



A Boiling Pot of Promises: The Fallout of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process

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JCSP 50

Exercise Solo Flight

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A BOILING POT OF PROMISES: THE FALLOUT OF THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE PROCESS

INTRODUCTION

The world reeled in shock on October 7th, 2023, as news broke of a surprise attack on Israel, targeting both civilians and military personnel, by the Palestinian militant group Hamas. This attack was the largest coordinated attack against Israel on Israeli land since the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, showcasing the escalating tensions and deep-rooted animosity between the two sides.¹ The attack, characterized by its brutality and indiscriminate targeting, sent shockwaves across the globe and reignited the seemingly endless cycle of violence in the region. Amidst a spiraling conflict marked by fierce retaliation, Israel's response has drawn international controversy, further polarizing opinions on the clash between Israel and Hamas. While Israel claims its actions are necessary to quell the threat posed by Hamas and ensure its security, critics argue that the scale and intensity of the response are disproportionate and contribute to the suffering of innocent Palestinian civilians. This complex situation is further exacerbated by the staggering number of casualties reported. According to Aljazeera news, updated 17 Apr 2024, "latest casualty figures within Gaza include 33,899 people killed, more than 13,800 children and 8,400 women. Injured more than 76,664 and another 8,000 people missing".² The sheer magnitude of human loss underscores the devastating consequences of the ongoing conflict and the urgent need for a sustainable resolution. Prime Minister Netanyahu, however, remains resolute in his stance against Hamas, stating in a media address, "It will continue until Hamas is destroyed — until victory...destroying Hamas, releasing our hostages and removing the threat from Gaza."³ However, voices within Israel and from the international community raise concerns about the long-term efficacy of this approach. The cyclical nature of violence, marked by periods of escalation and fragile ceasefires, suggests that a purely military solution may not achieve lasting peace. The question of whether dismantling Hamas entirely would truly eliminate the root causes of the conflict, such as the issues of land ownership, refugees, and political representation, remains unanswered. Additionally, the potential consequences of escalating the conflict, including further civilian casualties and regional instability, necessitate a careful examination of alternative approaches.

This latest Israeli-Palestinian clash is far from an isolated incident, and one would hardly anticipate it to be the final chapter in a long history of conflict. The region has been plagued by violence and political turmoil for decades, with both sides bearing the scars of past grievances and failed attempts at peace. This begs the question: To what extent does the complex equation

¹ "How Hamas Duped Israel as it Planned Devastating Attack ," last modified Oct 10, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/how-israel-was-duped-hamas-planned-devastating-assault-2023-10-08/>.

² "Israel-Gaza War in Maps and Charts: Live Tracker," last modified 17 Apr, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker>.

³ "Taking Flak from Right, Netanyahu Vows War Will Hamas Will Continue 'until the End,'" last modified 20 Dec, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/taking-flak-from-right-netanyahu-vows-war-will-hamas-will-continue-until-the-end/>

of the Israeli-Palestinian question invalidate and exclude resolution approaches essentially based on the use of force and, on the contrary, call for a strategy articulated around pragmatic negotiation? This essay will analyze the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, arguing that the rigid positions held by extremists hinder the prospect of resolving the dispute through force. Furthermore, the recent surge in violence exposes the limitations of such approaches, emphasizing the necessity of a moderated and pragmatic framework based on negotiation to achieve a sustainable and equitable resolution. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains one of the most enduring and complex challenges of our time. This essay traces its turbulent history, exploring pivotal moments such as the Oslo Accords and the subsequent rise of the Second Intifada. It examines the shift in dynamics within Gaza following Prime Minister Sharon's unilateral disengagement, analyzing the factors that contributed to Hamas's rise to power and the ongoing ramifications of this shift. This essay will then shift focus and provide recommendations on the "day after Gaza". By delving into the historical context, from the establishment of Israel to the present day, we can gain a deeper understanding of the multifaceted layers of this conflict and its profound impact on the region.

BRIEF HISTORY

At the start of the 20th century, Palestine, under Ottoman rule, saw the rise of Zionism, advocating for a Jewish homeland.⁴ After World War I, British control was established, marked by the Balfour Declaration supporting Jewish settlement while tensions between Jewish and Arab communities grew.⁵ After World War II and the Holocaust, global sympathy for the Jewish people led to the UN's 1947 proposal to partition Palestine into independent Jewish and Arab states, with 56% of the land allocated to the Jewish state.⁶ Despite Jewish acceptance and the declaration of Israel's statehood in 1948, Arab opposition triggered the first Arab-Israeli War.

Israel's victory in the war expanded its territory by 22%, displacing approximately 750,000 Palestinians in what they term the Nakba (The Catastrophe), fueling ongoing conflict over land, identity, and self-determination.⁷ The Six-Day War in 1967 saw Israel gain control over the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza Strip, West Bank, and Golan Heights, reshaping the region's geopolitics.⁸ The Yom Kippur War in 1973 aimed to reverse Israeli gains but led to peace

⁴ Amir Mashiach, "The Heralds of Zionism as Theological Revolutionaries," *Religions (Basel, Switzerland)* 12, no. 12 (2021), 11.

⁵ John Quigley, "Britain's Failure to Gain Legal Standing for the Balfour Declaration," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 10, no. 1 (2023), 8.

⁶ Phyllis Bennis, "The United Nations and Palestine: Partition and its Aftermath," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (1997), 47.

⁷ Yossi Goldstein, "Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Refugees: Ideology, Morality, and Praxis," *Israel Studies Review* 35, no. 1 (2020), 37.

⁸ Uzi Rabi and Chelsi Mueller, "The Gulf Arab States and Israel since 1967: From 'no Negotiation' to Tacit Cooperation," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 4 (2017), 576.

efforts, including the Camp David Accords in 1978.⁹ The First Intifada in 1987 marked ongoing Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation, complicating efforts towards a two-state solution.¹⁰

OSLO AGREEMENTS: A BAD START

During the summer of 1992, Yitzhak Rabin emerged victorious in the Israeli elections, forming a left-wing government with a focus on advancing negotiations with Palestinians and Arab states. Subsequently, on September 13, 1993, the agreement was formally signed during a notable ceremony held on the White House lawn, which included the presence of President Bill Clinton, Israeli Prime Minister Rabin, and PLO chairman Yasir Arafat.¹¹ The Oslo Accords, born from the Declaration of Principles, proposed the gradual transfer of governance in the West Bank and Gaza to the PLO. This involved creating a temporary Palestinian Authority, with an elected council and police force. Negotiations for a permanent settlement, aligned with UN resolutions 242 and 338, would continue during this transitional period, not to exceed five years.¹² The initial implementation agreement, derived from the Declaration of Principles, which formally handed over governance of the Gaza Strip and Jericho to the PLO, was signed in Cairo in May 1994 (referred to as the "Cairo Agreement").¹³ The Oslo Accords, while seen as a milestone at the time, had both positive and negative outcomes. On the positive side, they led to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, granting limited autonomy in Gaza and Jericho, a step toward Palestinian self-governance. Israeli forces withdrew from these areas, handing over security to Palestinian authorities. However, the agreement excluded the West Bank and Jerusalem, creating division within Palestinian territories. The issue of Israeli settlements remained unresolved, a source of tension. Hamas opposed the accords, complicating peace efforts further.¹⁴

Outspoken from the onset of Oslo I, was the militant terrorist group Hamas. Often the reason pointed to why the Oslo Accords went aground and subsequent negotiations didn't come to fruition.¹⁵ Hamas, formed under the guidance of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin during the onset of the first intifada in December 1987, strongly opposed engaging in political negotiations with Israel and refused to accept the agreements outlined in the Declaration of Principles. To demonstrate its opposition and impede any advancements in diplomatic efforts, Hamas carried out a prolonged

⁹ Yinon Shlomo, "The Israeli-Egyptian Talks at Kilometer 101," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 3 (2017), 449.

¹⁰ Lotte Buch Segal, "Ambivalent Attachment — Melancholia and Political Activism in Contemporary Palestine," *Ethos (Berkeley, Calif.)* 44, no. 4 (2016), 464.

¹¹ Hillel Schenker, "Oslo then and Now - what's Next?" *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 23, no. 2/3 (2018), 5.

¹² Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Declaration of Principles*, [1993].

¹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Agreement on Gaza Strip and Jericho Area*, [1994].

¹⁴ "Will the Cairo Agreement Hold?" *Domes (Milwaukee, Wis.)* 3, no. 2 (1994), 26.

¹⁵ Rob Geist Pinfold, "Wendy Pearlman and Boaz Atzili, Triadic Coercion: Israel's Targeting of States that Host Nonstate Actors," *Israel Studies Review* 34, no. 2 (2019), 147.

sequence of terrorist attacks targeting Israeli civilians.¹⁶ Initially, the majority of these attacks occurred in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. However, beginning in the spring of 1994, Hamas carried out suicide bombings in the heart of Israeli cities. They claimed these attacks were in retaliation for Baruch Goldstein's killing of Muslim worshippers at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in February 1994.¹⁷ These attacks stemmed from the onset of the initial Oslo Accords discussions. Hamas rejected any recognition of Israel's legitimacy, and the Oslo Accords, by acknowledging Israel and engaging in negotiations, were seen as a betrayal of this core principle. The Accords did not address the issues of Israeli settlements, control over borders, airspace, and water resources. Hamas saw this as perpetuating the occupation and undermining Palestinian self-determination. "Hamas presents the Palestinian people with a clear alternative to the current path of surrender [i.e. negotiations], and that is the alternative of resistance".¹⁸

In Israel, the violent incidents orchestrated by Hamas, including the suicide bombing of a bus in downtown Tel Aviv in October 1994, resulting in the deaths of twenty-two Israelis and injuring over one hundred others, sparked public outcry against further negotiations. This also led to a decline in Prime Minister Rabin's popularity in the polls.¹⁹ Meanwhile, Benjamin Netanyahu, a right-wing leader who fundamentally opposed the Oslo Accords, saw an increase in support.²⁰ Despite Hamas's terrorism, Israel pressed on with the Oslo Accords, signing the Oslo II agreement in September 1995. This granted Palestinians control over West Bank and Gaza towns and villages. After Rabin's assassination, Peres oversaw the Accords' implementation while Israeli forces cracked down on Hamas, killing key operative Yahya Ayyash in January 1996. However, this sparked more Hamas bombings, not less.²¹ Peres' 1996 election loss to Netanyahu, fueled by discontent with the Oslo Accords, brought a leader opposed to the agreements to power. Despite upholding existing deals, escalating retaliation and the Palestinian Authority's struggles led to diminishing returns for both sides. Continued West Bank occupation highlighted the Oslo Accords' failure to ensure accountability.

The signing of the Oslo Accords was perceived globally as a pivotal moment aimed at fostering peace in the Middle East and initiating a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine. Under the agreement, Israel and the PLO agreed to establish the Palestinian Authority (PA) to temporarily govern the Gaza Strip and West Bank. Israel also committed to initiating

¹⁶ Elad Ben-Dror and Netanel Flamer, "Missing the Spoiler: Israel's Policy with Regard to Hamas during the Oslo Talks and the First Stages of the Implementation of the Oslo Accords," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2023), 2.

¹⁷ Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence, and Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), xxx+244p.

¹⁸ Tareq Baconi, "The Demise of Oslo and Hamas's Political Engagement," *Conflict, Security & Development* 15, no. 5 (2015), 506.

¹⁹ Arian, Asher Barnea, Sholmit Ben-Nun, Pazit Ventura, Raphael Shamir, Michal, *Auditing Israeli Democracy – 2005 A Decade After the Assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin*.

²⁰ Yair Hirschfield and Sharon Roling, "The Oslo Process and the People-to-People Strategy," *Development (Society for International Development)* 43, no. 3 (2000), 160.

²¹ Meir Hatina, "Hamas and the Oslo Accords: Religious Dogma in a Changing Political Reality," *Mediterranean Politics (Frank Cass & Co.)* 4, no. 3 (1999), 42.

withdrawals from certain parts of the West Bank, although significant portions of land and Israeli settlements remained under the exclusive control of the Israeli military. Of particular note, the Oslo Accords did not categorically define the status of the 1967 Borders, Jerusalem, Palestinian Refugees, and Israeli settlers in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem.²² Subsequently, the West Bank was divided into three non-contiguous areas: Area A, under complete Palestinian civil and military control; Area B, under Palestinian civil control but Israeli military control; and Area C, under complete Israeli civil and military control (Figure 1.1).



Figure 1.1 Oslo II Accords Map of West Bank Areas²³

Area A encompasses roughly 18% of the West Bank and comprises the main Palestinian urban centers and communities. Within Area A, the Palestinian Authority (PA) assumes full authority over internal security, including counterterrorism measures, as well as public order, which encompasses all police activities unrelated to internal security, and civil affairs. Essentially, Area A is under the exclusive control of the PA.²⁴ Area B makes up approximately 22% of the West Bank and encompasses all remaining densely populated Palestinian areas, including approximately 450 towns, villages, refugee camps, and hamlets. Within Area B, the Palestinian Authority (PA) oversees all matters related to Palestinian public order and civil

²² Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Declaration of Principles*

²³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Declaration of Principles*, [1993].

²⁴ Joel Singer, "West Bank Areas A, B and C - how did they Come into being?" *International Negotiation (Hague, Netherlands)* 26, no. 3 (2021a), 393.

affairs. However, Israel maintains control over internal security matters in Area B, with coordination between Israeli authorities and the PA.²⁵ Area C encompasses all West Bank territory not designated as Areas A or B. As such, it constitutes approximately 60% of the West Bank's land area. This region includes all Jewish settlements, which are home to around 450,000 residents, as well as Israel Defense Forces (IDF) camps, military installations, areas deemed of strategic importance for security purposes, and uninhabited areas. Within Area C, Israel exercises control over all matters concerning internal security, public order, and civil affairs, with the exception of civil affairs pertaining to Palestinian residents in Area C, excluding land management responsibilities, which are delegated to the Palestinian Authority (PA).²⁶ Leading up to the signing of the Oslo II Accords, both sides acknowledged each other for the first time since Israel's creation, committing to end their longstanding conflict. The establishment of the Palestine Authority (PA) oversaw only 18% of the present-day West Bank, designated as Area A. Despite a five-year deadline for a final treaty, Prime Minister Rabin's assassination by a right-wing Israeli opposed to the PLO stalled progress. Area C, comprising about 60% of the West Bank, remains under full Israeli control, with continued settlement expansion.²⁷ The rise of Hamas, opposed to the Oslo Accords, warned against a two-state solution erasing Palestinian refugees' right to return post-1948 displacement (Nakba). At the time of this accord, there may have been hopes for a fully functioning Palestinian Authority capable of eventually assuming control over Areas B and C. However, the prospect of Israel retaining administration and control over 60% of the West Bank does not bode well for a viable two-state solution.

SECOND INTIFADA SEP 28, 2000 – FEB 8, 2005

The Second Intifada lasted almost 5 years and stands out as a prolonged and exceptionally violent phase within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict prior to October 7th. Its eruption marked a significant downfall and perhaps the end of the Oslo Accords Peace Process, which aimed to resolve the conflict through diplomacy and negotiation. A series of blame games continued on both sides, on the Palestinian side, the occupied territories saw an increase in Jewish settlements both in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, undermining the very context of the Oslo Accords.²⁸ On 28 September 2000, leader of the opposition Ariel Sharon and the Likud party delegation, along with hundreds of armed bodyguards visited the Temple Mount unannounced at a highly sensitive time, after a failed Camp David Peace Talks.²⁹ This visit to

²⁵ Joel Singer, "West Bank Areas A, B and C - how did they Come into being?" *International Negotiation (Hague, Netherlands)* 26, no. 3 (2021b), 393.

²⁶ Joel Singer, "West Bank Areas A, B and C - how did they Come into being?" *International Negotiation (Hague, Netherlands)* 26, no. 3 (2021b), 393.

²⁷ Shlaim Avi, "The Rise and Fall of the Oslo Peace Process," *International Relations of the Middle East* (2016), 285.

²⁸ Settlement Report, "Extraordinary Increase in Settlement Construction as Diplomacy Falters," 8 (March, 1998). <https://archive.ph/20130414194355/http://www.fmep.org/reports/archive/vol.-8/no.-2/extraordinary-increase-in-settlement-construction-as-diplomacy-falters#selection-1059.0-1059.70>.

²⁹ Sean D. Murphy, "Middle East Peace Process: Violent Clashes," *The American Journal of International Law* 95, no. 1 (2001), 160.

the holy site from Sharon sparked Palestinian riots across East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Israeli police responded with the use of tear gas and rubber bullets, while Palestinian protesters hurled stones and other projectiles, one of which injured the Jerusalem chief of police, which escalated the Israeli Police Force to use live ammunition vice rubber bullets. "These losses fanned the flames and turned the conflict into a self-perpetuating cycle: riots, fatalities, funerals that turned into clashes with the IDF, leading to more fatalities, more funerals and so on."³⁰ Series of escalating tit-for-tat, Palestinian insurgents from diverse organizations engaged in conflict with the Israeli military, which sought to quell the insurgency. Each side strategically employed violence to further their objectives, adapting their approaches as circumstances evolved.³¹ In contrast to the First Intifada, this Intifada included "many shooting incidents by Palestinians and severe escalation in terrorist attacks against Israel."³² During this Intifada, over 3,000 Palestinians and over 1,000 Israelis lost their lives due to the eruption of violence. Civilians suffered greatly, accounting for approximately two-thirds of casualties on the Israeli side and half on the Palestinian side.³³ This Intifada only demonstrates that the rigid positions held by extremists hinder the prospect of resolving the dispute. The escalatory tit-for-tat exposes the limitations of such approaches, emphasizing the necessity of a moderated and pragmatic framework based on negotiation to achieve a sustainable and equitable resolution.

Beyond military measures, Israel's strategy during the Second Intifada involved fragmenting the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This aimed to create isolated, disconnected regions heavily reliant on Israel, essentially forming a series of "cantons".³⁴ Gaza, a small strip of land just 40 kilometers long and a maximum of 12 kilometers wide, was harshly divided under the apartheid-like system known as bantustanization.³⁵ This division split the territory into three isolated zones, making movement incredibly difficult for the local population. Residents often faced restrictions preventing them from traveling between these zones, or were forced to endure strict military checkpoints just to move within their own land.³⁶ During the challenging period of the intifada, Hamas gained popularity by offering essential civil services and actively participating in armed resistance against Israel. Combined with the disillusionment with the Peace Process, the Palestinians had lost hope in achieving peace or even engaging in substantial political negotiations with Israel. Coupled with dissatisfaction with Fatah's Governance, after a

³⁰ Boaz Ganor, *Israel's Counterterrorism Strategy: Origins to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 199.

³¹ Lori Allen, "Getting by the Occupation: How Violence Became Normal during the Second Palestinian Intifada," *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 3 (2008), 456.

³² Ganor, *Israel's Counterterrorism Strategy: Origins to the Present*, 200

³³ B'Tselem's database, "Explanation of Statistics on Fatalities," *The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories* (. https://www.btselem.org/statistics/casualties_clarifications).

³⁴ Adam Hanieh, "Class, Economy, and the Second Intifada," *Monthly Review (New York.1949)* 54, no. 5 (2002), 39.

³⁵ Iveković Ivan, "Israel and the Bantustanization of Palestine," *Međunarodni Problemi (Srpskohrvatsko Izd.)* 54, no. 4 (2002), 408.

³⁶ Caroline Mall Dibiasi, "Changing Trends in Palestinian Political Activism: The Second Intifada, the Wall Protests, and the Human Rights Turn," *Geopolitics* 20, no. 3 (2015), 672.

decade of Fatah's rule, the Palestinian population had grown frustrated with perceived mismanagement and corruption within the PA. Following Yasser Arafat's death in 2004 and Mahmoud Abbas taking his place, Palestinian legislative elections in 2005 saw a surprising upset. The Islamist party Hamas secured a majority win, taking 76 seats compared to Fatah's 43. Ultimately, the Oslo Accords lay defunct, with little hope of revival from either side. Within the Palestinian community, Hamas gained traction, posing a threat to Israel's national security. This situation prompted Prime Minister Sharon to unilaterally withdraw Israeli forces and civilians from the occupied territory of Gaza.³⁷ Sharon's gamble was to leverage the fight against terrorism and national security concerns as justification for a strategic withdrawal from Hamas-controlled territories. However, this disengagement did not quell the rise of Hamas's influence, instead led to proliferation.

ISRAELI DISENGAGEMENT FROM GAZA

The Gaza Disengagement Plan, spearheaded by then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, signified a major shift in Israel's approach to Palestinians, particularly concerning the future of the Gaza Strip. Sharon framed the plan as a response to Palestinian violence, arguing that it was a consequence of their choosing terrorism over peace.³⁸ However, the plan faced significant opposition. Critics argued that Sharon's motivations were driven by personal legal troubles and that unilateral withdrawal would embolden terrorists.³⁹ This dissent led to the dismissal of opposing ministers, legal challenges, and a rise in conscientious objectors within the army. The color orange became a symbol of the widespread protests against the disengagement. In an attempt to overcome internal party resistance, Sharon promised to hold a referendum and resign if defeated. Ultimately, the government and Knesset approved the plan, paving the way for its implementation in 2005.⁴⁰ There was a fear that leaving Gaza would lead to more terrorism originating from the area, posing a security risk to national security. Support from the Israeli side had hope that Israel's presence in Gaza actually fueled terrorism and resulted in too many casualties.⁴¹ As well as the view that Gaza wasn't historically part of the land of Israel/Palestine, making it less important to maintain control. The Second Intifada significantly influenced the Israeli disengagement from Gaza in 2005. This withdrawal, following decades of occupation

³⁷ Eli Alshech, "Egoistic Martyrdom and Hamās' Success in the 2005 Municipal Elections: A Study of Hamās Martyrs' Ethical Wills, Biographies, and Eulogies," *Welt Des Islams* 48, no. 1 (2008), 49.

³⁸ Geoffrey Levin, "One Step Forward Or Two Steps Back? Unilateralism and Israel's Gaza Disengagement in the Eyes of the World," *Israel Affairs* 20, no. 1 (2014), 90.

³⁹ Dennis Ross, "Promised Land: The Legacy of Ariel Sharon and the Limits of Unilateralism," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (21 Sep, 2006), 3.

⁴⁰ Tamir Sheafer, "Detecting Campaign Effects in Imbalanced Campaigns: The Likud's Intraparty Referendum Over Sharon's Disengagement Plan," *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 10, no. 2 (2005), 92.

⁴¹ Rob Geist Pinfeld, "Security, Terrorism, and Territorial Withdrawal: Critically Reassessing the Lessons of Israel's "Unilateral Disengagement" from the Gaza Strip," *International Studies Perspectives* 24, no. 1 (2023a), 67.

since the 1967 Six-Day War, was perceived by Hamas as a historic victory, paving the way for their eventual forceful takeover of Gaza.

The main point of contention regarding Israel's withdrawal from Gaza was its unilateral nature, lacking any collaboration with Palestinian authorities. Critics argued that either joint coordination with Palestinians was necessary, or that Israel should have been compensated for leaving the area. Prime Minister Sharon justified the move as a consequence of stalled peace negotiations and the Palestinians' reluctance to follow the proposed roadmap. Despite portraying the disengagement as a solo action, there was an underlying hope that a vacated Gaza would flourish economically, as promised by the Palestinians.⁴² Unfortunately, this optimism was short-lived. The reality on the ground proved starkly different. Hamas militants swiftly took control of the evacuated areas, driving out Palestinian police, Fatah members, and representatives of the Palestinian Authority. The vision of a thriving Gaza Strip quickly evaporated.⁴³ Shortly after Israel withdrew its troops and settlers from the Gaza Strip in 2005, Palestinian militants began launching rockets into Israeli territory. This resulted in a two-week military operation by Israel, involving airstrikes and artillery fire against targets associated with militant groups in Gaza. Despite the withdrawal, tensions remained high. Palestinians viewed the disengagement as a victory resulting from their resistance, not a step towards peace. This perception boosted the popularity of Hamas, a militant group, which led to their success in local and eventually parliamentary elections in 2006.⁴⁴ The rise of Hamas, along with the incapacitation of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon due to a stroke, significantly impacted the political landscape in the region.

Since Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip via a coup in 2007, Israel, with Egypt's support, has enforced a strict land, sea, and air blockade. This blockade severely restricts the movement of both goods and people in and out of Gaza. While Israel claims the blockade is necessary to prevent weapons smuggling, many believe its legality is questionable. Despite Israel's 2005 withdrawal, its presence in Gaza and the West Bank is widely seen as an ongoing military occupation. Human rights organizations have condemned the blockade as an illegal collective punishment. They argue that it creates economic hardship, restricts access to essential resources, and violates the freedom of movement for Gazans, turning the territory into what some call an "open-air prison."⁴⁵

Palestinian territory is fragmented into two distinct areas. In the West, the Gaza Strip endures a blockade, fueling resentment towards Israel for its restrictions on essential services.

⁴² Rob Geist Pinfeld, "Security, Terrorism, and Territorial Withdrawal: Critically Reassessing the Lessons of Israel's "Unilateral Disengagement" from the Gaza Strip," *International Studies Perspectives* 24, no. 1 (2023b), 81.

⁴³ Safaa Sadi Jaber and Ilias Bantekas, "The Status of Gaza as Occupied Territory Under International Law," *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (2023), 1070.

⁴⁴ Evan Braden Montgomery and Stacie L. Pettyjohn, "Democratization, Instability, and War: Israel's 2006 Conflicts with Hamas and Hezbollah," *Security Studies* 19, no. 3 (2010), 526.

⁴⁵ Ilana Feldman, "Gaza as an Open-Air Prison," *Middle East Report (New York, N.Y.1988)* 45, no. 275 (2015), 1.

Meanwhile, the West Bank, encompassing the land beyond the 1967 borders, is divided into fragmented zones established by the Oslo II Accord. Israel retains control over the majority of this land and continues to expand its settlements, further complicating the situation. Israel has legitimate security concerns, having faced numerous wars and terrorist attacks throughout its history. The fear of terrorism and rocket attacks from Gaza, along with the rise of Hamas, a militant organization opposed to Israel's existence, have hardened Israeli positions on concessions. The Palestinians lacked a political horizon and stayed polarized between Fatah and Hamas as one political party aims to negotiate and use diplomacy but is often seen as an upward battle as shown in the Oslo Accords, where the other Party seeks to use force to take back ancestral Palestinian lands. The doctrine of Hamas to this day continues to read "Palestine is ours from the river to the sea and from the south to the north, there will be no concession on any inch of the land. We will never recognize the legitimacy of the Israeli occupation."⁴⁶ Consequently, the existing division between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank within the PA's jurisdiction is likely to persist unless the PA assumes greater control and establishes a unified governance structure across both regions. This would necessitate addressing the complex political dynamics between Fatah and Hamas, who have struggled to reconcile their ideological and strategic differences. Additionally, external factors, such as Israeli restrictions on movement and access, which are proven through the blockade of Gaza and the Area System from the Oslo Accords, further exacerbate the challenges of unification. Achieving a sustainable resolution would require not only a political framework but also significant efforts to harmonize the legal systems, economic policies, and social services across Gaza and the West Bank. This multifaceted approach would aim to bridge the gap in living standards and infrastructure, fostering a sense of shared identity and common purpose among Palestinians in both territories.

INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT AND MILITARY PROWESS

Analyzing the escalating tit-for-tat conflict between Israel and Palestine necessitates acknowledging the influence of international actors, particularly the unwavering support of the United States, the world's preeminent superpower. Following the Second World War, the power dynamics shifted significantly. The United States emerged as a dominant force on the world stage, with ambitions and interests that spanned the globe. In contrast, Israel's focus remained on regional concerns and securing its position within the Middle East. Although the State of Israel maintained relatively friendly relations with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, the strategic partnership between the US and Israel grew immensely.⁴⁷ As several Arab nations, including Egypt, Iraq, and Syria, aligned themselves with the Soviet Union, Israel became a crucial ally for the US within the Western bloc, serving as a counterbalance to Soviet influence in the region.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Charles B. Strozier, "The Apocalyptic Aims of Hamas," *Psychoanalysis, Self and Context* 19, no. 1 (2024), 3.

⁴⁷ Jerome Slater, "The Superpowers and an Arab-Israeli Political Settlement: The Cold War Years," *Political Science Quarterly* 105, no. 4 (1990), 565.

⁴⁸ Melani McAlister, *Eye on Israel: How America Came to View Israel as an Ally*, Vol. 93 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 499.

The close ties between the US and Israel, often called the "special relationship"⁴⁹, are built on a foundation of shared history and values. Both nations emerged from similar backgrounds, including Judeo-Christian influences, waves of immigration, and a pioneering spirit that drove their founding fathers. They share common ground in their democratic ideals and enjoy strong support from both American Jewish communities and Evangelical Christians. This creates a sense of kinship that has remained steady despite evolving strategic interests and military situations.⁵⁰ In practical terms, this special relationship translates to significant American support for Israel. This includes military and economic aid, advantageous trade agreements, access to advanced weaponry, collaborative development of sophisticated arms, intelligence sharing, and protection against larger threats. The US also defends Israel within international organizations, like the UN, and plays a role in mediating the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁵¹

Most notably the US provides substantial annual aid packages to Israel, primarily for military expenditures, bolstering its defense capabilities. Both nations enjoy a Free Trade Agreement, fostering economic cooperation and mutual benefits, and engage in extensive collaboration on technological advancements, particularly in the fields of defense and cybersecurity. In a time of escalating conflict, this situation may exacerbate existing biases, with the US offering state-of-the-art military support and economic incentives to bolster Israeli national security. The US is the primary supplier of advanced weaponry and military technology to Israel, ensuring its qualitative military edge in the region. As well the US supports Israel's missile defense programs, contributing to its protection against regional threats. Since the creation of Israel and the start of the Israeli-Palestine conflict, Israel has had the upper hand with regard to power over Palestine. By privileging military force, decision-makers may believe they can achieve their objectives more swiftly or decisively, particularly in situations where they perceive diplomatic efforts as ineffective or insufficiently advantageous. However, this approach carries significant risks, including the potential for escalation of conflict, civilian casualties, and exacerbation of underlying tensions.⁵² The proportionality of Israel's use of force in past conflicts has often been debated, with some arguing that their response is justified, while others contend it is excessive. Coupled with the support from one of the world's most powerful nation, Israel's military prowess is a result of a combination of factors, including mandatory service, advanced technology, and extensive experience, making it a formidable force in the region. Overall, while strategic and historical factors drive US support for Israel, it can inadvertently contribute to perpetuating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by bolstering one side's military, economic, and diplomatic leverage without sufficient pressure for meaningful peace negotiations and resolution of key issues. Fast forward to the present day, US President Joe Biden promises "ironclad" US.

⁴⁹ David Tal, "The Judeo-Christian Tradition and the US-Israel Special Relationship," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 34, no. 4 (2023), 755.

⁵⁰ Douglas Little, "The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and Israel, 1957-68," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 4 (1993), 572.

⁵¹ Dov Waxman, "Beyond Realpolitik: The Israel Lobby and US Support for Israel," *Israel Studies Review* 22, no. 2 (2007), 97.

⁵² Avi Shlaim, "The Iron Wall Revisited," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 41, no. 2 (2012), 94.

Support with \$15 Billion military aid despite Israel's prosecution of the war in the Gaza Strip. Lacking in tone, but often heard through diplomacy is the pressure of a cease-fire and the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gazans.⁵³ The devastating consequences of Israel's current approach towards Hamas are evident in the mounting casualties and the lack of a viable exit strategy beyond total annihilation. Looking ahead, this essay will analyze potential outcomes and challenges in post-war Gaza, where both sides must grapple with the ruins left behind.

DAY AFTER GAZA

Anticipating the fallout of the recent Israeli-Gaza war presents a complex challenge. However, thorough analysis of existing data and consideration of potential scenarios can provide valuable insights into possible outcomes. The world witnessed Israel's significant military response to the October 7th attacks by Hamas. Considering Gaza's dense population, collateral damage was sadly inevitable.⁵⁴ The assessed damage currently of Gaza is "unprecedented" equating \$18.5bn in an Un-World Bank report.⁵⁵ A crucial first step is a ceasefire agreed upon by all parties involved, including the Likud party, Hamas, and the Palestinian Authority. The land, air, and sea blockade served as collective punishment, this would need to be assessed to relieve the oppression of innocent Gazans.⁵⁶ Halting the violence and opening doors for dialogue while addressing urgent humanitarian needs is paramount. With critical infrastructure destroyed and widespread displacement, a comprehensive assessment of the damage in Gaza is necessary. The focus should then shift to providing immediate humanitarian aid to the affected population. To ensure accountability and deter future violence, an independent investigation into potential war crimes and human rights violations committed by all sides is essential. This investigation should be initiated by a neutral arbitrator, an internationally supported and voted-on approach like the UN.

Both Israel and the Palestinian Authority should consent to the deployment of a UN peacekeeping mission, not only to advance humanitarian endeavors but also to foster stability and promote peaceful resolution of the conflict. This mission should receive international backing, not just from the US, but also from Arab League nations and other independent states within the UN. The peacekeepers would monitor the ceasefire, disarm militants, and create buffer zones to protect vulnerable populations and prevent further bloodshed. Israel, in collaboration with the PA and supported by the UN peacekeeping mission, should work towards

⁵³ "After \$15 Billion in Military Aid, Israel Calls Alliance with U.S. 'Ironclad'," last modified 24 April, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/24/world/middleeast/israel-us-aid.html>.

⁵⁴ Rajendra K. Bera, "Israel Responds to Hamas' Attack," *Ssrn* (27 Mar, 2024), 11 . https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4740210.

⁵⁵ "Gaza Infrastructure Damages Estimated at \$18.5bn in UN-World Bank Report," last modified 2 Apr, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/2/gaza-infrastructure-damages-estimated-at-18-5-bln-in-un-world-bank-report>.

⁵⁶ Lena Obermaier, "Disabling Palestine: The Case of Gaza's Great March of Return," *Race & Class* 65, no. 3 (2024), 27.

transferring security responsibilities in the Gaza Strip. This would establish a more stable environment and facilitate reconstruction efforts.

Achieving lasting peace requires addressing the root causes of the conflict. This involves finding a solution to the presence of Hamas and encouraging moderation within the Israeli political party to enable progress towards a two-state solution. To ensure the success of any peace process, both Israel and Palestine need strong international backing. The inclusion of a third-party presence on the ground could significantly influence the moderation of this discussion. In past conflicts, external support and proxies were utilized without direct on-the-ground involvement. However, having a presence on-site capable of arbitrating disputes and reporting factual information would greatly contribute to shaping the narrative and garnering broader support. Having a UN peacekeeping mission would also bring in support from UN members and allow an avenue of reporting and discussions at the UN summits.⁵⁷ Identifying key supporting states for each side can provide the necessary framework and oversight for sustainable peace. Ultimately, achieving a two-state solution remains the most viable path to lasting peace. This will require addressing complex issues such as borders, settlements, and the status of Jerusalem. However, with the aforementioned steps and a commitment from all parties, the possibility of a peaceful and secure future for both Israelis and Palestinians can become a reality.

CONCLUSION

The Israel-Palestine conflict is indeed complex, with deep historical roots and multifaceted layers contributing to its intractability. Key historical events, like the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the 1967 Six-Day War, are viewed through vastly different lenses by each side, further deepening the divide and distrust. Both Israelis and Palestinians aspire to self-determination and establish an independent state, leading to clashes over territory and sovereignty. Israel emphasizes its security needs and the threat of terrorism, while Palestinians highlight the occupation and its impact on their daily lives and freedoms. The continued expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank is a major point of contention, as Palestinians view it as an obstacle to their statehood and a violation of international law. Numerous attempts at peace negotiations have failed, leading to frustration and a sense of hopelessness among both populations. The Oslo Accords, despite their initial promise and the global optimism they inspired, ultimately failed to hold parties accountable and resorted to violence. While the accords represented a landmark recognition between the two entities and the establishment of a framework for Palestinian autonomy, several critical factors contributed to their unraveling. The vehement opposition and relentless terrorist attacks by Hamas significantly undermined the peace process, fueling public discontent and eroding support for the accords within Israel. The assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, a staunch advocate for peace, and the subsequent rise of leaders

⁵⁷ Kuperwasser Yossi, "How Israel can Solve its Gaza Problem," *Middle East Quarterly* (2023), 9.

like Benjamin Netanyahu, who held opposing views, shifted the political landscape and hampered progress. The accords fell short of addressing fundamental issues such as the status of Jerusalem, the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and the final borders of a Palestinian state. These unresolved matters continued to fuel tensions and mistrust. The continued expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, particularly in Area C, further complicated negotiations and undermined Palestinian aspirations for a viable and contiguous state. The legacy of the Oslo Accords is nuanced and subject to debate. While initially seen as a beacon of hope, the agreement ultimately resulted in Palestinians experiencing diminished rights and loss of land, while Israel expanded its occupation to encompass 60% of the West Bank. While they offered a glimpse of hope and a potential pathway to peace, their ultimate failure underscores the deep-rooted challenges and complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Today, the two-state solution appears more distant than ever, with ongoing violence, political stalemate, and growing disillusionment on both sides.

The Second Intifada's violence destroyed peace hopes and intensified Israeli-Palestinian mistrust. Hamas gained power, settlements grew, and diplomacy failed, worsening the conflict. Though large-scale violence subsided, unresolved issues like occupation hindered peace. Learning from the Intifada is crucial for a lasting solution. The Gaza disengagement, meant to build peace, backfired. It worsened the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, empowered Hamas, and led to ongoing conflict. The disengagement solidified opposing views: Palestinians see it as a win for resistance, while Israelis prioritize security. The move left Palestinians divided and under partial Israeli control, hindering peace talks. A lasting solution requires addressing core issues like Palestinian statehood and Israeli security through dialogue and a two-state solution. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is complicated by US support for Israel. This "special relationship" provides Israel with military, economic, and diplomatic advantages. While Israel's military strength is clear, the power imbalance raises concerns. Unwavering US support, while strengthening Israel, may hinder a balanced and lasting peace.

Moving forward, acknowledging the intricate web of international influences, particularly the role of the United States, is crucial to understanding the conflict's dynamics and seeking sustainable resolutions. The ultimate peace process requires international intervention and a strong emphasis on diplomatic negotiations where both Palestinians and Israelis can benefit from a mutual understanding. The future remains uncertain, but the need for a just and lasting resolution to the conflict is as critical as ever. Whether through renewed negotiations, international pressure, or grassroots initiatives, finding a path toward peace remains an essential and urgent task for the region and the international community.

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