

United States And The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: An Appraisal Of The Roadmap For Peace

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Abstract: This study examines the role of the United States in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, focusing on the Roadmap for Peace, and analyzes the impact of U.S. involvement in shaping the peace process. The problem of the study lies in the persistent failure of peace efforts, despite numerous initiatives, due to power imbalances and geopolitical interests. The aim of the study was to appraise the effectiveness of the U.S.-led Roadmap for Peace and to explore how Realism, as a theoretical framework, can explain the persistent deadlock in the peace process. The theoretical framework adopted was Realism, which emphasizes national self-interest, security concerns, and power dynamics in shaping international relations. This approach was used to assess how U.S. foreign policy, driven by strategic interests, influenced the peace process. The study employed a qualitative methodology, analyzing key peace agreements, historical documents, and scholarly sources related to U.S. mediation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The findings revealed that the U.S. role in the peace process, especially its support for Israel and alignment with its national interests, exacerbated the power asymmetry between Israel and Palestine. Core issues such as Jerusalem's status, refugee rights, and settlement expansion remained unresolved, with the U.S. focusing on strategic objectives over equitable peacebuilding. The conclusion emphasized that Realism explains the U.S.'s failure to facilitate a fair peace process, prioritizing power and security over impartiality and fairness. Based on the above, the study recommended among other things that; address power imbalances by involving multilateral actors in negotiations; internationalize Jerusalem's status to reduce tensions and foster shared ownership and ensure a settlement freeze and uphold Palestinian refugee rights as critical elements of peace negotiations.

Keywords: Israeli-Palestinian conflict, United States involvement, roadmap for peace, realism, power imbalance.



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Introduction

For almost half a century, nearly every nation on Earth has felt the effects of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Onuoha (2004) asserts that the Middle East is the nexus or source of support for more than 80% of the world's terrorist outfits. As a means of challenging Israeli domination, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Hamas terrorist group have been carrying out violent attacks against Israelis; Osama bin Laden used this opportunity to rally the Arab world against America. Peace and stability in the Middle East has, therefore, been a top priority for a number of nations, the US included. Many factors, including resentment on both sides, a lack of official acknowledgement, a tangled web of interests, and an enduring desire for autonomy, have prevented the United States from fully resolving the problem throughout the years.

Changing geopolitical dynamics have created an unstable environment in the Middle East, a region prone to violence. One of the most tragic and long-lasting conflicts of the 20th and 21st century is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is the main cause of the recent upheaval in the Middle East. It was in the late 19th century, when the idea of a Jewish national home in Palestine was first proposed by the Zionist movement, that the war began. The nation's Arab community was strongly against this plan. As a consequence, the Arab Spring and the Zionist movement, two nationalist movements, clashed over who should control Palestine. In the 1930s, neighbouring Arab states backed the Palestinian Arabs in a struggle that sprang out because two people wanted control of the same region (Shlaim, 1996, p.2). When Israel was established in 1948 as a Jewish state, the battle shifted from being between communities to between states, with other Arab nations siding with Palestine in their opposition to Israel. Following the creation of Israel, the Arab world reacted angrily and launched a major offensive against the Jewish state. Around 400,000 people were forced to flee their homes as a consequence of this onslaught, which ended in a crushing loss for the Arabs across the board. As a result of the aforesaid nearby Arab nations including Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan continue to house displaced people since this refugee problem is not yet ended.

Israel gained control of the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, and the Gaza Strip itself during the 1967 Six-Day War, a watershed event. Due to changes in regional topography brought about by the conquest of East Jerusalem, Israel now maintains unchallenged control over the Holy City. The United Nations Security Council passed resolution 242 after the war, calling on Israel to respect internationally recognised borders and withdraw from the disputed territory in exchange for peace. Although the resolution lacked details, it did mark a major step towards ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

There are several competing explanations for the current crisis in the Middle East. The overwhelming majority of Arabs believe that the dispossession and dispersion of the Palestinian Arabs, an original sin made worse by Israel's continuous territorial expansions, is the root cause of the conflict. They see Israel as inherently aggressive because of its expansionist tactics and blame it for all the bloodshed in the region (Hirst, 1977). Most Israelis think that Arab rejection of Israel's legitimacy as a Middle Eastern sovereign state, rather than geographical disagreements, is the root cause of the conflict. An alternative view is that the Arab world's ultimate goal is Israel's demise, with Israel only acting in self-defence in response to Arab aggression (Harkabi, 1977). There is no denying that the Arab-Israeli conflict has played a major role in fuelling other crises in the Middle East, regardless of where or how it began.

Ignoring the above, the Persian Gulf (a region in the Middle East) is crucial to global trade. Paraschos (2017) estimates that the region has 52.5% of the world's crude oil reserves and 44.6% of its natural gas reserves. The five oceans that round the Middle Eastern landmass—the Caspian, Black, Eastern Mediterranean, Red, and Arabian/Persian Gulf—have long been strategic objectives for regional and extraregional countries seeking dominance of the area.

The Middle East is an extremely important region for the world economy because of the three major chokepoints that maritime transport must pass through: the Suez Canal, which connects the Mediterranean and Red Seas, Bab-al-Mandab, which connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden, and the Straits of Hormuz, which join the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.

Powers from outside, including the US, have long been attracted to the Middle East due to its strategic location at the crossroads of three continents and its abundant oil reserves. U.S. involvement in the region of the Middle East spans more than 200 years. In 1767, commodities from Smyrna, a historic city in Turkey, were brought to America, namely figs, and commercial contacts between Boston and Smyrna started. The first treaty between the United States and the Ottoman Empire was inked on May 7, 1831, after an American trading company had been established in Smyrna in 1811. (Howard, 1974).

The Middle East began to take an interest in American political philosophy and values following WWI. In addition, the idea of "self-determination" for nations put forward by President Woodrow Wilson was both essential and supportive of people's freedom to decide their own political destiny. In their pursuit of freedom, these principles resonated strongly with the hopes and dreams of Arab nationalists. In addition, Arab nationalism in the years that followed was "stimulated" by Wilsonian concepts. In the years leading up to Israel's founding in 1948, Washington had widespread adulation and respect among Arab nations. In 1983, Crabb Jr. wrote on page 400.

Regardless of what has been said before, it must be remembered that Britain was given the Palestinian mandate by the League of Nations in 1920 subject to the establishment of an appropriate Jewish Agency; this agency was to advise and collaborate on issues pertaining to the Jewish national home and to take part in the development of the land, as stated in Article Four. Britain handed the matter to the UN as it was mostly unable to handle it after the war.

After WWII, the US began to become politically involved in the Middle East. The United States' broader foreign policy has revolved on the Middle East ever since the end of WWII. United States' foreign policy in the region is guided by three main goals: achieving peace and stability, securing a steady supply of oil at a price and production level that is satisfactory, and limiting the influence of the Soviet Union while maintaining a strong position in the region.

The oil flow seems to be the most important of the three offered reasons. However, the United States' objectives have broadened to include security in light of growing security concerns and the emergence of terrorism and terrorist attacks. The United States has established a web of security alliances, collaborations, and arms transfer agreements with the Gulf States to achieve these goals. As a result of the Gulf War, the US has trained and supplied the GCC countries with cutting-edge weapons so that they can protect their borders and political interests from Iraq and Iran (Mutrif, 1998, p. 20).

Restraining and resisting the influence of the Soviet Union, radical nationalists, and leftist organisations in the Middle East was the primary goal of US security policy during the Cold War. There was a widespread belief that they were the greatest threats to American interests and regional security. These goals were accomplished by the United States via a variety of initiatives. The United States has devised a number of strategies, programs, and policies to limit the possibility of Soviet expansion across the world, particularly in the region of the Middle East. Important Cold War tactics included détente, deterrence, and containment. At the same time as the Soviet Union's regional danger diminished in the early 1990s, the Cold War itself came to an end.

Thus, the effects of worldwide communism were the most severe they had been in decades. As a result, once the Cold War ended, Washington emerged as the only superpower. Hegemony, leadership, supremacy, and military might be hallmarks of American foreign policy in international affairs in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

As a result, the nation's capital took advantage of the situation to safeguard its competing national interests in the region. For example, the need of oil from the Persian Gulf and Israel's security. Since the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel has relied on military force to quell the Palestinians' aspiration for nationhood." The United States has maintained steady backing for Israel since the 1967 fight, and Israel has been a strategic ally of the United States in the Middle East. This has done double duty: it has infuriated Arab states and intensified the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, making it the most dangerous and difficult diplomatic issue the world has faced since WWII ended. While the US has always been a staunch supporter of Israel, it has also sought to mediate a diplomatic settlement that would allow the two sides to set aside their competing claims. U.S. involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict's diplomatic, strategic, and political spheres was first substantial during Truman's presidency. In November 1947, the United Nations General Assembly accepted the Partition Plan, marking the first major participation of the United States in the UN with the goal of obtaining votes to support a particular agenda, which sprang from the need to determine Palestine's destiny. A Palestinian Arab state and a Palestinian Jewish state were suggested in the Partition Plan for Palestine, which the United States President ordered the government to support.

Historically, the United States helped get the UN General Assembly to approve the Partition Plan by a majority vote on November 29, 1947. The US then launched initiatives to prevent and eventually terminate the conflict that broke out, and it is still going strong today.

The following table details the occurrences and dates that are relevant to the case study:

Table 1.1: Chronology of the various negotiations and peace processes guided by the United States

Date	Conference	Short Description
1948	UN General Assembly Partition Plan	Called for the partition of Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state at the end of the British Mandate.
1949	Armistice Agreement	Agreement between Israel and neighbouring Arab states outlining the borders of the newly formed State of Israel.
1967	UN Resolution 242	Drew up principles for a peaceful settlement in the Middle East. Called for the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from all territories occupied in the 1967 war.
1973	UN Resolution 338	Reaffirmed the principles of Resolution 242 and called for negotiations.
1978	Camp David Accords	Agreement between Egypt and Israel. Also set out the Framework for Peace in the Middle East.
1991-1993	Madrid Peace Conference	Negotiations aimed at attempting to revive the peace process between Israel and Palestine.
1993	Oslo I Accords	Declaration of Principles geared towards a two-state solution aimed specifically at resolving the Israeli Palestinian dispute.

2000	Camp David Summit	Continuation of the negotiations of the Middle East peace process where the Final Status negotiations were to be resolved. No agreement was reached.
2001	Oslo II – Taba Talks	Details the five year interim agreement of Palestinian autonomy. Created Areas A, B and C in the West Bank. Proposed final agreements between Israel and Palestine. No agreement was reached.
2002	The „Roadmap“ for Peace	Plan to resolve the Israeli Palestinian conflict specifically outlining steps to reach a peace agreement.
2007	Anapolis conference	Conference between Israel and Arab neighbours, formally restarting the negotiations and reaffirming the two-state solution.
2010-2014	General peace talks	Direct talks between Israel and Palestine.

Source: Wikipedia 2025

A number of US administrations have openly proposed peace process blueprints that call for the creation of two nations, one for Israelis and one for Palestinians. An Assessment of the Roadmap for Peace is the overarching goal of this article. This study seeks to provide answers to the following pertinent questions:

1. what are the core issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?
2. what is the roadmap for peace in Middle East?

Theoretical Underpinning

The study is anchored in the theory of Realism, which asserts that international relations are governed by self-interest, power, and the pursuit of national security. According to Gilbert (2013, p. 45), “realism is an approach to international politics that is predicated on power politics (realpolitik) and holds the view that international behavior of states is determined by the search for power and the distribution of power”. Realism as a theoretical framework emphasizes that nations act in their own interest and maintain power through strategic alliances and military strength. The founder of Realism is often attributed to early political philosophers like Thucydides and Hobbes, but modern political realists, such as Hans Morgenthau (1948), have further developed these concepts to explain the behaviours of states in international politics. Realism plays a crucial role in the analysis of US involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because the US's policies, especially its unwavering support for Israel, reflect a strategic choice to maintain regional dominance and security interests in the Middle East. In particular, the ‘Roadmap for Peace’, which was introduced in 2003 by the United States, represents a diplomatic effort that mirrors the balance of power in which the US seeks to secure its national interests, particularly regarding its ties with Israel and broader geopolitical dynamics in the region. The assumptions of Realism, such as the importance of military strength, national interest, and security, are evident in the US's role as a mediator in the peace process, despite its clear alignment with Israel over the Palestinian cause. The relevance of this theory lies in understanding how US foreign policy is shaped by a pursuit of stability and dominance, rather than idealistic goals of equity or impartiality in the peace process.

Realism’s influence on the appraisal of the “Roadmap for Peace” is significant as it offers an explanation for the limitations and failures of the peace process under US mediation. According to

Realism, the imbalance of power between the Israeli and Palestinian sides, further exacerbated by US support for Israel, undermines the possibility of achieving a fair and lasting resolution. Realists argue that the absence of power parity between the two parties, due to Israel's military superiority and the US's diplomatic backing, prevents an equitable peace settlement (Ezugwu, 2023). Moreover, the US's role in pushing forward the Roadmap for Peace can be critiqued through the lens of Realism, as it was seen as reinforcing the status quo of Israeli power and security, rather than addressing the core grievances of the Palestinians (Chen & Guo, 2023). As a result, despite numerous peace initiatives, including the Oslo Accords and the "Deal of the Century" proposed by President Trump in 2020, the Realist perspective suggests that peace will remain elusive as long as the power dynamics continue to favour Israel (Wardoyo, 2021). Therefore, Realism provides valuable insights into the persistent failure of peace processes, as it highlights the influence of power structures and national interests in shaping international negotiations.

Results and Discussion

The Core Issues in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict erupted due to an extensive underlining socio-political issue. It is pertinent to note that, interpretation and perspective on these issues may differ, however, all parties agree to the subject matter as regard these issues. Thus, Content and thematic analysis was employed in this exercise.

The Status of Jerusalem: When the Middle East conflict is mentioned and its inability to respond to absolute treatment, or its protracted nature, one of the things that would run through the mind is the status of Jerusalem because it is one of the most sensitive and contentious issues in the conflict. Jerusalem is referred to as Al-Quds in Arabic, Jerushalayim in Hebrew, remains the site of the Western wall which is the last remnant of the second Jewish Temple, it is also site to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and also the passion of the Crucifixion and Al-Aqsa, the first Kibla and the third holiest sanctuary of Islam. Both Israel and the Arabs lay claims over the Eastern part of the city. For Israel, the holy City was the capital of Judea in the earliest times and home to the Jewish holy Temple of which only the Western wall is left. The claim by both parties seems to go beyond the natural, the question of who should own part or all of it has become a global issue as both sides see the city as its future capital. While the Palestinians sees the Eastern part as its future capital, Israel sees the entire holy city as an indivisible future capital of the Jewish state. According to Yehoshua Ben Arie "it was for the British that Jerusalem was so consequential it was them, who established Jerusalem as a capital, initially, it was no one's capital right from the first and second Temple".

Jerusalem as a place belongs to all, not to a particular group but to all monotheists. Therefore, control over the sacred city should welcome this simple reality and those binded by their current might should learn from history, they should come to terms and agree that Jerusalem is a heritage and whoever regulates it must serve as it's custodian (Richard Limheart and Saladin). This therefore implies a shift from ownership of a specific people to a shift of ownership by all which is in connection with the proposal of Jerusalem to be internationalized and administered by the UN as a Corpus Seperatum, a move the Arabs rejected.

On the 13th day of December, 2017, the organization of the Islamic countries which has a total membership of 57 countries mainly Islamic, declared Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state, thereby calling on all nations to do the same, While the declaration did not mention the holy city as a Corpus Seperatum, it neither made reference to the Western part of the city.

It is obvious that the major Abrahamic religions has a strong attachment to the holy city, this has shaped the people's conception and perception of the Holy city and this attachment is principally

traced to religion. The Dome of Rock, an Islamic sacred shrine in Jerusalem is built on the Temple mount, considered to be the place of Mohammads ascension to heaven and there, he was given the second pillar of Islam (Yusuf Ali's translation) There should be, by no reason, any other journey that should be embarked upon to visit any mosque but three: this mosque of mine, al-masjid, al-haraam and masjid Al-aqsa. (Abu Hiriairiah: Companion of Prophet Mohammad)

There are numerous sacred spots on Earth, but the most holy are the al-quds in Syria, the most holy spot in Syria is Palestine, the holiest spot in Palestine is Jerusalem (Bayt al-maqdis) the most sacred spot in Jerusalem is the mountain the most sacred spot in Jerusalem is the spot of worship (Al masjid) and the most sacred spot in the place of worship is the Dome.

According to reports by Zayd Ibn Thabit, Mahammad said “ how blessed is al-shaml, the companions gathered around him and questioned: why is that? Themessenger replied “I see the Messengers of Allah scattered their wings over al-sham, Ibn Ana's added “and the prophet dwells therein. There is no single inch in al-quds (Jerusalem) where a prophet has not prayed or an angel not stood (Tirmidhi Hadith 864/5-884).

1967 Border Arrangement

In 1949, Israel signed Armistice accords with neighboring Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. The Agreement was targeted to officially bring an end to the hostilities of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and set-up armistice lines between Israeli and Jordanian-Iraqi forces. It is also referred to as the Green line.



Fig. 4.1: Map showing the 1955 UN Map of Armistice

To ensure it is upheld, a supervising and reporting agency was set-up to monitor the established Armistice line. Furthermore, the United States, Britain and France inked a Tripartite Declaration

in 1950 in which the trio promised to take measures within and outside the United Nations not to permit any form of breach of the frontiers or armistice lines. The declaration also sketched out the trios commitment to peace and stability in the region, their stand to the use or threat of coercion and also reiterated their opposition to the development of an arms race. These lines remained until the six day war in 1967.

On the 6th day of January 1949, Ralph Bunche announced that Egypt has agreed to start talks with Israel on an armistice. The talks which kicked off on the Greek island of Rhodes on January 12, briefly after their talks commenced, Israel accepted to free a besieged Egyptian Brigade in Faluja, but soon rescinded their agreement, both Israel and Egypt made different demands, while Israel demanded that Egypt pull out all its army from the previous area of mandate Palestine, Egypt insisted that Arab soldiers pull out to the position which they held on 14 of October 1948, as per the Security Council Resolution S/1070 of 4th November 1948 and also that the Israeli military pull out to positions north of the Majdal-Hebron road. With the killing of Hassan Al-Banna, the head of the Islamic group Muslim brotherhood, on February 12 1949, there was a deadlock and Israel threatened to dump the negotiation, while the United States appealed to both parties to bring them to a fruitful conclusion.

The cardinal points of the armistice agreement between Israel and Egypt were:

1. The lines should not be construed in any sense as a political or territorial boundaries and is therefore delineated without prejudice to rights, claims and positions of either parties to the armistice as regards eventual “settlement of the Palestine question”
2. The line was mostly drawn along the 1922 international border between the mandatory Palestine and Egypt, with the omission of the Mediterranean Sea as Egypt maintained control of a coastal line known as the Gaza strip.
3. The besieged Egyptian army in Faluja were allowed without restrictions to return back to Egypt with their arms while the regulation of the area were given to the Israeli military.
4. The Uja-al- Hafeer was to be demilitarized and it became the seal of the bilateral armistice committee.

On the side of Lebanon, the main points were

- a) The positions of the armistice being dictated exclusively by military considerations.
- b) The line was drawn along the international boundary between Lebanon and. mandatory Palestine
- c) In line with the armistice, Israel disengaged it’s military officers from 13 villages from the territories under the Lebanese control which were held during the war. It was signed on 23 of March 1949. (Wikipedia)

With Jordan, it was signed on April 3, 1949 and the main points were:

- On no accounts shall any of the provision of these accords in any way prejudice the rights, claims and the positions of either party hereto in the ultimate peaceful settlement of the Palestine questions, the provision of this agreement being dictated exclusively by military considerations.
- The Jordanian army kept most of the positions it held, specifically, East Jerusalem with the old City inclusive.
- Jordan retreated its military at the plain of Sharon while Israel accepted to allow the Jordanian army to take over positions the Iraqi forces previously occupied.

- There was a territorial exchange while Israel received control on the Wadi Ara and the Little Triangle in exchange for territory in the Southern Hills of Hebron. (Wikipedia)

In April, 1949, Israel began an Armistice talks with Syria at Geshar B'not Yaacov on the Jordan River, this agreement was inked on 20th July 1949. The result of this agreement led to Syria pulling out its army from most of the territories it controlled West of the international border which became demilitarized.

Iraq, an active participant in the war, pulled out its forces from the area in March 1949. The position occupied by the Iraqi military was convened by the Armistice agreement between Israel and Jordan with no separate agreement with Iraq.

Green line was drawn as a result of the 1949 armistice agreement but those lines drastically changed after the Six-Day war of 1967 when Israel captured the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt as well as the Golan Heights from Syria respectively. According to Shlaim, in March 1949 as the Iraqi forces disengaged and transferred their position to the Jordanian legion, Israel executed operation Shin-Tav-Shin which allowed Israel to renegotiate the cease fire line in the Wadi Ara area of the Northern West Bank in a hidden agreement that integrated into the General Armistice agreement.

Any alteration in the pre-existing 1949 armistice lines should not in any way reflect the weight of conquest and should be confined to insubstantial alterations required for mutual security. We do not approve of expansionism. In the words of Stephen Schwebel “modifications of the 1949 Armistice lines along those states within former Palestinian territory are lawful (if not necessarily desirable) whether those modifications are insubstantial alterations such as recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the entire Jerusalem. He wrote “it should be included that the 1949 armistice agreement expressly maintained the territorial claims of all parties and did not approve to setup definitive boundaries between them, It is pertinent to note that the question of whether or not to what extent both the population and the Israeli military should pull out from the Green Line remains a crucial issue in some discussions bordering the Middle East conflict.

Furthermore, it is consequential to note that the Palestinians were not a party to the drawing of the Armistice line and therefore completely thrashed out the UNSC 242, to the Palestinians, it did not call for an independent Palestinian state and referred to them as refugees. But from 1976, there was a shift on ground as most elements in the PLO have come to accept the pre-1967 line as a basis for the creation of a Palestinian state. As Noam (1980) argued, that claims by the Israelis that the Palestinian leadership refused the international consensus calling for a Palestinian state based on the Green Line border arrangement weren't in anyway coherent with the documented record.

Within Hamas and Palestinian leadership, have agreed and called for a two-state and based on the pre-1967 borders although Hamas formal policy is highly geared towards the destruction of Israel. The Palestinian unity government Prime minister, Haniya Ismail stated that a long term truce with Israel could be achieved if Israel retreat from the territories it seized and occupied in the 1967 war (Aljazeera). Whereas, larger number of the Israeli public are against reverting to pre 1967 borders. According to a study conducted in 2011, 77% of Israelis are against reverting to the 1967 lines even if it would lead to peaceful and harmonious relationship between Israel and the neighboring Arab states, this is due to security concerns.

Rights of Return of Refugees: The question of rights of return of refugees is another core issue in the Middle East conflict and constitutes another major obstacle in resolving the Middle East conflict. The creation of the state of Israel led to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fleeing due to violent clashes. By the eve of the independence of the state of Israel, and the ending of the British mandate on the month of May 14, 1948, an estimated 400,000 Arabs had become refugees

in neighboring countries. The invasion of Israel by five Arab armies namely Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan, resulted not only to decisive defeat but produced another 700,000 refugees.

According to the United Nations estimate, the total figure of refugees for these two periods was 726,000, which accounts for a two thirds of the then Palestinians. In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly passed the Resolution 194, which has been reaffirmed annually since that year, it read: the refugees willing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should do so at the earliest practical date and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for the loss or the damage to property which under principles of international law or in equity should be made good by the government or authorities responsible (UN Report No A/6797). As a result of the Six-Day war, more Palestinians fled to neighboring countries. Today there are approximately 4.6 million Palestinian refugees many of whom reside in refugee camps in Gaza, Jordan, Syria, The West Bank, Iraq and Lebanon (UKESSAYS May 2017).

As Scheindlin (2020) noted, the rights of return of Palestinian refugees is amongst the most politically as well as emotionally charged issues in the Middle East conflict. The right of return of refugees is one of the most largely enforced as well as recognized rights which exist in refugee law (Akram, 2011). Over half of a century later, the right of return has been denied to the Palestinians and instead, 11 million Palestinians reside in the exilic Diaspora. A month after the state of Israel was established, the Israeli cabinet blocked the return of Palestinian refugees, consequently, Palestinians have relocated to other countries, some of these Palestinians who left, have managed to obtain residency or citizenship elsewhere including in some of the developed countries, it is clear that most of such Palestinians would rather favor to remain where they are while a small number would choose to return.

As DonPeretz (1996) noted, the Arab states only promised to aid the Palestinians to make available shelter and equal rights to the refugees but without seeking, or encouraging their absorption and this undermined their rights of return. The economic and social amenities pressure that the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees mounted on the Arab states made the refugees to be seen as problematic and came to occupy precarious positions in most Arab states While Lebanon became afraid that the refugees from Palestine living within its borders posed a severe and major threat to her already fragile ethno-religious balance. This ultimately resulted to the enactment of an uncompromising policy of oppression and policy of exclusion towards Palestinians by the Lebanese government, such subjugation include constraining them to refugee camp with severe restrictions such as being prohibited from working in some 70 occupations till date, Palestinians in Lebanon do not delight full civil or social rights and also have limited access to government services.

Jordan remains the only Arab country that has welcomed and treated the Palestinians with much acceptance by giving them citizenship and granting them the most right, but things changed with the mass influx of Palestinians into Jordan and coupled with the Jordanian civil war of 1970, Jordan fear of Palatalization of Jordan and from then, threatening to discard the citizenship granted to them.

While the Arabs maintain on the rights of return, it is consequential to note that the Arabs, in a bid to devastate the new Jewish state, their leaders asked the Palestinian Arabs to flee from their homes, pledging to annihilate Israel so they could return, this decision and action by the Arab leaders led to the exile of the Palestinians. Although all the refugees did not just flee based on the Arab leader's request, some fled due to the actions of the Israelis during the war, but it is a consequence or outcome of a war that the Israelis did not start, therefore Israel sees it as the fault of the Arabs, a repercussion of their inhumane and unkind decision against them (the Israelis) therefore Is not responsible for the destiny of the refugees.



Fig. 4.2: Refugees

Source: *Wikipedia*

Settlement Expansion

After the 1967 war (six day war), Israel has developed a concept building facts on the ground i.e, building settlements on the areas it captured during the six day war and this is one of the major issues hindering the achievement of absolute peace (Onuoha,2004). The Israelis has continued to build hundreds of settler units on Palestinian territories and this is a great obstacle towards achieving peace, for peace to be achieved, Israel must halt all settlements, dismantle the existing ones (Aljazeera news). While this request is been made, Prime Minister Netanyahu announced 1700 settler units in the city of West Bank and East Jerusalem (Reuters). The United Nations, the European Union and some leaders around the world has constantly expressed their discontent over such move by successive Israeli government emphasizing that “all settlements are hindrance towards achieving a lasting peace (Aljazeera news). Although some leaders and people’s around the world has expressed openly shown support for the settlement aggrandizement, stressing that it’s Israel’s legitimate right. About 475,000 Israeli Jews live in settlements in the West Bank alone.

Without realistic prospect of a complete freeze to the settlement expansion policy, activity and realization of a two state solution, it is only a matter of time before we are confronted with an irreversible, grievous collapse and widespread instability, Tor Winnesland, special coordinator for Middle East peace process told UNSC (Aljazeera news)

The Israeli settlements exist in areas Palestinians claim rights over notably, the West Bank including East Jerusalem and in the Golan Heights of Syria seized by Israel. Previously, settlements has been within the Egyptian Sinai peninsula and within the Gaza strip, however, Israel dismantled and moved out from the 18 Sinai settlements following the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace accords as well as 21 21 settlements in the Gaza Strip along with 4 in the West Bank in 2005 as part of its unilateral withdrawal from Gaza.

On 30, November 2009, Israel started a temporary moratorium on constructing new settlements, the 10 month halt on new construction was targeted at facilitating peace negotiations (Reuters) this settlement suspension was announced by Prime Minister Netanyahu in order to persuade the

Palestinians to return to the US-Sponsored peace talks that was stalled. This was not embraced by the Israelis who clearly lays a biblical birthright over the territory. However, this plan was completely rejected by the Palestinians because it does not include construction in Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem which the Palestinians proclaim as their future capital.

Road Map for Peace

When Bush administration assumed office in January of 2001, it shifted in a number of foreign policy areas. Nowhere was the shift in direction and priority more pronounced than in the approach to Arab-Israeli diplomacy. It was not only that the President would not be engaged; it was also that there would be no American envoy to the peace process. Indeed, in the first months of the administration, the very words "peace process" were banned from the public and private lexicon.

The policy was one of disengagement. A number of assumptions seemed to guide the new approach: the Clinton Administration erred in wanting peace more than the parties, with the President having been far too involved; Yasir Arafat was indulged too much; the new Ariel Sharon-led government in Israel would now rule out being able to achieve much; and U.S. interests in the region were threatened far more by Iraq. Dealing with that problem as opposed to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was more likely to transform the landscape of the area.

Whatever one thinks about the wisdom of America's intensive, high-level engagement in the 1990s, disengagement from peacemaking efforts was clearly not the answer. In the first years of the Bush Administration, with very limited American diplomacy between Israelis and Palestinians, the intifada was transformed into a war with a vast escalation in the suffering on both sides. For Israelis and Palestinians alike, the price they paid for having no peace process was very high.

To put this in perspective, the number of Israelis killed in the first four months of the intifada (until the end of the Clinton Administration) was 42. By June 2003, over 800 Israelis had been killed. Palestinian fatalities went from 350 to nearly 2,500. The wounded amount to ten to twenty times the numbers killed. The economies on both sides have also paid a severe price. While the Israeli economy is in crisis having declined in absolute terms every year for the last three years the Palestinian economy has been devastated. More than 60 percent of Palestinians are presently living below the poverty level, and 1.8 million in the West Bank and Gaza are now dependent on subsistence from the UN and other international agencies (Rose, 2003).

But there has been another casualty as well: The psyches of both sides have been deeply wounded. Both Israeli and Palestinian publics have come to doubt whether they have a partner in peace on the other side. The problem is less a loss of confidence and more a loss of faith. And that cannot be restored overnight.

The Genesis: Under pressure from Arab leaders, especially crown prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, the Bush Administration decided to re-engage in Middle Eastern diplomacy in August 2001. The President sent a private letter to the Crown Prince, establishing for the first time that U.S. policy would be to support a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In addition, the Saudis and others were told that the President would have a brief meeting with Yasir Arafat on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly meetings in New York.

None of this was announced, and September 11 interrupted the advent of a new diplomacy. Given the administration's understandable preoccupation with the war in Afghanistan, a new effort on Israeli-Palestinian diplomacy was put on the backburner. Notwithstanding limited efforts to produce a ceasefire later in fall and early winter 2001-02, the administration's reluctance to engage itself seriously remained the guiding principle of its approach. The hesitancy was reinforced by perceptions that Arafat was doing little to stop terror, had frustrated General Anthony Zinni's

effort to negotiate a ceasefire agreement, and had lied to the administration about trying to smuggle Iranian arms into the territories. Following the IDF's (Israel Defense Forces) sweep of West Bank cities and an unproductive trip to the region by Secretary Powell in April 2002, the administration again came under increased pressure to do something.

The result was President Bush's speech of June 24, outlining his vision for peace making. He publicly called for a two-state solution to the conflict. However, by emphasizing a performance-based approach to peace, he effectively told the Palestinians that if they wanted a state they would have to earn it. They must reform themselves, build credible institutions, end corruption, fight terror and create an alternative leadership untainted by terror. If the Palestinians did all this, Israel needed to accept statehood and "end the occupation that began in 1967."

While long on exhortation and short on plans, the President's speech did create a new basis for the international community to address the issue. Palestinian reform became the focal point for activity, with emphasis put on creating transparency and accountability in the Palestinian Authority (PA). But translating this new emphasis into a new reality on the ground was bound to be difficult. There was nothing immediately practical in terms of what had been proposed. Reform as an objective was very important, but it was unlikely to be achievable unless the Israelis would relax their grip on the territories so reformers could move, meet and plan. For its part, the Israeli government might be a supporter of Palestinian reform particularly if it meant sidelining Arafat but it was not inclined to relax its grip on the territories if the result of doing so would be new terror attacks in Israel.

The stalemate remained. Finding a mechanism to act on the President's vision is what gave birth to the concept of a roadmap.

Ironically, it was the Arab leaders who initially raised the concept of a Roadmap, notwithstanding their concern that the President's speech demanded too much from Palestinians and too little from Israelis. Desperate for the United States to intervene, they embraced the President's ultimate vision but called for a plan a roadmap to get there (Rose, 2003).

Here again, the administration did not rush to develop a roadmap. Arab leaders and Europeans were pleading for one to act on the President's words. Both argued that the U.S. position in the Middle East was being threatened by the administration's reluctance to defuse the Israeli-Palestinian war and its apparent eagerness to go to war with Saddam Hussein. Faced with the uncertainty of who to deal with on the Palestinian side and with the tactical need to gain support for its Iraq policy or at least the prospect of acquiescence in it the administration agreed to work with the EU, the UN and Russia in forging a roadmap to carry out the President's vision. While the United States would not let these other countries determine its response to Iraq, it would let them shape the conduct of U.S. diplomacy between the Israelis and Palestinians an unprecedented step in the U.S. approach to Arab-Israeli issues. Few things better indicate that the real objective here had less to do with Middle East peace and much more to do with the Bush Administration's Iraq policy. Arabs, Europeans and others would find it easier to tolerate what the United States was doing in Iraq if the administration could point to its making a serious effort on Israeli-Palestinian peace- or so the thinking went.

This tactical objective led to a reversal of the traditional approach to Israeli- Palestinian diplomacy. Rather than working out understandings with the parties, the administration engaged in a negotiation with the members of the Quartet (the United States, EU, UN and Russia). Consequently, the roadmap reflected agreement with parties that had no responsibility for carrying out even one of the steps for which they were calling. Conversely, the parties that would have to implement these steps were presented the roadmap after the Quartet had already agreed to it. They were each offered the opportunity to make comments but not to engage in a negotiation about its content or how it might actually be implemented. Perhaps the need to avoid negotiating with Yasir

Arafat as well as the desire to have an international consensus that would be difficult to reject influenced the administration's approach.

The Plan: Described as a "performance-based and goal-driven roadmap", the Roadmap was built on goals without going into details. It may be summarized as:

- a. End the violence;
- b. Halt settlement activity;
- c. Reform Palestinian institutions;
- d. Accept Israel's right to exist;
- e. Establish a viable, sovereign Palestinian state;
- f. and reach a final settlement on all issues by 2005 (Institute for Palestine Studies, 2013).

However, as a performance-based plan, progress would require and depend upon the good faith efforts of the parties, and their compliance with each of the obligations the Quartet put into the plan. This made the Roadmap different from former peace plans; there was no (unrealistic) time-scheme to reach the goal, a Palestinian state.

The Roadmap was composed of three phases:

- I. Satisfying the preconditions for a Palestinian state;
- II. Creating an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders;
- III. Negotiations on a permanent status agreement, recognition of a Palestinian state with permanent borders and end of conflict.

1. **Phase I** (finished as early as May 2003): Mutual recognition; an immediate and unconditional ceasefire to end armed activity and all acts of violence against Israelis anywhere; Palestinian political-institutional reform; Palestinian elections; Israeli withdrawal to the positions of 28 September 2000 (the start date of the Second Intifada; the plan does not speak of any further withdrawal). Israel refrains from deportations, attacks on civilians, demolitions and destructions, and other measures; reopens Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem; improves the humanitarian situation, fully implements the Bertini report, eases movement; freezes settlement expansion and dismantles settlement outposts built since 2001 (B'Tselem, *July 2007*).
2. **Phase II** (June–December 2003): An international summit to support Palestinian economic recovery and launch a process leading to establishment of an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders; revival of multilateral engagement on issues including regional water resources, environment, economic development, refugees, and arms control issues; Arab states restore pre-intifada links to Israel (including trade offices, etc.).
3. **Phase III** (2004–2005): A second international conference; permanent status agreement and end of conflict; agreement on final borders, clarification of the highly controversial question of the fate of Jerusalem, refugees and settlements; Arab states to agree to peace deals with Israel.

Note: A provisional state in Phase II would thus include all existing settlements and exclude East Jerusalem. Although the plan was presented with considerable delay, the original timetable was not adapted.

While the Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas accepted the Roadmap, right-wing ministers in the Israeli government opposed it (Reynolds, 2003). Sharon could only accept the

plan with "some artful language", thus the Government accepted "the **steps** set out in the Roadmap", rather than the Roadmap itself.

On 25 May 2003, the Prime Minister's Cabinet approved the Roadmap with 14 reservations. These included: On 25 May 2003, the Prime Minister's Cabinet approved the Roadmap with 14 reservations (Wikipedia, 2025). These included:

- a. The Palestinians will dismantle the (PA's) security organizations and reform their structures;
 - b. The Palestinians must cease violence and incitement and educate for peace;
 - c. The Palestinians must complete the dismantling of Hamas and other militant groups and their infrastructure, and collect and destroy all illegal weapons;
 - d. No progress to Phase II before all above-mentioned conditions are fulfilled;
 - e. (Unlike the Palestinians) Israel is not obliged to cease violence and incitement against the other party, pursuant to the Roadmap.
1. No progress to the next phase before complete cessation of terror, violence and incitement. No timelines for carrying out the Roadmap.
 2. Replacement and reform of the current leadership in the Palestinian Authority (including Yasser Arafat). Otherwise no progress to Phase II.
 3. The process will be monitored by the United States (not the Quartet).
 4. The character of the provisional Palestinian state will be determined through negotiations. The provisional state will be demilitarized, with provisional borders and "certain aspects of sovereignty", and subjected to Israeli control of the entry and exit of all persons and cargo, plus its airspace and electromagnetic spectrum (radio, television, internet, radar, etc.).
 5. Declaration of Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, as well as the waiver of any right of return of Palestinian refugees to Israel.
 6. Prior to the final settlement talks in Phase III, no discussions about settlements, Jerusalem and borders would be allowed. Topics would be limited to a settlement freeze and illegal outposts.
 7. No references other than the key provisions of United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 and 338. No reference to other peace initiatives (it is unclear if the Oslo Accords are included).
 8. Withdrawal to the September 2000 lines will be conditional.
 9. Israel is not bound to the Bertini Report with respect to improving Palestinian humanitarian issues.

The Government of Israel affirms the Prime Minister's announcement, and resolves that all of Israel's comments, as addressed in the Administration's statement, will be implemented in full during the implementation phase of the Roadmap.

Furthermore, the Government definitively ruled out the right of return: The Government of Israel further clarifies that, both during and subsequent to the political process, the resolution of the issue of the refugees will not include their entry into or settlement within the State of Israel (Wikipedia, 2025).

A U.S. official, however, said that U.S. commitment did not mean that all of Israel's demands would be met. Abbas called the Israeli reservations to the map "not part of the map and ... not relevant to its implementation, and ... not acceptable to the Palestinians."

Start and Deadlock: *The first step on the Roadmap was the appointment of the first-ever Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas by Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. The United States and Israel demanded that Arafat be neutralized or sidelined in the Roadmap process, claiming that he had not done enough to stop Palestinian attacks against Israelis while in charge. The United States refused to release the Roadmap until a Palestinian prime minister was in place. Abbas was appointed on 19 March 2003, clearing the way for the release of the Roadmap's details on 30 April 2003.*

The publication of the Roadmap could not stop the violence of the Second Intifada. Hamas rejected it, saying that "Abu Mazen is betraying the Palestinian people's struggle and jihad in order to appease the USA and to avoid angering Israel". From 1 to 17 May 2003, 43 Palestinian civilians were killed; from 5 to 17 May, 4 Israeli civilians. After a suicide attack on 18 May, which killed 6 Israelis, the army carried out 35 punitive demolitions of Palestinian homes (B'Tselem, 2003).

President Bush visited the Middle East from 2 to 4 June 2003 for two summits as part of a seven-day overseas trip through Europe and Russia in an attempt to push the Roadmap. On 2 June, Israel freed about 100 Palestinian prisoners before the first summit in Egypt as a sign of goodwill. The list consisted largely of administrative detainees who were due to be released. Subsequent prisoner releases involved members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, but the government insisted that those slated for release did not have Israeli "blood on their hands." In Egypt on 3 June, President Bush met with the leaders of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Bahrain, and with Prime Minister Abbas. The Arab leaders announced their support for the Roadmap and promised to work on cutting off funding to terrorist groups. On 4 June, Bush headed to Jordan to meet directly with Ariel Sharon and Mahmoud Abbas (Wikipedia, 2025)

After Bush left the region violence resumed, threatening to derail the Roadmap plan. On 29 June 2003, a tentative unilateral cease-fire ("hudna" in Arabic) was declared by the Palestinian Authority and four major Palestinian groups. Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas announced a joint three-month cease-fire, while Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction declared a six-month truce. The cease-fire was later joined by the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. One condition of maintaining the truce was a demand for the release of prisoners from Israeli jails, which was not part of the Roadmap process. This coincided with a visit to the region by United States National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice.

On 1 July 2003, in Jerusalem, Sharon and Abbas held a first-ever ceremonial opening to peace talks, televised live in both Arabic and Hebrew. Both leaders said the violence had gone on too long and that they were committed to the Roadmap for peace. On 2 July, Israeli troops pulled out of Bethlehem and transferred control to Palestinian security forces. The plan required that Palestinian police take over from withdrawing Israeli forces and stop any anti-Israeli militant attacks. At the same time, the U.S. announced a \$30 million aid package to the Palestinian Authority to help rebuild infrastructure destroyed by Israeli incursions (Wikipedia, 2024)

The hudna quickly collapsed. On 3 July, the IDF killed 2 civilians. In an IDF operation to arrest Hamas members, gunfight broke out in which an Israeli soldier and two alleged Hamas militants were killed. A new cycle of violence happened. Hamas responded with a suicide bombing on 12 August, killing one Israeli civilian. Fatah claimed responsibility for a second suicide bombing on 12 August, killing another Israeli citizen. Despite this de facto violation of the hudna, Hamas stated that the cease-fire would continue.

Hostilities then escalated. The Israeli army killed Islamic Jihad's Muhammad Seider on 14 August 2003; the Jerusalem bus 2 massacre by Hamas and Islamic Jihad on 19 August, killed 23 and wounded 136 people. Israel reacted causing large-scale destruction to Palestinian population centres. On 21 August, Israel assassinated Hamas' political leader Ismail Abu Shanab. Shanab,

who supported a two-state solution, strongly opposed suicide bombings and tried to uphold the ceasefire, was regarded as one of Hamas's more moderate and pragmatic leaders. Along with Shanab, three other civilians (his two bodyguards and a 74-year-old man) were killed. The following days it continued with a range of further Israeli killing-attacks. The assassinations of Seeder and Shanab resulted in Hamas calling off the ceasefire with Israel. International criticism of Israel increased because Israel was widely believed to be unwilling to respect the truce.

In November 2003, the United Nations Security Council endorsed the Roadmap in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1515 which called for an end to all violence including "terrorism, provocation, incitement and destruction". By the end of 2003, the Palestinian Authority had not prevented Palestinian terrorism, and Israel had neither withdrawn from Palestinian areas occupied since 28 September 2000, nor frozen settlement expansion. Thus the requirements of Phase I of the Roadmap were not fulfilled, and the Roadmap has not continued further. It eventually reached deadlock.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study highlighted the complex interplay of historical, political, and socio-economic factors that have perpetuated the conflict for decades. The theoretical framework of Realism, which underpins much of U.S. foreign policy, provided a lens through which to examine the motivations driving American actions. Realism emphasizes national interest, power dynamics, and security concerns, which were clearly reflected in the U.S. approach to the conflict. The U.S.'s unwavering support for Israel, as well as its strategic goals in the Middle East, particularly regarding oil and regional security, shaped its involvement in peace efforts. The document revealed that core issues such as the status of Jerusalem, the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and the continued expansion of Israeli settlements were major obstacles to a lasting resolution. The U.S. consistently backed Israel's territorial claims while pressuring Palestinians to adopt reforms and cease violence, creating an imbalance that Realism explains through the lens of power and self-interest. The Roadmap for Peace, introduced in 2003, underscored the U.S. commitment to a two-state solution, but its success was hindered by the unequal power dynamics and the lack of a fair, impartial mediator.

The findings indicated that while U.S. efforts were pivotal in framing peace initiatives, the realist pursuit of strategic interests often overshadowed the pursuit of equity and impartiality, leading to deadlock in the peace process. Despite multiple peace plans, including the Oslo Accords and the Roadmap, the absence of genuine cooperation between Israel and Palestine, and the dominance of external interests, ensured that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remained unresolved. Thus, Realism's focus on power dynamics and national security proved a crucial lens for understanding the persistent failure of peace negotiations.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were stated based on the major findings of the study:

1. **Address Power Imbalances Through Multilateral Engagement:** To resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the U.S. should encourage a more balanced approach to negotiations by involving a broader range of international actors, including Arab nations and the European Union. Realistic peace initiatives must address the power asymmetry between Israel and Palestine by creating a framework where both parties can equally participate. This would ensure that peace processes are less shaped by strategic interests and more focused on achieving equitable outcomes for both sides.
2. **Internationalize Jerusalem's Status:** Given Jerusalem's contentious role as the symbolic heart of both Israel and Palestine, international efforts should aim to facilitate its internationalization. As highlighted in the study, both sides claim Jerusalem as their capital,

causing friction and impeding peace. A possible solution would be to establish Jerusalem as an internationally administered city, serving as a shared space for all faiths under the guidance of the United Nations, thus addressing religious sensitivities and promoting stability in the region.

3. **Ensure Refugee Rights and Settlement Freeze:** The issue of Palestinian refugees and Israeli settlement expansions must be tackled as part of a holistic peace agreement. The U.S. and international community should exert pressure on Israel to halt settlement activities and provide Palestinians with a clear path to exercising their right of return or compensation. A comprehensive solution must prioritize the humanitarian needs of refugees while respecting Israel's security concerns, thus fostering goodwill and laying the groundwork for long-term peace negotiations.

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