

**LEBANESE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY**

The Role of Domestic Politics in Explaining the Evolution of US  
Foreign Policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: From Reagan  
to Trump

By

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A thesis

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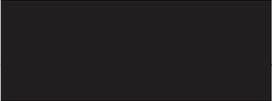
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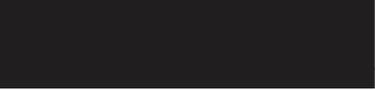
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## Dedication Page

*This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my loving father*

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# The Role of Domestic Politics in Explaining the Evolution of US Foreign Policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: From Reagan to Trump

Maguy Sleiman Arnous

## ABSTRACT

The Deal of the Century was the latest attempt by a US president and his administration to solve one of the most protracted conflicts in the world. This thesis examines the evolution of US role in and foreign policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the Reagan administration (1981-1989) until the end of Trump's presidency (2020) while giving an overview of successive American peace plans to the conflict. The principal focus is to unpack the "Deal of the Century" and examine it in the lens of domestic politics. While realism helps explain certain aspects of US foreign policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – namely that a weakened Arab and Palestinian position, which no longer presents a threat to US national interests, allowed the pursuit of a more advantageous deal to the Israelis than the Palestinians – the pluralist theory helps complement our understanding of the decisions of successive US administrations towards the conflict. The thesis adds to a rich literature on the conflict and the mediator role of the US by delving into the most recent peace plan under the last administration. It also helps to lay the groundwork for an initial analysis of Biden administration's policies towards the region, Israel and the Palestinians.

Key words: Peace process, Deal of the Century, Realism, Pluralist theory

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>I. Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 A Protracted Conflict.....	2
1.3 The US as a Peace Mediator.....	3
1.4 Explanatory Models.....	4
1.5 Methodology .....	10
1.6 Thesis Contents .....	11
<b>II. The History of US Involvement in the Arab Israeli Conflict.....</b>	<b>12</b>
2.1 The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.....	12
2.2 1967: The US Involvement .....	13
2.3 1982-2016: The Peace Processes .....	17
2.4 Conclusion.....	30
<b>III. The Deal of the Century: The End of the Two-States Solution? .....</b>	<b>31</b>
3.1 The Deal of the Century .....	31
3.2 Key Differences from previous Peace Plans.....	39
3.3 The Underlying Domestic Factors .....	44
3.4 Conclusion.....	48
<b>IV. Is the Deal of the Century Dead? .....</b>	<b>50</b>
4.1 Reception of the Deal of the Century .....	50
4.2 Conclusion: Is the Deal of the Century Dead? .....	60
<b>V. Looking Beyond the Deal of the Century: Biden and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict .....</b>	<b>62</b>
5.1 The Biden Presidency .....	62
5.2 Forcing New Realities on the Ground .....	63
5.3 The Question of Palestine .....	64
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>67</b>

# Chapter One

## Introduction

This thesis examines the evolution of US role and foreign policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the Reagan administration (1981-1989) until the end of Trump's presidency (2020) while giving an overview of successive American peace plans to the conflict. The principal focus is to explain the "Deal of the Century" in the context of domestic politics under Trump. Realism helps explain certain aspects of US foreign policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, namely that a weakened Palestinian position, which no longer presents a threat to US national interests, allowed the pursuit of a more advantageous deal to the Israelis than the Palestinians. The argument presented in this thesis is that, on top of realism, the reality of domestic politics in the US and the power of interest groups in influencing foreign policy, encouraged by a weakened Palestinian side, can better explain the advancement of US peace plans to the conflict.

The key questions this thesis answers are:

1. How does the Deal of the Century compare to other peace plans?
  - a. How did the US peace plans evolve regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since the Reagan administration?
  - b. What is the role of US domestic politics in shaping its foreign policy?

### 1.1 Background

In November 2016, Donald Trump was elected as the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America. His win came at a time when right wing politics has been sweeping major victories around the world. Some would argue that Trump's election was due to his ambitious campaign promises, chiefly his irrevocable alignment with the interests of the state of Israel,

calling himself “the best thing that could ever happen to Israel” (Trump, 2016). When elected, Trump did not shy away from his campaign promises. He declared Jerusalem the capital of Israel and worked towards moving the American Embassy to said “capital”, after more than fifty years of it being in Tel Aviv (Landler, 2017). These moves would eventually culminate towards the announcement of the Netanyahu-Trump two states solution to the conflict, called the “Deal of the Century”. The Deal of the Century comes after a number of other peace plans over the last seven decades of the conflict. The two states solution succumbs to the expansionist policies of the state of Israel and what is presumed to be a Palestinian state is an agglomeration of segregated mini territories (Peace to Prosperity, 2020). All of this comes at a time when the Arab world could not be more shattered. Since 2011, and the surge of Arab uprisings, Arab states have been struggling internal battles threatening the collapse of their nation-states, regimes and territorial integrity. For some Arab countries, notably in the Gulf region, the shifting geopolitical power balance in the region presents a new reality for their regime survival and whereby their alliance with the US, and the recent and developing deals with the state of Israel, neutralizing their threat to the state of Israel, if it existed before. The US is therefore dealing with a weakened Palestinian side which does not present a threat to US national interests. The Palestinians cannot oppose the normalization of some Arab countries with Israel or threaten their dependence on the US, in order to regain an Arab support to the Palestinian cause. The gradual erosion of Arab support to the Palestinian cause, or Palestinian fatigue, encouraged the US administration to present a favorable deal to the Israelis at the expense of the Palestinians.

## **1.2 A Protracted Conflict**

A historical overview of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is essential to understand the grievances of the Palestinian people and the long struggle for liberation. Ever since 1948,

based on a lawless document that promised “a land without people, to a people without land”, the struggle of the Palestinian people began. That year, more than 700,000 Palestinians were forced to flee their country and take refuge in neighboring countries after systematic ethnic cleansing by Zionist forces nearing the end of the British mandate (Pappé, 2006).

The Palestinian Exodus, or what was dubbed as al-Nakba (the catastrophe), is at the start of millions of Palestinians suffering around the globe, denied their Right to Return. The occupation of Palestinian land was aggravated after the defeat of 1967 (al-Naksa), where the Egyptian and Syrian armies were defeated before entering occupied territories, resulting in further occupation of historical Palestine. Since then, the Israeli expansion has been either by illegal land grab or illegal settlements which are clear violations of international law.

Palestinians’ plea has often fallen on deaf ears as retribution of crimes against humanity perpetrated against them are muted from the international discussion of the conflict. All peace plans consider the annexed territories in 1967 by the state of Israel as a *fait-accompli*, forcing the Palestinians to erase two decades of dispossession and humiliation (Neff, 2002; Masalha, 2000).

### **1.3 The US as a Peace Mediator**

In the wake of World War II, the US gained an international position as a global power. It did not however have a direct role in the Middle East as the region was colonized by Great Britain and France. Palestine was under the British Mandate, until its termination on May 15, 1948, a date commemorated as the catastrophe for the Palestinian and Arab people, and the establishment of the state of Israel by the Jews. The Arab defeat in 1967 engendered a tradition by US administrations since then to lay out peace plans for the region, in an attempt to solve the intractable Israeli Palestinian conflict. The US self-proclaimed role of the mediator between the Palestinian factions, and later the Palestinian authority, along with

allied Arab states from one side, and the State of Israel on the other side. Almost all US administrations since then have attempted to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict presenting the world with a new peace plan. These plans took a great deal of media attention and were far removed from the reality on the ground, as both conflicting parties, the Israelis and the Palestinians, often ended up in an armed struggle sabotaging any real progress at higher diplomatic levels.

## **1.4 Explanatory Models**

### ***Realism***

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marked a shift in the theories of international relations. After two world wars that devastated humanity, neo-classical realism was put forth as a theory to explain a world in chaos. The post-World War II also turned the international stage into a bipolar system as the Cold War set in between the US and the Soviet Union. To maintain power, these states competed in an arms race, bringing forth a more pessimistic outlook into the future of the world. Reaffirming much of classical realist theory, neo-classical realist portrayed a more sinister outlook on the world. Kenneth Waltz argues that states have only one goal which is their survival in an anarchist international community (1967). As there are no governing body more powerful than states themselves, the latter view each other with fear over their survival. Even though internal processes of states, such as domestic pressures and ideological inclinations, do influence states' behavior, realism contends that international competition amongst states on limited resources weighs more in the foreign policy decision-making processes. In Waltz's three level of analysis of state behavior and foreign policy, he delineates the individual, state and system levels of analysis. Recognizing internal processes however does little to negate the primary premise of realist theory as Waltz argues that the first two levels of analysis are existentially bound to the third.

In other words, the individual and state levels of analysis are only to complement the third level or the main predictor of state behavior. In his seminal book “Man, State and War”, Waltz presents his theory of international relations by imaging the international community as in constant state of war, wherein states, as rational entities, fight to ensure survival. The individual and internal processes of state then are rendered irrelevant in this depiction of the international stage (2018). Waltz argues that if states allow for its internal and domestic politics to interfere with its supposedly rational decisions concerning its foreign policies, they would be jeopardizing their position in the international stage (1967).

The aforementioned US peace plans were predominantly viewed with a realist lens (Quandt, 2005; Bosely, 2008). Realists perceive states as opaque rational black boxes that are in perpetual hunt for their national interests and protecting their national security. The realist theory has been at the forefront of foreign policy analysis. This means that states will develop foreign policies based on rational calculations that would maximize gains and minimize losses especially at the expense of their national security and sovereignty. National interest is measured in terms of power: the more powerful a state is, the more weight it holds in the international stage and the more likely it is capable of attaining security and monopoly of resources (Morgenthau, 1956). Let’s unpack these two concepts separately: power and national interest in the context of US’ role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

- Power: While realist theorists debate over the concept of power and why states pursue it, this thesis will simply use a simple explanation of power as defined by military, economic and strategic gains. A state therefore seeks power by developing strategies that will help in increasing these gains. Realists look at the relationship between the US and Israel as the following: a “patron-client relationship” where the US is the superpower in the global arena, providing unconditional economic and military support to Israel, a weak and new state. Without this support, the survival of the state

of Israel in the international stage is at stake. The benefit Israel provides to the US is its strategic position in the Middle East, allowing the US to exert its influence more easily on a fragmented region torn by occupation (Desch, 1996).

Mearsheimer and Walt's argument regarding the proven influence of the Israeli lobby on the US foreign policy puts into question the realist framing of the US-Israel relationship in terms of power (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2008). Although realism can explain aspects of the US foreign policy towards Israel, the fact that the Israeli lobby has always played a major role in American elections and its foreign policies towards the Middle East is an indication to the role of domestic politics and interest groups in the decision making of the US foreign policy. How can the Israeli lobby play such a significant role in shaping the US foreign policy and its conception of power? If the argument holds that states are rational entities and should be treated as black boxes where no internal processes can affect foreign policy, then the influence of the Israeli lobby, or any lobby in the US, is a clear violation of this reasoning. Instances where priming Israel's own national interest and jeopardizing the US's in the region are countless. Therefore, Israel does not necessarily stand as a "force multiplier" for the US, as Desch argues (1996). In other words, US is not gaining more power from its relationship with Israel. Moreover, the relationship of power, arguably asymmetrical and tipping towards the US, is in reality just the opposite. As US sees its power diminishing in effectuating Israel's ambitions in the region, Israel is the only entity benefitting from endless support and a *laissez-faire* attitude. There is much debate within the realist theorists circle over the concept of power and a clear definition of it, as well as addressing exceptions to the theory which the Israeli lobby and the US-Israeli relationship present. Other theories, such as the pluralist model, can help address this gap.

- National Interest: National interest cannot be separated from the concept of power. Seeking power is interpreted in a series of decisions in a state's foreign policy as a means to preserve power, security, sovereignty as well as military and economic superiority (Morgenthau, 1956). As discussed in regards of compromising the power the US holds in the world, and as both power and national interests are significantly interlinked, the Israeli lobby also threatens the national interests of the US by advancing the national interests of the state of Israel (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2008). The Arab and Muslim worlds have expressed great antagonism towards the US mainly due to its unwavering support to Israel and the latter's occupation of Palestine. How can allowing terrorism addressed at the US be of its national interest? At what costs will the US allow compromising its power and national interests? The Israeli-lobby and its success in influencing the US foreign policy towards the region, and in particular towards the Palestinian issue, puts into question the validity of the realist theory and depiction of the state and the world order. The lobby had succeeded in neutralizing opposing opinions of Israel within the US, emphasizing the two countries interdependence and bringing forth a more nuanced analysis of decision-making in the US, one that takes into account the pluralistic nature of national interest (Sheffer, Hofnung, 1987; Stephens, 2006).

Based on the above, it seems inevitable to include domestic politics factors, primarily the Israeli lobby, in explaining the US foreign policy towards the Middle East and its influence in the US peace deals since 19981. The explanatory model is a blend of realism and a response to the interest of various groups in the US. It aims at opening the black box of the state, as realists portray it, and unpack the inner workings of it to understand the pursuit of some foreign policy decisions.

### ***Pluralist Theory***

The US-Israel relationship moves beyond realist analysis of states' behavior. The foreign policy of the US towards Israel cannot be fully understood with a realist lens. The presence of lobbies within the US and their proven influence on both domestic and foreign politics is a counter-argument to realism's depiction of states as cohesive units. According to Keohane and Nye, the US and Israel hold an interdependent relationship, which is the "opposite of realism" (2012). Moreover, if the realist argument holds through, Israel would be a weak and dependent state in an anarchic international system. However, Israel's position in the international system is elevated through its ability to lobby within the US and subject the latter into unwavering support.

The pluralist model stems from liberal ideology where multiple groups in society are recognized as playing a role in the power dynamics of the state. It stands against realism which puts the state at the center of its theory as a rational actor with unlimited power. It argues that organized groups, such as religious, political and social groups, within the state share the power, which is distributed depending on size and status. The interplay of power dynamics within these groups results in a foreign policy reflective of powerful and operational groups. Valerie Hudson says that foreign policy is a continuation of domestic politics and domestic actors from different segments of government have an influence on it (2008). The international stage, often depicted as a chess game, is in fact a "dual nested game" as per Christopher Hill (2003). In other words, there is an interplay between the domestic level politics and the international level where the former is bound to influence the latter. Even Henry Kissinger, a renowned realist, argues that risks in foreign policy are directly correlated with domestic stability (1969).

Realists grapple to make their case, often arguing that the US-Israel relationship is merely an exception to the rule (Bosely, 2008). Waltz for instance argues that shifts in the

international system can present domestic groups with the opportunity to advance a certain political agenda. In other words, the influence of domestic groups is only effective when it aligns with external factors. However, Monshipouri (2002) argues that the US-Israeli relationship is not affected by the international system but the shifting dynamics in domestic politics. As stated before, the unconditional support the US has given its Israeli ally have created a chain of events that altered the international system in ways that are not beneficial to the US. The rise of terrorism and anti-American sentiments are amongst few negative consequences of the US-Israeli alliance, threatening the US presence in the region and its economic interests. Therefore, to be able to explain the continuous support to Israel, realism fails to provide a convincing explanation, whereas the pluralist model through the influence of the Israeli lobby in the US holds a more parsimonious reasoning.

In conclusion, it is clear from the arguments presented above for both realist and pluralist theories of analysis that domestic factors are key in understanding why states make certain alliances at the systemic level. Domestic politics often influence presidents to make choices at the international level to please, or appease, influential groups for a number of reasons. In what concerns this thesis, the argument will be laid out to explain why President Trump, although alienated himself and the US from battles that his predecessor had taken on, such as the Iran Deal and the Paris Agreement, jumped into signing off on the Deal of the Century as a presumably peace plan to put an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The thesis will unpack the Deal of the Century and what it means through the lens of US foreign policy as well as the leading up to the deal from Trump's campaign promises, his election as well as his team of advisors and the influence exerted on them by the Israeli lobby. This thesis will also help to move beyond the short-lived presidency of Donald Trump and view the bigger picture where the Deal of the Century is a continuation of American tradition to play the mediator role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This thesis recognizes the interplay of different domestic factors on the US foreign policy, specifically in relation to the Israel-Palestinian conflict: the partisan ties to different Israeli political parties (Bennis, 2014); the influence of the Jewish lobby on the US Congress (Stephens, 2014; Grim, 2019); the media's influence on US public opinion towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Fowler, 2015; Jackson, 2021); the special relationship between the US and Israel and the political imagery of Israeli with the US (Rynhold, 1998); and the influence of other domestic groups on US' foreign policy towards the conflict (Marsden, 2013). As argued earlier, the size of the influence depends on the status and power of organized political groups operating in the political sphere in the US. In terms of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Jewish lobby is at the center, if not a party, of the conflict. The interplay of these interest groups takes form in different avenues in which they operate in. As the focus of the thesis revolves around six different US administrations and presidents, the domestic factors analyzed are the presidents' ideological orientation, the influence of their Middle East advisors and the power and influence of the Jewish lobby on each administration's foreign policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although the influence of the Jewish lobby has been discussed extensively in regards to its power within the US Congress, this thesis narrows down on its influence on the peace process presented successive US presidents since 1982.

## **1.5 Methodology**

This thesis highlights the role of domestic politics in foreign policy decisions in the US regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, especially the development of US peace plans, by arguing against realist analysis on the subject. In facing-off these two paradigms, the thesis analyzes secondary sources on the subject, including US presidents' statements, FP briefs, and campaign promises. The thesis also looks at president's advisory teams and

borrow from the work of personality psychology to analyze president's leadership and personality traits to complete the triangulation process in order to answer the research questions.

## **1.6 Thesis Contents**

The thesis is divided into four chapters: the first chapter gives a historical background of US peace plans to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The second chapter unpacks the Deal of the Century and understands it from the pluralist model point of view. The third chapter presents the reactions to the Deal of the Century and the possibility of its viability post-Trump. The fourth chapter looks beyond Trump's one term presidency. As president Biden faces his own share of domestic concerns, a preliminary look at the continuation of the Trump's plan on the conflict or a deviation from it is explored.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The History of US Involvement in the Arab Israeli Conflict**

This chapter serves to give a brief historical background of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the onset of the US involvement in the conflict. While the US started a direct interference in 1967, this chapter is concerned about the peace plans presented by US presidents to reach a resolution of the conflict, which started with Ronald Reagan in 1982. A presentation of the successive administrations' plans follows while analyzing the influence of the domestic factors on the decisions made by the relevant president and his advisory team.

#### **2.1 The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is complicated to sum up in digestible snippets, as they most certainly always omit a big chunk of reality and truth each party of the conflict is strongly attached to. It is difficult to pinpoint an approximate date for the beginning of the conflict as well. Whereas Arabs and Palestinians highlight the onset of the conflict in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when European Jewish immigrants started to take residence in historical Palestine - events that led to al-Nakba, or the catastrophe, in 1948 with the declaration of the state of Israel on what they claim is their land. Zionists, and advocates for Israel, however, dismiss the Palestinian narrative and push back the conflict to over two thousand years in time, claiming primacy over the land (Pappé, 2006). These conflicting narratives are further complicated by the religious aspect of the conflict. Pinning the Jewish and Muslim religions' narratives against each other engendered a never-ending discussion of who came first and

who is entitled to the land. The mere discussion sanctifies the land and what it represents, leading to the hardening of positions on both sides. A political solution to the conflict is seen, therefore, as a compromise on what communities hold most sacred and most valuable, justifying why a political solution to the conflict has not been able to resolve the conflict over seven decades later.

A look at the last 100 years does nothing in terms of uncomplicating the story. Following the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, what is commonly known as the Middle East fell under the colonizing powers of France and Great Britain, the latter predominantly present in historical Palestine. The “Balfour Declaration” is often signaled at the crux of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians as it offered the land inhabited by both communities to one community, the Jews, over the others, resulting in a systematic expulsion of the Palestinians from historical Palestine and subsequently the declaration of a Jewish state, Israel. What the declaration did, furthermore, was a legitimization of the nationalistic aspirations of the Zionist movement which saw that the Jewish identity as a national identity and not just a religious identity.

Since then, there has been many efforts to bring peace to the region by resolving a seemingly never-ending conflict. Various peace processes and negotiations have been taking place since at least 1967 to no avail. The main broker of peace since then has been the United States and this chapter will present the onset of US involvement and the various peace plans presented or adopted solely by US presidents (Quandt, 1993).

## **2.2 1967: The US Involvement**

The US involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is often portrayed to have started in 1967, after the defeat of the Syrian and Egyptian army in a joint military action against Israel to reclaim occupied Palestinian territories. However, the legitimacy of the state

of Israel needed to be solidified in the United Nations and backed by the US, the rising superpower post-WWII. The recognition of the state of Israel by the US in the UN is often pinpointed as the first successful lobbying in the US by Jewish organizations at the time. As Mearsheimer and Waltz argue, this tradition will continue for a long time, casting a shadow of doubt on the “patron-client” relationship between a superpower and nascent state as realists would like to portray it (2008). Already in 1948, US officials were voicing concerns about the entanglement of the US interests with that of the Jewish lobby and the Zionist movement’s expansionist plan in the Middle East (Elgindy, 2020).

Equally importantly, all the talk of peace processes and the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the US has a record of unwavering support to the state of Israel in terms of military, economic and diplomatic aid. The US holds the record of vetoing, and abstaining once, every single resolution that tried to condemn the use of violence by Israel, even allegations of human rights violations, the building of settlements in the West Bank, and any attempt of the Palestinian Authority to get international recognition of a Palestinian state.

The period between 1948 until 1967 did not witness any effort to resolve the conflict. As Illan Pappé documents, Palestinians and Arabs fought back against the organized Zionist movement prior to the declaration of the state of Israel in 1948 (Pappé, 2006). However, the crackdown by the Zionist legions on native Palestinian factions and Arab volunteers was more successful, resulting in the annihilation of all military opposition, and an early expansion of the state of Israel well beyond the UN partition plan of 1948 towards the western part of Jerusalem, swaths of land in the West Bank and Gaza reaching the Egyptian border. The war in 1967 was yet another defeat to the Arab countries, presenting another opportunity for expansion and further land grab, often explained as buffer zones to guarantee Israel’s security in the face of future Arab wars. The 1967 war ended with Israel occupying

the Golan Heights in Syria, the West Bank from Jordan, and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt (Oren, 2017).

1967 marked different turning points at different levels. Diplomatically, the 1967 war and the threat it posed on Israel's security resulted in a direct involvement of the US in the conflict. The US involvement was justified on realist and strategic reasoning as the Americans felt their national interests and power threatened by allies of the USSR in the region, Syria and Egypt. The mini proxy war alerted the Americans and resulted in their direct interference in the war in favor of Israel on one hand, and their realization that it is necessary for the Americans to broker the peace between the Israelis and the Arabs to guarantee the security of their long-standing friend and ally and, subsequently, their own interests in the region. Aaron Miller, a diplomat who worked under several US presidents for over 25 years on the Israeli-Palestinian issue, argues that the UNSC resolution 242 marked the first public instance where the US interfered directly in the conflict. In order to accomplish their objective of preserving Israel's security, the US adopted the English version of the resolution over the French, creating a controversy based on mere semantics, and insisting that Israel is not required to retire from newly occupied territories (Miller, 2008). Ever since then, all peace processes that were put forth acknowledge the 1967 borders as the official delineation lines between the state of Israel and a possible state for the Palestinians (Oren, 2017; United Nations, 1967).

After a second defeat for the Arab armies by the Israelis in 1973, marking yet another failed attempt at liberating the land, and the direct interference of the US in the conflict, Arab countries, mainly Egypt and Jordan, opted for bilateral talks with Israel reaching separately peace deals in 1979 and 1994 respectively. Losing the support of major Arab countries, the Palestinians were further alienated from peace talks until the early 1990s and their cause left for future negotiations that never happened in the deals with both Egypt and Jordan. With the

peace accords between Israel and Egypt, a breakthrough in American diplomacy has been set in stone: the “land-for-peace” motto was an optimistic way to broker peace in the Middle East with the mediation of the US. Following the bilateral talks with Arab countries and the sidelining of the Palestinians, especially the PLO, the latter’s position became weaker with fewer Arab support. It was then the US started the negotiations with the Palestinians (Rynhold, 2008).

This study zooms in on the US involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, unpacking the role of domestic forces in framing US foreign policy towards Israel, the Palestinians and Arab countries. It will attempt at challenging the realist theory, presenting arguments against its explanation of foreign policy towards the Middle East, and the conflict at hand specifically. The US has been since accused of going against its own interests to protect Israel and preserve their “special relationship”. This has often been done at the cost of alliances with influential Arab countries, and, therefore, resulting in Arab resentment towards the US and mistrust of its policies, in particular when it comes to the question of Palestine and the various peace processes (Chomsky, 1999). Miller, despite his role in different US administrations, echoed the Arab concerns:

“In May 2005 I wrote an op-ed in the Washington Post that got me into a lot of trouble. The article, entitled “Israel’s Lawyer,” made what I thought was an irrefutable point: if you wanted to succeed in Arab-Israeli peacemaking, you must be an advocate for both sides. Far too often the small group with whom I had worked in the Clinton administration, myself included, had acted as a lawyer for only one side, Israel.” (p. 75).

Miller indeed worked under different administrations and his reference to the Clinton administration could very well apply to others, as this chapter will discuss. The one-sidedness of the US is further discussed by Richard Falk who stated:

“The agreements that have been negotiated so far reflect the inequality between Israel and the Palestinians. The agreements do not lead anywhere near the attainment of self-determination that needs to be satisfied if the Palestinian national question is to be resolved successfully. Indeed, the present inequalities of the agreements are encouraging the very thing the U.S. government says it doesn't want; that is, the one-sidedness of the peace process ... Having just returned from Gaza, I can report with confidence that this is an existential reality, not idle speculation. A potentially very explosive situation is taking shape. The U.S. government, which has such great leverage in relation to Israel on these issues, has been extremely passive.” ((Riedel, Quandt, Folk, & Mattair, 1994, p.11)

Different American administrations have attempted to negotiate a resolution to the conflict between Israel, the Palestinians and influential Arab countries. This chapter focuses on retracing in chronological order of the main peace plans which were backed by five different US presidents since 1982 till 2016, highlighting the historical context at the time and the role the US played in the development and implementation of each plan. This chapter argues that although realism best predicts the foreign policy decisions of different US administrations, in terms of preserving national interests and augmenting power, it nevertheless offers an array of decisions. The final decision on a specific course of action boils down to domestic factors, partisan dynamics, US president's team of advisor, and the president's own leadership style and personal concerns (Quandt, 1977).

## **2.3 1982-2016: The Peace Processes**

### ***2.3.1 Reagan's Plan***

Ronald Reagan took office in 1981 two years after the Egyptian side, a previously central party in the Arab-Israeli conflict, had normalized its relationship with the state of

Israel. After years of sidelining the PLO, then the biggest representative party of the Palestinians inside the occupied territories and the Palestinian refugees in Arab and neighboring countries, the American administration under Reagan was the first to present a peace plan to the Israeli-Palestinian and the first to address Palestinian self-determination, albeit within a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation, and revisiting of the 1967 borders. Even with the proposed plan, the new Reagan administration was still banking on what Carter was able to achieve a few years back. Just as Carter convinced the Egyptian leadership back then to abandon the USSR and align with the US, and thus Israel, the Reagan administration was focusing its efforts on Syria, naturally followed by Lebanon, and Jordan. These efforts were predominantly explained by realist and geopolitical logic: the US was targeting the Soviets' long-term friends in the region and Reagan's interest in the Middle East was primarily viewed in that lens (Quandt, 1986). Although the geopolitical environment at that time, in the last decade on the Cold War, was parsimoniously explained by the realist theory, the administration's stance towards the Palestinian question per se, the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian question, the gist of the peace process, as well as the administration's varying behavior towards the Israelis and the Arabs, cannot be solely explained by realism. The influence of the Jewish lobby in the US at that time, and the perceived independence of the Israeli government's military actions from its patron state, should be analyzed present a comprehensive view of how these peace processes came to be.

The Reagan plan, as a stand-alone initiative, was short-lived, marking the only instance where the president addressed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It was then followed by a series of aborted mid-level plans, or Arab-initiated plans with no real effect on the status quo in the region. The Reagan plan, however, managed to do two things: a) challenge the realist understanding of the US-Israeli relationship as "patron-client" relationship; b) cement a "special US-Israel relationship" and separate it from the peace processes. Even though the

Reagan plan received lukewarm Arab acceptance, it was immediately rejected by the Israeli government under Begin. The US' interests to counterbalance the Soviet influence in the Arab region, primarily in Syria and with the PLO factions, by presenting a deadlock to the Israeli-Arab conflict was circumvented by its ally, Israel. The latter prioritized its own policy of annihilating the PLO in the West and Gaza, by further occupation and subjugation, and invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Israel's unilateral actions in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq in the early 1980s put the US in an awkward position as a mediator of peace in the region. The US interests were therefore undermined at the expense of Israeli policies. The "patron-client" relationship was also put into question: can the US reign in its closest ally in the region? The relationship underpinned by realism therefore fails to accurately portray the "special relationship" on the ground. Israel was given a laissez-faire greenlight to do and implement its own policies in the region, even at the detriment of the American image.

The free pass, however, would not be possible had there not been strong proponents to the state of Israel within the American administration and political sphere. An already established and organized Jewish lobby was in full force able to swing US politics towards Israel's favor. Friends of Israel in the US Congress were able to push the Reagan administration to move forward with a memorandum of understanding between the two allies after a short spat over the occupation of the Golan Heights. Furthermore, Israel was able to enjoy additional and unconditional military aid from the US despite further expansion and settlements in the occupied territories, and onto neighboring countries, as well as atrocious human rights violations in Lebanon in the early 1980s (Golan, 1989). The Reagan plan set the precedent for the US administrations to turn a blind eye on Israel and continue with business as usual on one hand, and present itself as a peace mediator in the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict on the other hand.

### ***2.3.2 George H W Bush and the Madrid Conference***

By the time George Bush H.W. became president, the Cold War was nearing its end. With a weaker and divided Russia, the US was preparing to enter a new unipolar world order. The Middle East was (still) in turmoil and the Americans found themselves a new headache with Iraq and Saddam Hussein. In the occupied territories, the first intifada was already in full force. The US, and Israel, had the PLO in the corner, condemning it for sponsoring terrorism and stirring violence following the events of the first Intifada. The relationship between the Americans and the PLO had also taken an even worse turn after PLO leader Yasser Arafat supported Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and his threats to target the US's ally, Israel. Following the events in Iraq, Bush H.W. turned his eye on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and, alongside USSR president Gorbachev, called for a peace conference in Madrid, notably without the PLO. The conference itself did not meet its objectives but it was a significant turning point in the peace process. The Madrid Conference is considered the onset of the negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Despite the absence of the PLO from the actual conference, the Palestinians who have been sidelined from all US initiatives to resolve the conflict so far, wanted a seat at the negotiating table. Arafat was willing to relinquish the PLO's longstanding stance on several key issues, such as the return to pre-1967 borders and the right to return for Palestinian refugees, and trust the US to mediate the Israeli-Palestinian bilateral talks. The negotiations culminated in the signing of the Declaration of Principles in Washington during the administration of President Clinton in 1993. The Conference also led to direct bilateral negotiations between the Israelis and the Kingdom of Jordan resulting in the signing of a peace agreement in 1994.

Even when the geopolitical environment shifted towards US's favor under H.W. Bush, the "special relationship" between the US and Israel was very much the same as during the Reagan administration. The patron-client state was very much challenged when the world's leading and sole superpower required Israel's approval of an international conference

for the resolution of the Israeli-Arab conflict in Madrid and it had to occur on the Israelis' terms. The Madrid conference was required by then Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir to be a neutral space for all parties to meet, without the interference of the UN, a historical arena for Palestinians to plead their case against the Israeli occupation (Quandt, 1993). The US policies towards the region under Bush H.W. were, therefore, very much influenced, if not dictated, by the people governing the state of Israel and the Jewish lobby inside the US. Observers of the US peace processes have noticed the growing number of Zionist and Israel sympathizers hired during the administration of Bush H.W. Now familiar names such as Dennis Ross, Aaron Miller and Daniel Kurtzer, amongst others, were all hired as Middle Eastern advisors and kept working under several administrations since then (Beilin, 1999). Bush H.W. and then Secretary of State James Baker attempted to orbit away from the entanglements of the Jewish lobby and domestic politics, trying to force a more realist foreign policy towards the region and Israel, which would see its special status diminished following the end of the Cold War and the loss of its strategic role in the US-USSR rivalry (Waxman, 2012). Their strategy proved futile with Shamir, a right-wing politician, costing him the elections to Labor party candidate Yitzhak Rabin, who would proceed to talk with the PLO and sign the Declaration of Principles under President Clinton.

### ***2.3.3 Clinton and the Oslo Accords***

Bill Clinton's presidency followed the multilateral efforts, and failures, of the Madrid's conference, but it succeeded to ride the wave of emerging bilateral talks between the Palestinians, primarily the PLO, and the state of Israel, and the latter with the Kingdom of Jordan.

The one-term presidency of Bush H.W. alerted the Democratic Party that Republican politicians were paying attention to a crucial electoral lesson, one that the Democratic Party was solely privy to: the importance of the organized Jewish voters, who more often than not

lean towards candidates who support a pro-Israel policy. Following Bush Sr's presidency, more republican politicians and members of Congress became increasingly aware of what the Democratic Party had already been practicing and following for a while. It is crucial to present an electoral campaign and platform which will please Jewish voters as they were perceived as organized groups who would rally around a candidate, and are effective in steering elections in favor of the candidate with an agenda that is most likely to reinforce the special relationship between the US And Israel and even favor Israel's interests (Chomsky, 1999). Moreover, Republican politicians understood the strong link between their Israeli policy and the voting behavior of right Christian groups, which, on ideological and religious basis, viewed the state of Israel as a manifestation of their theological beliefs. For the Democratic Party, this resulted in an even stronger commitment and rapprochement between its candidates, and their electoral platforms, and the various Jewish political groups and the organized Jewish lobby. With Clinton, the US-Israeli relationship shifted, again, from strategy to what is more political and calculating in terms of partisan competition on internal resources. In other terms, the alliance with Israel is no longer based on strategic, rational, and realist logic, as it was with Reagan and H.W. Bush, both republican presidents. It was with Clinton, however, based on a more calculated basis to serve domestic interests. The retaining of votes from organized Israeli lobbies and engaged Jewish communities became a primary concern to the Clinton's administration.

The Clinton administration had to also tailor its policy towards the conflict, its stance towards Israel and its questionable behavior in the occupied territories, depending on who's in power in Israel. Clinton had to appear firm on his Israeli policy, soft, to appease the Arab countries and oil-rich Gulf allies, but not too firm, to maintain a strong alliance with Israel, preserve the "special relationship" status to appease the Jewish lobby and tame his adversaries. Therefore, having a labor leader in Israel meant that the US could mediate a

solution to the conflict that won't meet an immediate rejection from the Palestinians (or Arabs); whereas a Likud government meant a total refusal and rebuttal of any deal that would require Israel to define its geographical boundaries and withdrawal from occupied territories. The Clinton administration had to deal with three successive Israeli governments and had to change its tone, even concede to the Israeli point of view at different instances. A closer look at the Oslo Accords for instance illustrates this idea. The Accords went through three phases, each designated with a different Israeli government.

- The first phase with Clinton, Arafat and Rabin heading the American administration, the PLO and the Israeli government respectively. The US picked up the pace after the Madrid conference and engagement as the mediator of the bilateral talks between the Israelis and the PLO. The talks reached a first breakthrough when the Declaration of Principles were signed in 1993, often considered as a victory of American diplomacy, a win for Clinton who was able to achieve what his predecessors failed to do, and a win for Arafat, who was a strong believer of the American diplomacy efforts to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and considered this is the best deal he is going to get from the Israelis. Rabin held a flexible stance on the establishment of a Palestinian state and the Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories after 1967. The US hoped that with someone like Rabin as the head of the government in Israel, they would be able to pursue business as usual with the Israelis, appease the Jewish lobby domestically and extend diplomatic ties and arms sales to Arab countries. The only problem lied with the Israeli side, as strong opposition faced the government of Rabin, which eventually led to his assassination by a right-wing Israeli.

- With Rabin's assassination starts the second phase of the Oslo Accords, as the Likud party, and Benjamin Netanyahu, win the election in 1996. For the Likud party, a withdrawal from the West Bank is not negotiable and Netanyahu refused a 13% withdrawal proposition by then secretary of state Madeline Albright. The latter was forced by the Jewish lobby in the US to backtrack and soften its stance towards the state of Israel under Netanyahu, often considered as American capitulation towards a less powerful client state. Netanyahu seemed more powerful than the Secretary of State as he gained the support of Republicans in Congress, a gain banked since the Bush administration, the Jewish lobby and the Christian right wing (Freedman, 2012).
- The Oslo Accords would not have reached its culmination in 2000 on the White House lawn, the third and final phase, had Netanyahu won the 1999 election against Ehud Barak, from the Labor party. It was the Israeli government and its affiliate pressure groups inside the US which were dictating the course of the talks and the resolution of the conflict.

Despite the famous handshake and the signing of the Camp David agreement in 2000, the solution of the conflict remained elusive at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century following the Barak in the elections, the end of Clinton's second term, and the stirring up of the second intifada in the occupied territories as Arafat finds himself facing an angry Palestinian, and Arab, street.

What remained true, however, is that the relationship between the US and the state of Israel have grown to become even more special and the power of domestic politics in the US was all geared to keep it that way. Perhaps the most descriptive way to designate this relationship came from Vice President Al Gore who said in 1998: "Our special relationship with Israel is unshakable it is ironclad, eternal and absolute. It does not depend on the peace process, it transcends the peace process." This dogmatic approach to states relationships

throws reason and logic out the window, leaving little room for a realistic explanation of this “special” and “unshakable” bond. The US foreign policy towards Israel therefore cannot be explained by the realist model, which fails to present a convincing argument of how the US is acting as a rational state aiming to preserve its power and national interests. The realist model also fails to present a parsimonious explanation of foreign policy for the mere fact that these foreign policy decisions are not replicated elsewhere in the world towards other allies of the US. If the US is not setting its foreign policy based on rational calculations of power maximization and national interests’ preservation, then who is drawing its foreign policy and especially its irrevocable relationship with Israel? Going back to Miller, the foreign policy of the US towards the conflict is set by “Israel’s lawyers.” During the Clinton administration, and other administrations since Reagan, a group of mid-level advisors were in charge of coming up with a Middle East policy and consequently a US stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Miller, a Jew and Zionist sympathizer was amongst them, including Sam Lewis and Martin Indyk, and they all served under different administrations. Baker used to call them the peace processors, like food processors, mixing geopolitical, and domestic ingredients to whip a new policy towards the Middle East and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is not far-fetched to imagine a skewed foreign policy towards the interests of the state of Israel. According to a Washington Post article, Arabs reported feeling as if they are negotiating with “five Zionist Jews”, referring to the mid-level team mentioned earlier as well as Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and Defense Secretary William Cohen, and special Middle East coordinator Denis Ross. (Miller, 2008).

The Oslo Accords were nothing short of historical and a testament of American diplomacy, no matter where observers stand on the conflict spectrum. Indeed, the Declaration of Principles gathered extreme negative reactions from both the Israelis and the Palestinians and even resulting in the assassination of Rabin by right-wing Israelis. Nevertheless, the US

was able to “help deliver what God, the British, and the United Nations couldn’t” (Miller, 2008, p. 4). It succeeded in making both conflicting parties to the negotiations table and recognize each other. However, in what concerns Israel and the Palestinians, the gains were minimal. In form, the Oslo Accords do not bring anything new to the table. As stated earlier, the iteration of different peace plans by successive US administrations were a reformulation of the original Allon Plan in 1967 drafted after the Six-Day war. The Accords required from Israel to withdraw to the pre-1967 borders which will be under the administrative powers of an elected Palestinian Authority. During a five-year interim period, the Israelis and the Palestinians were required to continue a series of negotiations on the admittedly difficult issues, such as the status of Jerusalem, the right for return for Palestinian refugees, settlements and most importantly the issue of cooperation between Israel and the PA regarding security, the borders and the relationships with Arab neighbors. Even when the Americans were applauding their diplomacy, these presumed negotiations never saw the light, and the cycle of violence continued (Rynhold, 2008).

#### ***2.3.4 Bush W.’s Roadmap to Peace***

In contrast to his predecessor, George W. Bush’s presidency was not interested in meddling in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or attempted to do so quite late in the game at the end of the president’s first term presidency (Christison, 2004). After the events of 9/11, the administration Bush W. held one single mantra to define its Middle East policy: war on terror. This defined how the administration viewed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well, adding another layer to the US narrative of the conflict, often one-sided and biased towards Israel. The conflict’s root cause is no longer about occupation, 1948 or 1967, but rather centered around terrorism, and specifically Palestinian terrorism, and, furthermore, serving the Israeli narrative of the need to safeguard the security of the state of Israel at all costs. The rise of Islamic terrorism presented to the “special relationship” between US and Israel what

the demise of the USSR took away: a common enemy. Bush W.'s Middle East policy was identical to that of Israel and Kathleen Christison's recently published article attempts to unpack the reason behind this fact. She states that Bush W. lacked knowledge on the region and the workings of its affairs, and had developed a fraternal affinity to Ariel Sharon, then the Israeli Prime Minister. As the first Republican president since his father, who managed to put pressure on Israel and establish a more realist and strategic rapport with a presumably client state, Bush W. was facing a different reality within the Republican party who became increasingly dependent on right-wing Christian votes, and had understood the advantage of Democratic candidates in appealing to organized Jewish voters during elections. From both sides of the US political spectrum, it was expected for politicians to present a pro-Israel stance to rally around them committed voters and sway elections in their favor (Reinhard, 2006).

A year into the invasion of Iraq, Bush W. turned his eyes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The EU, Russia, UN and the US developed the Roadmap to Peace in 2003, the gist of it not quite different all previous peace plans, with more Palestinian concessions and Israeli gains. The Palestinians were quick to understand this fact especially when Bush W.'s position was ambiguous towards the return to pre-1967 borders. The US seemed to be allowing further annexation of Palestinian land, a major step back from the administration's push towards withdrawal to pre-1967 borders in 2002. Sharon and pro-Israeli domestic groups, including high profile members of the Congress, rallied against the president for making such a claim. Demonstrations took place in Washington to pressure the president to walk back on his comments. The Quartet's Roadmap to Peace was, therefore, doomed to fail due to domestic pressure and influence on American foreign policy.

The second intifada and the Iraq war damaged how Arab perceived the US in terms of mediator or leading superpower. According to Miller, even if Clinton's Camp David had

prospects in ensuring a legacy of peace in the region, it was quickly tarnished by 2004 (2008). President Obama understood that he needed a new strategy altogether for the Middle East and for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular.

### ***2.3.5 Obama and Kerry's Six Principles***

President Barack Obama ran on an election campaign that departed significantly from his predecessor. In what concerns the Middle East, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict specifically, Obama seemed to be immune to the influence of the Jewish lobby and his relationship with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu was tense, with observers going as far as accusing the American president of attempting to topple the Prime Minister in Israel after the former's speech in Cairo (Rubin, 2019). Obama tried to steer the relationship with Israel from its "special" status to a more strategic, "normal", relationship. He did manage to get an immediate response from Netanyahu on his Cairo address, which Israeli observers considered as capitulation on Israel's, or the right wing in Israel per say, longstanding stance on a Palestinian state. But as soon as Netanyahu alluded to the possibility of a Palestinian state, new Israeli demands on the nature and look of the state started to manifest. Netanyahu's objectives were to: establish a demilitarized Palestinian state, declare Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, allow Israel to exercise its right in building new settlements, and deny all claims of right to return for Palestinian refugees. All these conditions would be impossible for the US administration to sell for the Palestinians and, therefore, any possibility of peace under Obama would disappear.

It is important to note that Obama's policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict did not defer drastically from those who came before him. He was still for a two-state solution for the conflict, but he did take a strong stance regarding the continuous building of new Israeli settlements, noting the need to preserve the pre-1967 borders. Early on in his presidency, Obama started facing pressure from Congress and pro-Israel groups. A quid pro

quo was expected from Obama: he was asked to change his Israel policy in return of Congress passing his health bill (2010). Obama had to back down from his criticism to Israel and opted for the return of negotiations. His administration was still, like previous ones, a staunch supporter of Israel in the UN, blocking all measures taken by Palestinian leadership for a Palestinian state recognition. During his time as president, it was also noted that Israel received \$38 billion, the largest grant ever given to a single state.

What distinguished Obama from all previous administrations, since Reagan, was the fact that the president was not directly involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in the sense that he did not himself present a plan, or was part of a multilateral efforts, or moved forward personally with the negotiations like Reagan, the two Bush presidents, and Clinton respectively. Obama's elections guaranteed a strong base at home and a somewhat secure feeling domestically in his first term. He was more concerned with Iraq and Iran than with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict where others before him had drastically failed. The aforementioned tense relationship at home and in Israel with the Zionist movement made him appoint in 2009 George Mitchell, as the chief US Middle East peace mediator, to move forward with this matter. Mitchell's resignation two years later was indicative that the conflict, especially with the start of the Arab Spring, was not on Obama's top agenda. In his second term, Obama was still pursuing a nuclear deal with Iran, and even with then Secretary of State John Kerry presenting his Six-Principles for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the weight of the administration, and that of the president, was not supporting this initiative which quickly fell apart after the resumption of violence in Gaza in 2014 following a renewed Israeli aggression (Ali, 2012; Ruebner, 2014).

At the end of his second term, and with a new Republican presidency looming in under Donald Trump, and despite the failure of his administration to make a dent towards peace for the Israelis and Palestinians, Obama's last piece de resistance was abstaining from

voting in the Security Council on a resolution to prevent further Israeli settlements (Elgindy, 2020).

## **2.4 Conclusion**

Almost four decades after Reagan, the US administration under President Trump attempts its luck again with a new peace plan, the “2020 Peace to Prosperity” plan, better known as the “Deal of The Century”. The next chapter will take a deep dive on Trump’s plan, compare it to the old plans presented in this chapter, and examine the influence of domestic factors on the making of such a plan.

## **Chapter Three**

### **The Deal of the Century: The End of the Two-States Solution?**

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the Deal of the Century and summarizes the key points in the political and economic frameworks in the plan. As the Deal of the Century marks a shift in the US foreign policy towards the conflict, a comparison with previous plans is also discussed. Finally, the chapter unpacks the underlying domestic factors that led to the announcement of Deal of the Century, which sidelines the Palestinians and clearly benefits the state of Israel.

#### **3.1 The Deal of the Century**

In a New Yorker article published in June 2018 titled “How the President, Israel, and the Gulf states plan to fight Iran – and leave the Palestinians and the Obama years behind,” author Adam Entous unpacks, in thorough detail, the Trump administration’s policy towards the Middle East (Entous, 2018). According to Entous, Trump’s policy is a clear departure from that of the Obama administration. First it aims at forming new regional alliances and drawing yet another novel map for the Middle East. Second, the Palestinians, the Palestine question, and even the Deal of the Century - yet unveiled by the time of publication of the article – are all means to an end in the fight against Iran. It might seem then that the underlying explanation of the Trump administration’s policies in the Middle East can be understood by the realist theory as logical and calculated moves to increase American power and preserve national interests against the rise of Iranian influence in the region. But

as Entous, and many other observers and critics of the Trump’s administration, this could not be farther from the truth. This chapter will unpack through the lens of the Deal of the Century – more formally known as the “Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People” (White House, 2020) – how domestic factors, and the president’s leadership style as well as his team of Middle East advisors helped in shaping a new American-brokered peace plan for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As was highlighted in the previous chapter, the Obama-Netanyahu relationship was at best tense. According to a policy advisor who worked under Obama, Netanyahu was eager for the 2016 elections, no matter who would win: Trump for the Republican party or former Secretary of State under Obama, Hilary Clinton for the Democratic Party. The Israelis were already creating channels of communication with the two candidates before the November 2016 elections – and it was already clear then who would deliver better outcomes for Israel and preserve its aspirations and interests. When Trump was elected the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the US, and until the announcement of the Deal of the Century during the last year of his presidency, the president had taken a series of steps that were a clear indication as to why he was indeed “Israel’s best friend in the White House” (Trump, 2019). Trump’s policies towards the Middle East made it blaringly clear to the Palestinians that whichever iteration of a peace plan under Trump would most certainly serve Israel’s interests first, at their own expense.

Prior to the Deal of the Century, the Trump administration had already been paving the way to the announcement by taking a series of measures as well as approving decrees that were biased towards the state of Israel, and were specifically in line with Israel’s right-wing policies of further annexation of Palestinian territories and expansion of the state of Israel (Crowley & Halbfinger, 2020). For starters, the Trump administration recognized Jerusalem as the capital of the state of Israel and signed a decree to relocate the American embassy from

Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The Trump administration also worked towards silencing opposing views on Israel inside the US, working at crushing Palestinians' advocacy and activism campaigns within American educational institutions (Risha, 2020). Furthermore, the US State Department omitted for the first time the term "occupied" when referring to the West Bank, legitimizing Israel's military presence in the area and making way to building even more settlements in the Occupied Territories (Cook, 2018). This also allowed Netanyahu to doubt claims by the international community, which, based on international law, questions the legality of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank. During the announcement of the Deal of the Century, Netanyahu publicly proclaimed, in double negatives, that "[the Israeli settlements] are not illegal" (Hawari, 2020), a statement that was also echoed by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo during a conference to a right-wing Israeli group. Pompeo was quoted saying: "We're recognizing that these settlements don't violate international law," contrary to a 1978 memorandum by the then State Department (Zonszein, 2020).

Not only did the US administration under Trump unquestionably err on the side of Israel's right-wing party, but it also went further by sabotaging an already fragile image of the US as a mediator to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, sanctioning millions of Palestinians to further misery and humiliation. The Trump administration ordered the PLO to close its office in Washington, and approved its designation as a terrorist organization. It also worked at sanctioning the work of the BDS movement in the US, attempting to pass a law forbidding calls for boycott of the state of Israel. In what directly impacts the lives of Palestinians, the US ended its direct funding to US organizations operating in the Occupied Territories as well as cutting all aid to the UNRWA, in order to pressure Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank and the Palestinians refugees to forego their demands of a two-state solution, their right to return, forcing them to accept any deal which will be given to them (Risha, 2020).

The Deal of the Century was presented in two parts: first, the economic framework was presented at a time when the US administration was trying to rally Arab, and more specifically Gulf support to the deal. A global meeting was planned in Bahrain in June 2019, which was later then subdued to a mere “workshop” as both the US and the Gulf regimes sensed a backlash to the Trump administration, his Israeli-biased policies towards the region, and the deal itself, even prior to its announcement in full. The political framework of the deal was later announced on January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020 at the White House by Trump and Netanyahu, with an attendance from US and Israeli politician and a representation of Jewish interest groups. Remarkably absent from the announcement is any representative body of the PLO, the Palestinians or Arab states, except for the Bahraini and Emirati ambassadors to the US. According to Zaha Hassan: “No Palestinians were needed, since the Deal of the Century is, in effect, a memorandum of understanding between the US and Israel over how much Palestinian territory to annex” (Hassan, 2020). The announcement also failed to include major global powers, such as the EU and Russia, traditional partners in peace processes, as well as other US domestic powers, such as representatives from the Democratic Party, or former Middle East and peace process advisors. Except for some few Arab client states, and domestic Jewish organizations, the Deal of the Century was not applauded in the international arena as it was in the White House during the announcement (Deutsche Welle, 2020). In what follows, a deep-dive into the Deal of the Century is presented in details, unpacking both the economic and political frameworks.

### ***3.1.1 Political Framework***

The political framework addresses key issues characterizing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict such as the issue of Jerusalem, refugees and borders – topics which were previously left out to the negotiation phase between the two parties and not discussed at the onset of

former peace plans. What follows will list and summarize the key political components of the Deal of the Century:

- Jerusalem: The Deal of the Century builds on the Trump administration's decision to recognize all of Jerusalem, undivided, as the capital of the state of Israel, while the capital of the supposed state of Palestine will be the adjacent areas on the west and east of Jerusalem, which may be renamed as al-Quds. The plan also stipulates that the barriers between the West Bank and Jerusalem, and also between the future Palestinian capital and Jerusalem, must stay in place to guarantee the safety and security of the Holy City.
- Refugees/Right to Return: The Deal of the Century attempts to equate between the Palestinian refugees and Jewish refugees and holds the Arab host countries accountable for not integrating the Palestinians into their countries as Israel did with the Arab Jews. The plan does not include any mention of US resolution 194, attempting to omit all claims of right to return, or compensation.
- Borders: The borders of a future state of Palestinian would be under the control and supervision of the state of Israel. The construction of the wall will be continued to delineate the new borders. Checkpoints between the two states will still be in place but the soldiers will be in civilian uniforms instead of military ones. The borders of Israel will expand towards over 75% of the West Bank, diminishing the size of a viable state for the Palestinians. Israel would completely encircle the Palestinian state, giving it access to the Jordan valley, the Mediterranean sea and all neighboring countries.
- Sovereignty and statehood: Israel has full authority over the sovereignty and security of the Palestinian state, which will be fully demilitarized. All access, imports, exports will be controlled by Israel. There will no airport for the state of Palestine, and a port in Gaza is only conceivable in case of "good behavior". The state of Palestine will be completely dependent economically on Israel, rendering the BDS movement, or anti-Israeli initiative,

an impossible option. Israel withholds the right to intervene in every way possible in the internal affairs of the Palestinian state if it deems it in the interest of its national interests.

- Demographic transfer: While the Deal of the Century claims that there will be no demographic transfer, it contradicts itself by suggesting the transfer of the Palestinians from the Triangle – a group of 1948 Arab towns at the pre-1967 borders – to the new Palestinian state and taking away their Israeli citizenship which they acquired since the Nakba in 1948. There is also the possibility to transfer the Palestinian residents of Negev to the industrial and agricultural zones which will be created at the borders with Egypt, which will be part of a Palestinians state loosely connected to Gaza via Israeli controlled roads. There would not be any Jewish demographic transfer as the state of Israel will expand its sovereignty towards illegal settlements in the West Bank, as per the plan.
- Gaza: The Deal of the Century affirms that the US and Israel will not negotiate with terrorist organizations such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad. A unified Palestinian government needs to renounce all forms of violence against the state of Israel. Demilitarization of Gaza and disarmament of political factions there are the conditions for peace stipulated by the state of Israel.
- Arab-Israeli Relations: Normalization of relations between Arab states and Israel, under US and Israeli terms and conditions, is an objective of the Deal of the Century. Already the Trump administration managed to materialize agreements between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain, with a couple of other Gulf and Arab African states waiting their turn. The plan argues that by doing so Arab countries, and Israel, can face together the threat of Islamic terrorism and Iran.

In sum, the Deal of the Century presents the Palestinians with demilitarized islands of territories within a more expanded Israeli state, connected together with tunnels and roads controlled by the Israeli military. The plan aims at relieving the state of Israel from the

Palestinians and the accompanying “demographic problem”, creating more open prisons, à la Gaza, completely surrounded by Israel. In exchange of a fake sense of nationhood, the Palestinians are asked to forego their rights, their dignity and any claims of sovereignty or even ownership of, and independence over the state they are given (Badil, 2020).

### ***3.1.2 Economic Framework***

The formal title of the Deal of The Century “Peace to Prosperity” already gives an indication as to what the deal is all about. In exchange of Palestinian good behavior – and good behavior is determined and dictated by the state of Israel – the US will allow funneling of aid and investment money into a so-called Palestinian state. The seeds of this idea were planted during the conference in Bahrain in order to get a sense of possible outcomes and responses from Arab regimes and Arab streets towards the Deal of the Century. The key question that the Trump administration had most certainly needed an answer to before announcing the Deal of the Century: Would the Arabs and the Palestinians accept a bad deal in exchange of \$50 billion in investments? This is the essence of the economic framework presented by the Trump administration. Unpacking the economic part of the Deal of the Century, it does not come as a surprise to understand that Trump, an infamous businessman, was behind the deal. The business focus and corporate lingo of the economic framework attempt to sugarcoat a biased deal with Dubai-like construction projects that will lead to development and prosperity. It is astonishing to believe that at the top of the most powerful country in the world, a group of advisors thought it is a good idea to present a resolution to one of the most intractable conflicts in the world by adopting a real-estate mindset of businessmen in Manhattan. During an interview with the CNN, Jared Kushner, the “mastermind” behind the Deal of the Century, and the son in law of President Trump, didn’t shy away from comparing the Deal of the Century to a “business plan” for the region –

emphasizing his lack of sensibility and knowledge of the intricacies of the Israeli-Palestinians conflict (Kushner, 2020).

The economic framework lists several objectives to lure in Palestinian, and Arab acceptance. On top of numerous billion-dollar investments, the Deal of the Century promises the creation of 1 million jobs for the Palestinians, a reduction of poverty by 50% and the doubling of the GDP. The plan is based on a liberal economic model: it proposes the creation of free trade zones, boosting of the tourism sector, and increasing the role of the private sector. The plan also conditions all of these investments and the building of a port in Gaza to the good behavior of the Palestinians – and until then all the import/export to and from the Palestinian territories will be controlled by Israel. The plan fails to mention the economic return for Israel as it controls all the borders and the import and export gateways to the supposed Palestinian state and will have a free reign on the Palestinian market. It appears to be that even when the Palestinians are promised billions in investment, the main beneficiary of the economic part of the Deal of the Century remains to be the state of Israel.

A presentation of an economic plan, dangling investment, job opportunities and economic growth for Palestinians who had been living under occupation serves two purposes: a) further humiliation of Palestinian people who would never accept such a deal, painting them once again as rejectionists and obstructors of peace; b) absolving the Israeli state of any responsibility of the miseries and deteriorating life conditions the Palestinians suffer through on a daily basis, pinning the blame on poverty, corrupt governance (even if it's true) and hardened ideologies, rather than occupation and dispossession. Any economic plan, based on valid post conflict resolution on the basis of international law and approved-upon UN resolutions, would have created much more economic gains to the Palestinians than the Trump plan. The framing of the Deal of the Century as the best deal for the Palestinians shadows three main facts: a) this is not the best plan for the Palestinians who will

categorically refuse it; b) this is not the best plan for the Israelis who will only use the Palestinian rejection as a motivation to go forward with further annexation and occupation; c) this plan only serves to break away from the two states solution and push away any claims of pre-1967 borders by the Palestinians forcing them to accept a new reality or reject it and possibly be dealt a worse deal in the future (Halbfinger & Kershner, 2020).

Finally, tying the concept of peace to economic returns or gains instead of rights and retribution is not a groundbreaking idea that Kushner came up with by himself. The Deal of the Century is a new iteration of previous attempts to corner the Palestinians in order to accept a bad deal. Previous US administrations, however, were not as blunt as the Trump's administration and did not find it necessary for their domestic and foreign policies to be completely aligned with the Israeli agenda. Under Obama, Kerry also proposed economic investments in a negotiated upon Palestinian state if the two parties were able to resolve their conflict. But the Obama administration, in its second term, was not concerned by the domestic factors that would affect a reelection or held strong ideological beliefs aligned with the Zionist project in the Middle East. The differences between the Deal of the Century and previous US attempts to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is discussed in the next section.

### **3.2 Key Differences from previous Peace Plans**

Reading through the Deal of the Century, it is clear that it deviates significantly from all previous plans presented in Chapter 2. The Deal of the Century starts by positioning itself against all previous UN resolutions that were put forward in order to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It puts the blame on the UN, and all other multilateral efforts as well as previous administrations, in their inability to put an end to the conflict between the Arabs/Palestinians and the Israelis. In doing so, the Deal of the Century aims at turning the

page on the past. It suggests a tabula rasa kind of approach to the conflict, with all previous efforts actively ignored and disregarded, and all the focus is directed to the here and now.

The notion of starting anew and bringing a fresh perspective of conflict resolution onto an intractable conflict such as the one at hand might have been a refreshing idea to consider, for all parties. However, the biased way the Deal of the Century was presented and how this “fresh outlook” for a new peace deal sponsored by the US was used and to which purposes leave much to be desired. The Trump administration thought it can impose a new consensus and a new reality on the ground for the benefit of the Israeli state, and once more at the expense of the Palestinians similar to what was done in pre-1967. In the same aforementioned interview with CNN, Kushner attempted to impose this new reality and urged people to “divorce [themselves] from all of the history”, and to think about the here and now rather than to remain stuck in the past (Kushner, 2020). But why would Kushner and Trump want to sideline the UN? Historically, the UN has been considered the arena where the Palestinians would seek to voice the atrocities and injustices they’ve been forced to live through since 1948, and they managed to fight for a handful of resolutions on which they base their claims to the land and to their rights.

By circumventing the role of the UN, the Deal of the Century would be seeking to rob the Palestinians of that voice as well. The Israelis are aware of the number of times they were saved by the American veto at the UN and through the Deal of the Century they are seeking to erase all previous resolutions that would give an inkling of hope to the Palestinians. In doing so all previous claims in the UN made by the Palestinians for their right to return, right to the land, right to retributions and sanctioning Israel for illegal and continued occupation would be nullified. The purpose is therefore to not just silence the Palestinians in the here and now and make them accept a bad deal, but to also scrap all previous, minor, successes in the

UN and abolish future avenues where the Palestinian people can plead their cause against guaranteed further occupation and humiliation.

The Deal of the Century is then a deviation from all previous US peace plans, despite their own abnormalities. Since the Reagan administration at least, the proposed peace plans were consistent on their goals and objectives: the US role was to mediate between the two conflicting parties, bringing them together to the negotiating table to set a common agenda for future negotiating on key issues. All these plans respected the international law and the previously agreed upon international resolutions. For instance, Jerusalem would remain undivided, and shared between Israel and a Palestinians state as the capital of both states. The holy sites for Jews and Arabs would be protected and safeguarded by both sides as well. The latter is defined on the basis of pre-1967 borders, and therefore, crucially, all Israeli settlements in the West Bank are illegal. Israel was never granted the right to expand its territories or its sovereignty on illegally grabbed lands. There were no mention of land swaps that would force the Palestinians to suffer through another wave of relocation, while the Israelis can remain put in illegal settlements.

Finally, a Palestinian state can have the chance to viable, independent and sovereign without the unilateral interference of Israel. The right to return was not fully approved before but it was not fully dismissed either, with the avenues of retribution and compensation such as the UNRWA safeguarded and funded and not attacked. Trump, and Netanyahu, attempted to put an end to the two-state solution proposed by all previous administrations. The US administration under Trump, and their Israeli ally, made a deal in bad faith and attempted to pressure the Palestinians when they were at their weakest point in over 70 years. The US, encouraged by the Israelis, thought they can impose a collective amnesia on over 13 million Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, and over 6 million refugees across the globe, in return of economic aid.

The most striking difference between the Deal of the Century and all other US mediated peace plans is the absence of the Palestinians in every stage of development and presentation of the plan. Sidelining the PLO, and categorizing it as a terrorist organization, is an erasure of Palestinian partner for peace. It is a walk back from the Oslo Accords and all the efforts, and compromises, that were made in the past 30 years. It is the end of the two states solution and the end of a Palestinian state based on the pre-1967 borders (Hurlburt, 2020). According to Aaron Miller, senior advisor on the Middle East and specifically the Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution, the Deal of the Century is neither about peace nor diplomacy (Miller, 2020). Miller compares the Deal of the Century to other peace plans, since the Camp David agreement in 1979 between Israel and Egypt, and is hard pressed to find a step towards peace or a diplomatic win for the US. Whereas previous plans were centered around negotiations, bringing the two sides together to talk, bridging deep divides through soft diplomacy, and attempt at creating trust between the two conflicting parties to reach a permanent and comprehensive agreement, the Deal of the Century was put forth following a complete Israeli bias and a disrespectful, say discriminatory, view of the Palestinians who are not seen as partners in peace. For instance, Kushner publicly degraded the Palestinian people questioning their ability to govern themselves, making way to validate why the Deal of the Century erodes all sense of sovereignty and self-determination in a so-called Palestinian state and gifts these responsibilities to the Israelis. The Trump administration did not hide its disdain and orientalist views of the Palestinian people and their leadership. All previous plans were arrived at after prolonged discussions and dialogue with both the Israelis and the Palestinians. Even though, and as reported in Chapter 2, Miller himself was one of “Israel’s lawyers” within Clinton’s negotiating team during the Oslo process, the Palestinian voice was not completely silenced and the Palestinians, political factions and people, were not totally sidelined, and blindsided by the peace processes.

The main difference is that all previous plans were set out to be the instigator of bilateral talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians – a means to an end. The Deal of the Century takes a more forceful approach to the conflict, a “take it or leave it” wild card presented to the Palestinians, with the answer already known in advance. The Deal of the Century includes a vague timeline for its implementation, with a four-year period for the Palestinians to either accept or reject the plan – most likely banking on four more years of Trump and on a guaranteed Palestinian rejection. The Palestinian Authority can never sell this deal to the Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories or the Palestinian refugees across the world. If the US administration knew at some level the rejection of the Deal of the century, this sheds a light of doubt on the objectives of the Trump-Netanyahu deal. The Deal of the Century is not a peace plan. It is a US approval stamp for the annexation of the West Bank and a validation of Israel’s policies towards the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories (Beilin, 2020).

Despite the differences between the Deal of the Century and other previous peace plans, it is important to highlight some key points. Emphasizing the difference between the “bad” Deal of the Century and the “accepted”/“acceptable” peace processes that preceded it can lead to two dangerous conclusions: 1) it gives too much credit to the ingenuity of those who came up with the Deal of the Century; 2) it gives credit when credit is not due to previous US administrations. To start with, the move of the US embassy to Jerusalem, and the declaration of the latter as the capital of Israel is not an achievement for Trump, nor were they his ideas, or those of his son in law. The move has been in the talks since the 1970s and was approved by both the Democrats and the Republicans in Congress in the 1990s (Abukhalil, 2019). Even the economic framework was a reworking of numbers and timeline of a previous Kerry plan, under democratic President Obama (Tartir, 2020). A much less talked about initiative that was part of the 2014 talks between the US, Israel and the

Palestinians. Trump and his team only lacked the finesse, experience and diplomacy of previous administration and therefore were incapable to package things, at least for the media, in a better way than how the Deal of the Century was read and interpreted: asking the Palestinians to sell out their cause for money and investments.

What were the reasons that led to the Deal of the Century then? How come Trump was able to do for Israel what previous administrations failed to do? It is important to note here the role of the domestic factors that allowed Trump to bring forward the Deal of the Century and other foreign policies related to the Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### **3.3 The Underlying Domestic Factors**

It is easier to underline what the Deal of the Century is not, rather than what it actually is. As Miller compares it to all previous efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he emphasized that the Deal of the Century is not an operation, nor a deal, nor part of the peace process. This begs the question on its use and utility, of concern primarily to the Trump administration.

Trump's entire election campaign and his shocking win over Clinton meant that the US would adopt an isolationist policy, as per his "Make American Great Again" electoral slogan, and an unpredictable foreign policy. Foreign policy analysts observing the Trump administration focused on the president's arrogant and erratic personality, often demonstrated in angry tweets in the middle of the night. According to Miller, it was then Trump's arrogance and his obsession with negating his predecessor's work and foreign policy gains that led him to withdraw from the Iran Deal and the Paris Accord for instance. It was also his arrogance that made him believe that he can put his stamp on the peace process of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Trump was also planning for a second term in office. Despite his non-intervention promises during his campaign, he knew that in order to secure a second election,

as he secured the first one, he had to align his foreign policy towards Israel with the aspirations of his republican and Christian evangelical electoral base as well as the Jewish interest groups in the US, all of which were amongst the major donors of his 2016 campaign.

Trump's personality played a role in skewing his foreign policy decisions. But his ideology and personal beliefs also contribute to the understanding of his political decisions and alliances. The pro-Israel stance of the Trump administration is tightly linked to the Christian evangelical ideology and its close ties with Zionism. The presentation of the Deal of the Century is actually an iteration of extreme right-wing and Zionist views of the supremacy of the Jewish people and its claims over the land of Historical Palestine. The ambition to establish a Greater Israeli from the Jordan valley to the Mediterranean sea is the driving force behind the government of Netanyahu and the Trump administration. The Palestinian rejection is therefore guaranteed and expected – and would only be used to portray them, and the Arabs, as rejectionist of peace. In the meantime, the state of Israel will be working at expanding its settlements in the West Bank, against international law. If the Palestinian partner is absent from the Deal of the Century, this remains a deal between Trump and Netanyahu. What remains to be asked is: a deal for what ends? It is certainly not to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without the Palestinians. Both men, concerned by their own political careers, attempted to solve the conflict for their own personal goals.

For Trump specifically, the votes of the evangelical Christians were his primary concern. Evangelical Christians believe that a Jewish rule must be established on the Holy Land to bring forth the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, who will restore the kingdom of heaven on earth. Jewish inhabitants of the Land will either choose to convert to Christianity or perish. The idea of Greater Israel is therefore deeply rooted in their religious belief, intersecting with the Zionist agenda for a single Jewish state on Historical Palestine. This political and theological intersection led to the creation of the Deal of the Century, a deal

categorically biased towards Israel at the expense of the Palestinians. The Palestinians are no longer a demographic problem for the Jewish state of Israel, but an impediment to the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven. Christian evangelicals are the main electoral base for Trump to target as over 80% of them voted for him in 2016, and they account for over 25% of the US population. Trump's administration knew it needed to deliver on its campaign promises, especially via-a-vis Israel, to get a chance at a reelection in 2020.

Moreover, the Trump administration was concerned of keeping the Jewish lobby on its side for the second term elections. It is well known that Sheldon Adelson – also present at the White during the announcement of the Deal of the Century – was one of the main donors of Trump's campaign and that Trump administration had promised him the announcement of Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel as soon as Trump was elected president in 2016. Trump did not immediately make good to his promise, but he eventually made it happen with other major pro-Israel decisions. The Jewish lobby was always an influential domestic actor in all previous US administrations. The relationship between the US and Israel was never threatened by the moral justification of rights and justice for the Palestinian people. It has always been solid as it was argued in the previous chapters. However, under Trump, that relationship took a drastic positive turn. The combination between Christian evangelicals in the White House and right-wing Zionism could not have presented a different outcome than the Deal of the Century as a proposal to end the conflict. A closer look at the Middle East advisory team for President Trump is a blatant indication of the direction of the plan: his son in law Jared Kushner, the US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman, formerly known as Trump's bankruptcy lawyer, and Jason Greenblatt, another lawyer close to Trump. From Miller's "Israel's lawyers", to Trump's lawyers, it can be argued that the ideological concerns of President Trump and his team outweigh all foreign policy concerns. All three of his Middle East advisors are either devoted Zionist or Christian evangelicals, with two of them

closely tied to real state companies in the West Bank. It is also important to note that Trump's Vice President and Secret of State, Mike Pence and Mike Pompeo also subscribe to the Christian evangelical beliefs and that Israel should expand its borders over Historical Palestine, and even towards the Occupied Syrian Heights (Bump,2019; Miller & Winston, 2016).

Finally, as the Deal of the Century is tightly linked to domestic and ideological factors, the timing of its announcement was also directly correlated to the inner domestic politics in the US and Israel (Kardas & Can, 2020). The Trump administration was very attentive as to when it needs to announce and make public its Middle East policies. The Deal of the Century was supposed to be announcement much earlier than January 2020 but the domestic factors in the US, and Israel, dictated the time of announcement. With the beginning of an election year for Trump, he needed to remind his electoral base of the things he can achieve for Israel. A pro-Israel deal that can turn the table on the Oslo Accords and the two states solution seemed to be the course of action for the Trump administration. The announcement also came a few weeks before the elections in Israel. This is important because around the time of the announcement of the Deal of the Century, both President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu were undergoing chaos on the domestic level in their respective countries. Trump was undergoing an impeachment trial due to his alleged ties with Russia and an election interference in the 2016 elections. Mere two days before the announcement of the Deal of the Century, John Bolton, the previous National security Advisor for President Trump, reported that the latter is liable in the case and had lied in the investigations. While an impeachment trial was being conducted a couple of kilometers away from the White House, Trump was attempting to distract the media with a “win-win” proposal for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It would have been more accurate for Trump to explicitly say that the “win-win” deal was in fact designed for himself and his Israeli ally Netanyahu. The

latter was himself being investigated for corruption in Israel and the premiership was the only ticket to save him from being tried. It is then an effort to distract from the impeachment trial from the Trump team and a push from the Jewish lobby, friends of Netanyahu in Washington, by meddling in the domestic politics in the US to influence a favorable outcome for the latter's elections chances. The Deal of the Century is therefore a mere deal between two corrupt businessmen, made politicians at the head of two powerful states.

The Trump administration benefitted from the shifting geopolitical climate and alliances in the Middle East and even worked towards forming new alliances between few Arab Gulf regimes and Israel. But geopolitics does not paint a full picture of the reasons that led to the announcement of the Deal of the Century. The Jewish lobby, the Christian evangelical electoral base, the President's one-color team as well as President Trump's own personality and ideologies led to the US siding completely with the state of Israel at the expense of Palestinians, ditching decades of soft diplomacy and putting the two-state resolution to rest.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

The Deal of the Century, as Trump's entire presidency, was definitely polarizing. Despite Trump's isolationist policies, he made an exception for the Middle East. His "Make America Great Again" was turned on its head for his Middle East policies, making it more into "Make Israel Great Again". To complete the process that started in January 2020, the Trump administration worked towards achieving a new feat in the Israeli-Arab relations. Normalization with few Arab regimes was able to give a semblance of legitimacy to the Deal of the Century. Reflecting back on 2020, the lingering question is whether Trump would have won the November elections later that year had he not callously mishandled the COVID-19 crisis. The election of democratic candidate Joe Biden over Trump raises further questions

about the next chapter of the US-Israeli relations and the role of the US in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The next chapter would look at the reactions and the future of the deal after Trump was voted out of office.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Is the Deal of the Century Dead?**

This chapter provides an overview of the reactions of the pertinent parties to the Deal of the Century. As noted in the previous chapter, only a handful of involved groups foresaw a future and a viability to the Trump administration's proposed plan to solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. After Trump's election loss in November 2020 to the Democratic candidate Joe Biden, groups who have aligned themselves with former President Trump's policies towards Israel are already working out ways to dissociate themselves from Trump. This chapter will also serve as an assessment of the longevity of the Deal of the Century after Trump.

#### **4.1 Reception of the Deal of the Century**

The Deal of the Century was evidently polarizing both within the United States and in the Middle East region. In order to organize the reactions to the plan, the following sections will look at reactions from domestic groups inside the US, then shift to the concerned parties in the conflict and highlight the reactions from the Palestinians and Israelis, both on the political/governmental side and the population's reactions. Finally, a quick overview of key Arab states' divided stance on the Deal of the Century is presented.

##### **4.1.1 The US**

It is simplest to start with the Jewish-American interest groups when decompartmentalizing the reactions to the Deal of the Century within the political domestic sphere of the US. Several of these groups, parsimoniously known as the Jewish lobby, have been working towards aligning the US foreign policy with the national interests of the Israeli state for a very long time (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2008). In recent years, and with the rise of

right-wing groups in the US and Israel, the extremist voice of these groups was the most outspoken, finding an opportunity in implementing expansionist policies of the state of Israel over the Occupied Territories. Representatives of these groups were present during the announcement of the Deal of the Century as their role in forming the deal was more pronounced than that of the Palestinians and the Palestinian Authority, deemed as unfit to be a partner towards peace. These groups were therefore the most outspoken zealots for the Deal of the Century, standing by both President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu in defending the plan. Most notably, the AIPAC released a statement appreciating Trump and his administration's work towards the resolution of the conflict. The statement also thanks President Trump for his efforts to consult with the opposing political parties within Israel (Dogantekin, 2020). The irony of the administration's efforts to talk to everyone except for the Palestinians was apparently lost on them. Zionists often subscribe to the rejectionist stereotypes against the Palestinians to justify their prejudice and the purposeful sidelining of Palestinians, deemed not equal in the peace process and not a real partner for peace. The Republican Jewish Coalition chairperson was quoted emphasizing, in his statement endorsing the Deal of the Century, on "the requirements that the Palestinians reject terrorism, stop inciting violence, stop their indecent pay for slap program that pays terrorists for their crimes, and end corruption and human-rights abuses" (O'Brien, 2020).

Other Jewish groups who have a long history of activism against the influence of Zionist organizations in the US as well as the US policies towards the state of Israel – and some against the existence of the state of Israel itself – were less heard in the US mainstream media as representatives of the will of the Jewish people. Some of their statements do not appear on Google Search and public statements are solely present on these groups' social media pages denouncing the Deal of the Century and the politics it represents. Their statements slammed President Trump for his biased policies towards the conflict, reading that

the Deal of the Century “is a green light for Israeli annexation of the West Bank,” and an attempt to sabotage any two-state solution. These groups recognized what was argued for in Chapter 3, mainly regarding the Trump administration’s obsession with reelection on an election year and their attempt to pull in Jewish and Christian evangelical voters, as well as lure in as many donors and funds for Trump’s electoral campaign. Rabbi Alissa Wise was quoted saying: “[the Deal of the Century] is a distraction ploy by two warmongers who are prioritizing their personal election campaigns over any semblance of statecraft” (Dogantekin, 2020). The division between Jewish communities stems from different interpretation of religious ideology as it pertains to the political realm. Many committed Jewish religious figures refuse to abide by the Zionist agenda, designating the Israeli state as an apartheid state that has derailed from the theological significance and justification for its existence (Karpf, Klug, Rose, & Rosenbaum, 2008).

In response to the Deal of the Century, the Democratic Party, also prepping for an electoral year, found it opportune to stand against Trump’s policies on the Middle East and voice opposition specifically to his bias towards Israel. The Democratic Party per say was never far off from the state of Israel and its policies, and was never immune to the influence of the Jewish lobby in the US. However, as portrayed in Chapter 2, the Democratic Party, so far, has had a more balanced approach towards the state of Israel. Joe Biden, the favorite candidate from the Democratic Party, and the one who ended up winning the elections last November, is by his own admission a staunch Zionist (Baroud, 2020). Bipartisan politics has never been a good indication of the US foreign policy towards the Middle East, as people in the region often get the burnt end of either administrations’ policies. However, emerging voices from progressives and left-leaning politicians and their supporters have voiced out their opposition to Trump’s Deal of the Century, evidently positioning themselves against his right-wing policies as well as the policies of his right-wing ally in the state of Israel. Their

political campaign was based on dissociating their candidates from the Trump's agenda towards the region, and consequently that of AIPAC and Netanyahu. A social media campaign was organized by democratic-leaning voters urging candidates from the Democratic Party to skip the electoral event hosted by AIPAC. They based their opposition primarily against Trump, as well as the apartheid like policies inside the state of Israel, making the case for Palestinians whose voices were silenced during the Trump administration.

Amongst the three democratic favorites, Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders committed to skipping the AIPAC 2020 conference, whereas Biden joined in via video messages (Biden, 2020). During his virtual attendance, Biden reiterated his already-known position towards the state of Israel, merely sharing his opposition of further annexation of Occupied Territories, foreshadowing a similar Obama-like policy towards Israel and the conflict during his presidency. The return to the special relationship between the US and Israel, as with pre-Trump administrations, is articulated during his speech, emphasizing that the relationship is "above politics and beyond politics" (Baroud, 2020).

Besides the 2020 democratic candidates, senators from the Democratic Party rejected Trump's Deal of the Century as it stands against the US' longstanding commitment to a two-state solution (Middle East Eye, 2020). A group of 12 senators penned an open letter addressing the flaws in the Trump administration's plan, primarily highlighting the lack of viability of a Palestinian state if it will come to existence based on the proposed plan. The senators reiterated their concerns of unilateral policies towards Israel and of the latter's plan to annex over 70% of the West Bank. In the same vein, members of Congress from the Democratic Party shared the same sentiment and expressed their opposition towards a "shameful and disingenuous" proposal to end the conflict (Middle East Monitor, 2020). Of these lawmakers, Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib, the first Palestinian American woman to be

voted in office, had a strong reaction against the Deal of the Century, recalling the impeachment and corruption charges against both President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu respectively. Tlaib recognized the domestic political goals both head of states were aiming for, saying that their plan is a “political stunt [that] gets us no closer to peace or justice. As a member of Congress, I consider it a non-starter (Buttu, Hassan, & Levy, 2020).

The usual faces from the American Arab community were the most vocal in their opposition to the Deal of the Century. The go-to analysts for news pertaining to Palestine were hosted on major TV outlets broadcasting the announcement of the Deal of the Century. Palestinian American human rights lawyers Zaha Hassan and Noura Erakat – the niece of late PLO negotiator Saeb Erekat - and Palestinian American historian Rashid Khalidi were among the few Arab/Palestinian faces who were given airtime as sole representatives of Palestinian voices. In a televised interview on CNN, Erakat rejected the notion that the Deal of the Century is biased towards the state of Israel, rather it is an Israeli plan being implemented by the Trump administration (Erakat, 2020). Erakat also argued that from a legal point of view, the Deal of the Century is void as it is a deal presented to the Palestinians under duress. Hassan and Khalidi also dismissed the viability of such a plan as it stands against all bases of international law and it only aims at legitimizing decades long colonial policies towards the Palestinian people, and in the Occupied Territories (Hassan, 2020). Khalidi goes further by declaring the Deal of the Century as yet another war on the Palestinians – underscoring the systematic occupation, annexation and human rights abuses the Palestinians suffered through since 1948 (Khalidi, 2020). Khalidi’s comments on the Deal of the Century are echoed in his latest book “The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine” where he looks at the conflict as a settler-colonial occupation of Palestine intending to militarily subjugate the Palestinians and to erase all traces of their existence in Historical Palestine (Hroub, 2020).

Other Arab American groups denounced the Deal of the Century and opposed the Trump administration's foreign policies towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Arab-American groups have generally been concerned about the Palestinian issue, rallying support around their activism and advocacy for the human rights of the Palestinian people. The Palestinian question is at the heart of this community, gluing it together in times of great divisions over other divisive issues pertaining to the Arab world. The fact that Arab American groups started organizing politically in 1967 speaks to the community's attachment to the issue of Palestine and the Palestinian people (David, 2007).

In response to the Deal of the Century, the American-Arab anti-Discrimination Committee released a video on their Facebook page denouncing the plan. The reach and the interaction on the Facebook post were minimal, as it is on the group's social page in general, which do not give a clear indication of their supporters' view on the issue. The group also had a statement on their website calling out Trump's bias towards the state of Israel and accusing his administration of reinforcing its apartheid system. Similarly, the Arab American Institute issued a statement on their own website calling out Trump's unilateral plan to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The group's executive director penned the statement accusing President Trump of violating international law and forcing the Palestinians to accept a deal in bad faith (Arab American Institute, 2020). Lastly, the National Palestinian American Organization also penned a condemnation of the Deal of the Century on its website warning of Trump's policies aiming to erase traces of Palestinian history to satisfy his Israeli allies. The organization reiterates Palestinians' stance to defend their rights based on international law and their commitment to the UN resolutions pertaining to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (National Palestinian American Organization, 2020).

#### ***4.1.2 The Palestinians***

The US also witnessed several protests organized by collectives that stand with Palestine and the Palestinian people (Evans, 2020). Similarly on the other side of the world, an impromptu response to the Deal of the Century led the Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories, and Palestinian refugees elsewhere, to take on the streets to protests against the Trump's administration biased policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Palestinians had already lost trust in President Trump, and even before the details of the Deal of Century were made clear, they were protesting against his plan. The Palestinian workers' union in the West Bank organized a strike following the announcement of the Deal of the Century. An immediate crackdown on the protest from the Israeli army led to the injury of 41 Palestinians, three of them heavily wounded from live ammunition (BBC, 2020). Post-announcement polls also indicated the complete rejection of the Deal of the Century in Gaza and the West Bank (Pollock, 2020).

The Deal of the Century however managed to do one thing for the Palestinians: bring together the opposing political factions in the Occupied Territories as the PA called for an emergency meeting in Ramallah which saw the participation of both Islamic Jihad and Hamas (al-Akhbar, 2020). The opposing Palestinian factions issued separate statements to denounce the Deal of the Century. Islamic factions stood against the plan and called for Jihad to continue the fight to liberate all of Palestine. The PA reiterated its commitment to previous UN resolutions and the right of Palestinians to the land pre-1967 borders. President Mahmoud Abbas publicly rejected the Deal of the Century, threatening to cancel security coordination with the state of Israel. Hamas however expected a stronger reaction from Abbas. Khaled Meshaal, former head of Hamas' political arm, called upon the PA to go beyond cutting coordination ties with Israel, by dissolving the PA and retreating from the Oslo Accords – going back to an armed struggle with Israel (Abdel Razek et al., 2020). The

unity over rejecting the deal may not translate into any concrete efforts to unify the Palestinian factions.

Despite a strong debate over the efficacy of Trump's policies, especially those towards the Middle East and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, global media still managed to sideline voices from Palestine, whether those living within the 1948 borders, in the Occupied Territories or Palestinian refugees residing in neighboring Arab countries (al-Najjar, 2020). Just like Trump sidelined the Palestinians in the peace process and the development of the Deal of the Century, global media managed to silence them further by not giving their opposition to the deal a voice and space in the global reactions to Trump's plan that directly affects their lives (al-Najjar, 2020). This is not new for the global media – and especially the Western media. For instance, a recent article in the New York Times, highlighting the Human Rights Watch's reports of illegal, racist and apartheid-like practices in the state of Israel, interviews three Israeli officials, and a Palestinian resident of the West Bank off the streets. How can Israeli officials implementing apartheid-like policies have an unbiased take on human rights abuses inflicted on the Palestinians? The article gives ample space for Israeli experts, including Netanyahu's senior adviser, to justify the actions taken by the state of Israel towards the Palestinians. It is difficult to understand the logic behind the choice of experts weighing in on issues that directly impact the lives of the Palestinians, except the implicit thinking that the Israeli experts should be given the space to justify their government's actions (Kingsley, 2021).

Despite their strong language against the Deal of the Century, the PA and Islamic factions still managed to sabotage a chance to unify and show a unified front against Trump's proposal (Abdel Razek et al., 2020). The schism between the West Bank and Gaza seems unsurmountable as talks between the opposing factions did not materialize beyond the primary immediate reactions to Trump's plan. The dissociation between the political factions

and the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territories seems to be even more pronounced as promised elections and reforms have been postponed indefinitely (at the time of writing). Palestinians who have long trusted the peace process led by the US are now seeing their compromises since the late 1980s, and Arafat's bilateral talks with the Israelis which led to the historical Oslo Accords, are all efforts gone to waste. The US' support to a two-state solution and a Palestinian state based on pre-1967 borders seems to be no longer on the table (Farrell & Heller, 2018).

#### ***4.1.3 Israel***

As the Deal of the Century faced an overwhelming rejection from the Palestinian people and political factions, it also garnered negative reaction from certain quarters in Israel (Wittes, 2020). The plan is seen as prolonging and exacerbating the conflict by the mere premise of allowing the occupation of Palestinian territories to continue. In other words, the Deal of the Century, embraced solely by a much-debated US president, is not a guarantee for Israel's security – a longstanding concern and basis of many previous peace processes – nor a solution to the conflict. Following this logic, Israel will therefore be in a more vulnerable position vis-à-vis a more frustrated Palestinian population (Bahour, 2019b). It will also face a disapproving international community once Trump is voted out of office. By celebrating the Deal of the Century, Netanyahu is seen celebrating his own battle against corruption charges at the expense of a more isolated Israel. Israelis are also aware that the Palestinians would certainly reject the plan, making it void to even consider beyond a domestic political ploy by Netanyahu (Bob, 2020).

#### ***4.1.4 The Arab World***

The Arab world has seen drastic changes since the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2011. Regime changes, revolutions and counter-revolutions, civil wars, inter-Arab wars, and

a new geopolitical climate dictated new alliances and new foes. During this chaotic decade, the Palestinian cause, often at the center of Arab consciousness, seemed to take a backseat. In response to the Deal of the Century, the Arab league rejected the plan presented by the Trump administration, but consensus amongst Arab states in reality is nowhere to be found. The presence of Arab ambassadors from Bahrain, Jordan and the UAE during the announcement of the plan is already an indication for differing views on the question of Palestine (Abdelaziz, 2020). One of the main reasons behind the erosion of Arabs' support to the Palestinian cause is pinned to the rising influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region and the geopolitical rivalry that ensued between the latter and the Gulf states. The Trump administration was successful in convincing two Gulf states to publicly align with Israel, against the threat presented by Iran. Other countries seemed to be leaning to take similar steps, but the US election of 2020 were coming up, indicating a possible shift in administrations, which led these states to hold off on committing to such seismic shifts in the region (Middle East Eye, 2020).

Other Arab states, traditionally key players in the question of Palestine, such as Egypt and Syria, have their own internal battles to fight and have been sidelined in the buildup to the announcement of the Deal of the Century. Syria, an ally of Iran, has been witnessing a staunch civil war since 2011. Its government has been sidelined by the Obama administration and the Trump administration in their efforts to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Despite being on the margins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the government of Syria denounced the plan and slammed Trump's unilateral approach to solving the conflict while disregarding all previous UN resolutions (The Syrian Observer, 2020). On the other hand, Egypt, the first to sign a peace deal with the state of Israel, had no qualms to approve Trump's plan, especially when its regional alliances dictate a closer approach to overarching Arab issues to the stance of Gulf states. Egypt's concern with maintaining good relationships

with the US led to a tacit approval of the Deal of the Century by the Egyptian people and government (Pollock, 2020).

## **4.2 Conclusion: Is the Deal of the Century Dead?**

The Trump presidency created new realities for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While Trump lost the elections in 2020, his biased policies can still overshadow the current administration's policies towards the conflict and the region. Even though the Deal of the Century failed to deliver a domestic momentum for Trump to win a second term, it is unclear whether it failed to achieve its desired outcomes for the Israelis and the Jewish interest groups in the US. The COVID-19 pandemic and the stalled political climate within the state of Israel might have halted Netanyahu's plans of annexations towards more Palestinian territories, but the events since March 2021 are indicative of impending escalations from the Israeli side in Jerusalem, the Occupied Territories and neighboring countries. In the months leading to the 2020 US elections and eventually the inauguration of Biden, Israel tried to secure irreversible steps from the departing administration which can cement the gains gathered under Trump. Over 6,200 new settlements were announced in the Occupied Territories while demolition of Palestinian homes and forced relocation of Palestinians continued in areas set by the Deal of the Century to be annexed by Israel. The last days of the Trump administration also saw that the US annual aid to Israel can be directed to the building of future illegal settlements in the West Bank. Former Secretary of State Pompeo also made a historical visit to a settlement in the West Bank, legitimizing the occupation and announcing that products from these occupied territories can be labelled as "Made in Israel". The Biden administration is already set to reverse key decisions made by the Trump administration, but it is unknown when it will start tackling the Israeli-Palestinian issue (Zogby, 2020). The Palestinians are waiting for the new administration to reveal its cards, but few are hopeful about their future. New Palestinian voices are emerging, proposing new ways to look at the

conflict beyond Trump's questionable Deal of the Century and more imaginative than all previous peace processes the US was involved in (Rantawi, 2021; Bahour, 2019a).

## **Chapter Five**

### **Looking Beyond the Deal of the Century: Biden and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

At the time of writing, and as the Biden administration has completed its first 100 days in office, the fate of the Deal of the Century remains uncertain. While it might feel like the Trump administration's plan is well behind us, the Biden administration has not made concrete moves to turn the page on Trump's Middle East policy. This concluding chapter offers some informed insights into the Biden administration based on analysis and reports in order to assess the fate of one of the most intractable conflicts in the world. A purview of the unfolding events in the Occupied Territories and Jordan is presented to assess the shifting political climate in the region; and shed light on ways the Biden administration can respond to it, especially vis-a-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

#### **5.1 The Biden Presidency**

The Biden administration seems to be primarily concerned with reversing the previous administration's work. In less than two months in office, the State Department under President Biden released a new US memo on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Karam, 2021). The memo titled "The US Palestinian Reset and the Path Forward" is reminiscent of the Obama days. The memo states that the US needs to re-engage the Palestinians in the peace process and reset the relationship which was damaged by the previous administration. As this is still a draft memo that hasn't been publicly endorsed by Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, there is little weight to the assumption that a complete U-turn from Biden on the

biased policies towards Israel issued by Trump is in the works. The administration's recent behavior in blocking calls for investigating Israel's crimes in the ICC, and criticizing the condemnations of the illegal settlements in the West Bank by the UN, as well as continuing to oppose the BDS movement are all indications that not much will change under President Biden.

While a possible return to a two-state solution defined by the pre-1967 borders is a step back from Trump's policies, a serious conversation over the success of the peace processes and the role of the US as a mediator of the conflict needs to take place in the US. As the conflict rages on, it is clear that neither the Deal of the Century nor all previous peace plans worked. The recent events in the Occupied Territories and Jerusalem are worrying as they highlight that even when Trump is longer president, his policies and carte-blanche for Israel are still intact.

## **5.2 Forcing New Realities on the Ground**

The Deal of the Century attempted to enforce a new reality for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that were removed from what was actually on the ground. The plan's objective was to legitimize further annexation and occupation onto the Occupied Territories, despite international disapproval and Palestinian objection. With Trump voted out of office, the Right-wing Israeli government under Benjamin Netanyahu is trying to implement the Deal of the Century on the ground, while the rest of the world is busy with the COVID-19 crisis. The events in Jerusalem and the West Bank since the beginning of March 2021 are indicative that the Deal of the Century might not be totally dismissed. The evacuation of Palestinians from East Jerusalem, the continued building of illegal settlements in the West Bank and the daily crackdown on Palestinians with the worst forms of human rights abuses are enabling a forced change in reality on the ground, as per the Deal of the Century. As Netanyahu fails again to

form a consensus government, it seems his only hope is still attached to the resurrection of the Deal of the Century which bought him a little over a year in power.

Other developments in the region, especially in Jordan, can be read with the lens of the Deal of the Century. The presumed coup on King Abdullah in Jordan in early April 2021 was interpreted, by mostly Arab media, as an indirect message from the Israelis for him to reassess his strongly held opinion against the demographic relocation of the Palestinians in the West Bank to Jordan. Even though the Deal of the Century serves to give the Israelis swaths of illegally occupied land in the West Bank stretching to the Jordan River, the demographic problem that the great Israel will face is not lost on the current government. A relocation of the Palestinians, a long-held fear for the Palestinians and the Jordanians alike, will be necessary to conserve the Jewish identity of the state of Israel. The presumed coup and the support from President Biden towards the King of Jordan are an indication that Netanyahu no longer gets a free pass with the current administration as he used to with the Trump administration (Tharoor, 2021; al-Omari & Satloff, 2021).

### **5.3 The Question of Palestine**

The Palestinians understand the role the US plays in the conflict. Since Arafat entrusted the peace process to the US, the Palestinians have been looking for an honest broker for the conflict (Aruri, 2003). The Palestinians are aware of the vulnerabilities of the state of Israel, despite its military might, without the support of the US. A shift in US policies is the only salvage for the Palestinians. New voices are emerging to address current president Biden to change his policies on Palestine. A new report published in April 2021 acknowledges the challenges the Biden administration will face vis-à-vis the conflict and puts forth innovative strategies to look at the conflict and overturn the injustices caused by the previous administration. The report argues that the Palestinians need to shift the fight from

that of demand for the return of occupied lands to that of rights. The focus on the return of the land will only engender peace deals similar to the Deal of the Century where smaller and smaller parcels of lands will be given to the Palestinians. These plans flourish on the rejection of the Palestinians of whichever deals are presented to them as it reinforces long standing stereotypes held against them. What Zaha Hassan and her team suggest is rather a focus on rights. A rights-based approach allows taking the negotiations in international courts of law, where shady deals between the likes of Trump and Netanyahu do not hold much weight. This approach will manage to steer away from the theological and nationalist rhetoric and recognize that the Palestinians, as people, have been subjugated to the worst forms of human rights abuses in the past century (Hassan & Munayyer, 2021). This approach attempts therefore to correct the course of the role of the US in the conflict, turning it from “the dishonest broker” to an effective mediator for peace.

The geopolitical climate points to yet another difficult decade for the Middle East. As new alliances fold and unfold, it is difficult to predict the future of the region, but the outlook does not look bright for the people living here. What this thesis tried to highlight primarily, through the peace processes contributed for by several US administrations and through the lens of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is that whilst the geopolitical environment dictates the US foreign policy, it does so by providing an array of choices for each administration. The latter then needs to balance these choices with primarily domestic concerns, chiefly public support, lobbying efforts, leadership ideology and style and most importantly the electability based on these decisions. A careful examination of the US domestic environment thus adds one layer to our understanding of US foreign policy, without negating the conclusions arrived at based on realist thinking.

Trump's presidency proved this thinking to be correct as laid out in previous chapters. Trump's eccentric policies – driven by his own ideology, his penchant for quick action, his close circle of advisors and his domestic alliances – failed to deliver a balanced foreign policy that was even more skewed in favor of Israel than the policies of his predecessors, including Republican hawks such as Ronald Reagan. What is expected from President Biden is a return to a more balanced and less personality driven foreign policy. The US' alliance with Israel is unshakeable and it would be unrealistic, indeed foolish, to assume the opposite. However, the US needs to reassess how far aligned it needs to position its foreign policy with that of the state of Israel and reestablish a true sponsor-client relationship, as it does with its Arab allies, in order to preserve its power and national interests. Any other outcome will be at the detriment of the US in the long run. The US can no longer advertise its values in the world without actually implementing them in its policies. Even assuming the best intentions, the US, the primary mediator to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for the past five decades, failed to end the conflict. It is time to turn the table on what is threatening its global influence.

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