslo's first mistake. Although the postponement from these issues was feasible, it had, nonetheless, to be agreed (at some time) by both sides. At this point, Israel (under Barak's guidance) failed to recognize that

the Palestinian negotiators were only willing to consider a comprehensive package addressing all issues on the permanent status. At the same time, Arafat and the Palestinian negotiation team made significant mistakes that rendered the Israeli public suspicious of Palestinian's strategic intentions. In fact, signs on lack of understanding and compromise played a significant role through all negotiation mechanisms. At Camp David, particularly towards the issue of Jerusalem and its the sovereignty concerns under Temple Mount/ Haram al-Sharif, Arafat should not have expressed doubts about the holiness significance and magnitude of the Temple Mount for the Jewish people. But despite that, Barak's tactics were at times confusing and manifested unclear negotiation patterns for the Palestinian leadership to follow. The scholarship analyzed throughout this thesis, and especially on chapter 3, confirms the mismanagement of the negotiations on the account of both Israeli administrations, with special account towards Barak's faulty leadership methods. Nonetheless, the biggest question is whether it was acceptable for the Palestinian team, and especially Arafat, to use Barak's confusing politics as a bargaining chip in failing to prevent violent uprisings in the form of intifadas, and as a compelling excuse to not collaborate from that point onwards.

Additional challenges on practical terms, such as the 'open city' definition (Jerusalem), 'border lines' and emergency deployments (territory), and the 'right of return' (refugees), etc., contributed towards the existing gaps of mutual coordination throughout the negotiation process. Yet these gaps are not entirely related to a deprived practical administration alone, but to its symbolic issues on sovereignty and all the narrative elements behind it, which brings me about to the second and more conceptual explanation of the negotiation's failure. Certainly, faulty negotiation styles, poor management of the process, and poor leadership skills are all accountable hypothesis for

the Oslo failure and will always remain the go-to easy explanation. Except this is not a just assessment of reality.

A shared story by different narrators

I surely didn't have to be at the core center of the Israeli-Palestinian divergences to become more informed about its nature, but it certainly posed a new insight and the realization that in a conflict (this one in particular), the narrative of one side is not necessarily identical to the narrative of the other, and not necessarily part of the same story as well. The way narratives are constructed and disseminated, either through its social or political agents, often tend to produce conventional images rather than establish a climate conducive to peace.

Daoudi, Mohammed, and Barakat (2013) in "Israelis and Palestinians: Contested Narratives" argue that it is proven that narratives diverge and multiply when a conflict arises as to "to demonize and delegitimize the other and to emphasize the rightness, authenticity, legitimacy, and justice of one's *own* claims"¹³⁷. Gradually (and especially in crisis situations), the predominant national narratives may change, evolve, or oscillate. This notion is particularly important in referral to my topic because as narratives tend to shape people's values, ideas, views, and attitudes towards a certain position, the same phenomena may well hold true when story-fragments are exposed to the same narrative over an extended time period. I arrived in Israel and in Palestine with a very specific and narrowed view on the conflict (and a lot of it had to do with research material content I had been reading for this MA thesis) and left with another.

The Israeli and Palestinian narrative dispute, that begun over territory ownership and eventually spread over to additional concerns, has led to a foul conflict between the two.

¹³⁷ Dajani Daoudi, Mohammed S., and Zeina M. Barakat. "Israelis and Palestinians: Contested Narratives." *Israel Studies* 18, no. 2 (2013): 53–69. <https://doi.org/10.2979/israelstudies.18.2.53>.

The two side's historical narrative accounts of the conflict contain diametrically and incompatible interpretations of the past and future. A narrative of past-trauma and nationalization has been integrated with political interests and the perception of reality has been shifted with an enhanced lack of trust. On one side, the continuous and competitive narrative perceptions of victimhood by both Israelis and Palestinians (one with the Holocaust, the other with Nakba), remain the most crucial barrier in terms of solving security concerns (essentially for Israel) and in a refugee issue resolution (Palestine); on the other, a heightened level of distrust, as both continue to perceive the other as unwilling to acknowledge its existence.

Lessons from Oslo

To this very day, Israel continues to be skeptical in terms of formulating peace with Palestinian political group's such as Hamas and the PA, who continue to refuse acceptance and/or and recognition of Israel's existence. This situation leaves Israel no alternative than to take unilateral security steps rather than seek for a negotiated peaceful solution. From the Palestinian perspective, the main cause of distrust relies upon Israel's presence at the Palestinian territories and its continuing status quo on in the forms of settlement-building, construction of the walls surrounding Palestinian territory; and above all, the unilateral determining of borders that are seen for the Palestinian population as constantly reminders about Israel's unwillingness to leave these territories. This puts Palestinians in a position in which taking unilateral steps rather than looking for a final status agreement seems more prudent.

Nonetheless, it seems as if the Palestinian's trust issues are not with Israel alone. There has also been a problem of trust between the Palestinians and the Americans since the Oslo peace process. Although during Oslo, Americans tried to position themselves as honest brokers, Palestinian negotiators argued about their favoritism towards Israeli

concessions. Despite much controversy and blaming, which again, will always remain the easier road, Clinton's efforts towards a peace resolution were undeniable. In fact, when focusing on U.S.'s efficiency and involvement as a mediator, it seems clear that they opted for a hands-off approach throughout the process when it came to identifying, formulating, and advocating for solutions to the core issues of the conflict. Not only did the American team set out a list of parameters that envisioned the border delineation between Israel and a new state of Palestine that would bridge the gap between the Palestinian demand for a state over the West Bank and Gaza Strip, they also took into account the need for Israel to minimize its the number of settlers; implemented a definition for Jerusalem as the seat of two capitals, as well as identified special arrangements for the handling of its holy and historical sites; resolved both the symbolic, intangible and the practical aspects of the Palestinian refugee issue; and devised security arrangements that would address Israel's special security needs while respecting Palestinian sovereignty. Although the Clinton Parameters did not bring about a breakthrough toward an agreement, it did become, unquestionably, the most significant contribution toward a possible and final status agreement so far formulated.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the most complex conflicts of the modern world. This prolonged conflict embodies several elements leading the parties to failure. There are serious challenges in finding solutions to final status issues, such as of the right to return of refugees, the status of Jerusalem, the issue of Jewish settlements and the borders. But moving forward is also to recognize that the future of the Middle East peace process does not promise a fair and lasting negotiated solution anytime soon. The lack of trust and the serious narrative clash between the two is so dense that both parties at this time, and despite promoting their flexibility towards achieving a solution, do not feel the need to make the necessary compromises for peace. While for the Palestinians it is easier

to sign conventions and appeal to international economic aid packages in regard to their pursuit of “justice” and of “undeniable rights”, a process in which by definition requires no compromise with Israel; on the other side, it is safer for Israel to avoid political tensions in forms of governing coalitions at the Knesset and for the Israeli people to maintain its security and status quo.

The 2000 Camp David Accords offered a comprehensive plan that would have allowed the Palestinians to establish a demilitarized Palestinian state in 92 percent of the West Bank and in all of Gaza Strip. Yet this proposal was rejected, with no counteroffers, by at the time PA president Yasser Arafat. Later, the negotiations at Taba, Egypt, in January 2001 that were on the brink of agreement, failed because “time ran out”, with Clinton out of office, and Ehud Barak facing almost certain electoral defeat to Ariel Sharon. The two major peace plans after (the road map peace to Middle East and the unofficial Geneva accord) in 2003 also ended in failure. Then the direct negotiations between the Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas and Netanyahu in 2010; the secret back-channel negotiations between the envoys of Netanyahu and Abbas in late 2013; the Kerry negotiations of 2013–2014; and the Trump Peace Plan.

Each discourse of these continuous failed hopes for diplomacy began with promises to succeed when its predecessors had failed. Each included statements about the urgency for peace along with warnings about its momentum. A two-state solution was often mentioned. Each ended with a series of tactical mistakes and unforeseen developments that eventually led to the talk’s termination. And, just as the repetitive pattern, each side continued to neglect to realize the most logical explanation for its failure: no agreement has ever been reached because at least one of the parties’ neglects to acknowledge the narrative of the other.

Scholars and historians often tend to suggest that to live in the future is to learn the story of the past. But one of the biggest impediments in changing track from conflict to peace is the unconstructed narrative that stands as an obstacle to reconciliation and coexistence. In the first chapter I asked whether narratives can be evaluated. In fact, Daoudi, Mohammed, and Barakat (2013) suggest that “narratives may be evaluated by comparing historic events as they unfolded with how they have been narrated by scholars who are not parties to the conflict.”¹³⁸ But when it is the case of two or more inconsistent accounts of the same narrative, one may well wonder about its absolute truth. In moving further, the main question about this ongoing conflict is thus to whether will or can an authoritative narrative emerge that would be acceptable to both Israelis and Palestinians, and if so, if it will finally narrow the existing gap between the two.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

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