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# The Point of No Return

*The United States, the Palestinian Refugees and the 1967 Post-War Diplomacy*

Ingrid Bjørndal Farestvedt

Modern International and Transnational History

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Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History

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## Abstract

Historians contend that the Palestinian refugee question is at the core of the conflict between Israel, the Palestinians, and the Arab states. Yet, it remains unresolved and consistently excluded from peace efforts. This thesis investigates how the relationship between the United States and Israel affected the Palestinian refugee question in connection to the diplomatic aftermath of the 1967 war.

As Israel gained an unparalleled military triumph against its Arab neighbors in the 1967 war, several geographical and political lines were redrawn in the Middle East. While the war was a watershed moment in more ways than one, this thesis argues that for the Palestinian refugees, it also represented a point of no return. Ultimately, the post-war diplomacy resulted in the United Nations (UN) Security Council's Resolution 242. Supported by the United States, the document established the legal framework for all coming peace efforts related to Israel and the Palestinians. Although it called for a "just settlement of the refugee problem," it did not include details of such. Thus, by its omissions and ambiguity, Resolution 242 affirmed the Israeli state while demonstrating a renewed testimony to the Palestinian dispossession. For this, Israel became indebted to its strategic, yet informal, partner: The United States.

This thesis contributes to existing scholarship by demonstrating the way in which the U.S.-Israeli relationship affected the handling of the Palestinian refugee issue in the aftermath of the 1967 war. By being imperative in the diplomatic process, the United States enabled a final blow to the inclusion of Palestinian refugees in peace efforts.

## Acknowledgements

The journey toward this thesis has not been plain sailing. Looking back, I am proud and indebted to those who have had my back and more throughout the process.

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Any academic endeavor comes second to the friendship I have earned at Blindern. Kaja, Ingrid and Regine: Your endless support and commitment to Friday night beer pitchers could carry me through any hardship, as it has this one. I am in awe of your compassion and care.

The unlimited support of my mother and father is with me in everything I do. You inspire me in everything you are. My friends and extended family: Thank you.

The present of my exiled Palestinian friends is more infused by history than it is for most. I hope for justice and peace in your future.

Ingrid Bjørndal Farestvedt

Oslo, June 2023

# Contents

I: INTRODUCTION.....	2
Methodology and Limitations	4
State of the Art	5
II: THE EMERGING “PROBLEM” .....	13
Palestinian Refugees in the <i>Nakba</i> Aftermath	13
The Post-War Pillars of U.S. Policy in the Middle East	15
No Room for Palestinians: Zionism’s Colonial Project	17
The Presidents and the “Problem”	18
III: THE WATERSHEDS OF 1967 .....	21
Johnson and the Palestinians	21
Six Days of War	22
The Crucial Consequences	24
IV: BLAME GAME .....	28
From “Uncertain Armistice” to “Durable Peace”	28
A Just Settlement?	30
Jarring’s Mission Impossible	33
V: “ERODING THE PROBLEM” .....	35
A Special Relationship	35
The “Human Bomb”	37
Shifting Policy, Shifting Policymakers	38
Strategy Over Peace?	40
Peace “Process”	41
“The Old Will Die and the Young Will Forget”	43
VI: THE PEACE PARADOX .....	45
SOURCES .....	48
Archival Records	48
United Nations Resolutions	48
Books and Journal Articles	48





# I: Introduction

On a freezing January day in 1968, prominent U.S. and Israeli government officials gathered on President Lyndon B. Johnson's ranch in central Texas.<sup>1</sup> As bitter winds swept over the property, Israel's Prime Minister, Levi Eshkol, delivered a candid opening statement. Reminiscing upon the past year, he addressed Johnson directly:

Mr. President ... I want to express my appreciation for many things which happened in the first week of June and in the political arena since then. Having met you in 1964, your emphatic stand and principles during 1967 on matters of the most fundamental importance to the existence and security of my country are engraved for all time on the tablets of Jewish memory and indeed world history.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, it had been a year for the books: Israel's spectacular military triumph in the 1967 war was a bolt of lightning that shocked the Middle East.<sup>3</sup> It radically altered the regional dynamics, and consequently, every aspect of the wide-ranging conflict between Israel and the Palestinians grew larger. As Israel more than doubled its territories, the magnitude of the Palestinian exodus expanded significantly. In the Arab world, the defeat was perceived as a civilizational rather than military – as crushing as the loss of Palestine in 1948.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Johnson's priorities realigned as Israel demonstrated its superiority: The small, Jewish nation was not only becoming a reliable partner to the United States, but also a strategic asset against perceived Soviet expansionism in the Middle East. Yet, as the United States took it upon itself to engage in the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, one subject – or rather, a “problem” – was perpetually pushed to the back of the line: The Palestinian refugees.

The Palestinian refugee question has been continuously deprioritized in political and diplomatic processes since the establishment of Israel in 1948. Time and time again, the issue has been dismissed as too complicated to solve, and therefore, postponed in favor of seemingly more urgent matters. When the United Nations (UN) Security Council adopted Resolution 242 in response to the war in November, 1967, it mainly addressed territorial disputes. Although

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<sup>1</sup> “President's Daily Diary Entry,” January 7, 1968, in *President's Daily Diary Collection*. President Lyndon B. Johnson's Secretarial Staff, *LBJ Presidential Library*. Accessed June 15, 2023, <https://www.discoverlbj.org/item/pdd-19680107>.

<sup>2</sup> Doc. 39, “Memorandum of Conversation,” January 7, 1968, U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1964–1968, Volume XX, Arab-Israeli Dispute, 1967–1968*.

<sup>3</sup> Malcolm H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd Al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958–1970*, 3rd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 129.

<sup>4</sup> Fawas A. Gerges, “The Transformation of Arab Politics: Disentangling Myth from Reality,” in *The 1967 War: Origins and Consequences*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis and Avi Shlaim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 289.

the resolution called for a “just settlement of the refugee problem,” it did not include details of such process. The Palestinian refugees were sidelined. Yet, the document established the benchmark for all coming peace efforts.

By its omissions and ambiguity, Resolution 242 affirmed the Israeli state while demonstrating a renewed testimony to the Palestinian dispossession. For this, Israel was indebted to its strategic, yet informal, partner: The United States. By being imperative in the diplomatic process, the United States enabled a final blow to the inclusion of Palestinian refugees in peace efforts. In the extension of such, this thesis argues that the 1967 war and the subsequent diplomatic activity represent a point of no return for the Palestinian refugees. What can explain the official U.S. policy toward the Palestinian refugee issue in the wake of the 1967 war, and why?

## **Methodology and Limitations**

The thesis draws upon official U.S. documents and archival materials retrieved through the archive collection *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS). The series has been published regularly since 1861 and contains the official historical record of U.S. foreign policymaking. FRUS includes documents from numerous foreign affairs agencies, including the Presidential Libraries, Departments of State and Defense, the National Security Council (NSC), and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Although the archived records related to the 1967 war and peacemaking in the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is extensive, this study finds that a consistent trait of such material is the lack of substance on the Palestinian refugee issue. While this deficiency underlines the thesis' argument, it has necessitated the usage of secondary sources and existing scholarly literature to a larger degree than what was envisioned initially. The extensive scholarship on Israel and the Palestinians, as well as on related U.S. policymaking, are explored later in this chapter.

As the study principally handles state-to-state affairs, then, it places itself within the tradition of contemporary international and diplomatic history. Nevertheless, the lack of statehood remains fundamental in the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. By default, the Palestinian refugees transcend a nation state framing and remain non-state actors. In that sense does examination of the topic carry transnational features. This study, however, predominantly discusses state actors, as it were those who carried out the specific policymaking in question.

This thesis attempts to provide a comprehensive analysis of the United States' relationship with Israel and its connections and consequences for the Palestinian refugee issue in 1967 and 1968. The scope of the thesis, however, does not grant an all-encompassing account. Therefore, some clarifications are in order. First, an obvious paradox cannot go unheeded: This study discusses the lack of Palestinian participation in peace efforts while it does not lean on source material from the Palestinians themselves. Yet, the principal focus for this study does not involve the Palestinian refugees themselves, rather, it is restricted to how the United States dealt with the Palestinian refugee issue. In these processes, the Palestinian refugees were not granted a voice.

Yet, it must be noted that historians attempting to discuss the matter using archival records originating with the Palestinians, will encounter significant problems. There exists an asymmetry within the availability of archival resources in the Middle East. While Israel follows the practice of liberal democracies of organization and declassification of official documents,

Arab states do not.<sup>5</sup> Nor does the Palestinians. Their lack of statehood affects any overall organization including the means to maintain such records. In that sense, the lacking access to Arab sources exacerbate any explicit emphasis on the Palestinian historical narrative.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the asymmetry of archives reflects an asymmetry in greater narrative of the conflict between the Palestinians and Israel. The power of such asymmetry will be accentuated in the following subchapter as well as throughout the study in general.

Although other scholars have investigated similar questions related to the treatment of Palestinian refugees, the topic has yet to be thoroughly examined in connection with the 1967 war and with the relationship between Israel and the United States in mind. In that sense, this study sheds light on how the issue was dealt with from the outbreak of war in June 1967 and throughout 1968, specifically the diplomatic processes linked to the adoption of Resolution 242 in November 1967. 1968 is included because during which, official U.S. correspondence suggest that the Palestinian refugees only relegated further on the political agenda despite the pronounced “just settlement” which Resolution 242 called for. Thus, in order to examine the topic in question, this periodization is deemed adequate.

## State of the Art

As the Israeli state was proclaimed and the first Arab-Israeli war shattered the region in 1948, about 750.000 Palestinians were forced to flee their land.<sup>7</sup> Among Palestinians, this collective trauma is recognized as the *Nakba* – the “catastrophe” in Arabic. 19 years later, when another 200.000 to 300.000 Palestinians were forced to flee due to the 1967 war, it represented the *Naksa* – the “setback”.<sup>8</sup> Among Israeli officials, however, the conquest was celebrated as a continuation of their 1948 *War of Independence*, as the Zionist state expanded.

Through a historian’s gaze, it is worthwhile to examine if these events have been studied accordingly, as affiliations and orientations may affect the way in which one interpret the past.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Wm. Roger Louis and Avi Shlaim, “Introduction,” in *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis and Avi Shlaim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Marte Heian-Engdal, “Twenty Years of Crocodile Tears: The International Treatment of the Palestinian Refugee Issue, 1948-1968” (Oslo, Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History, Faculty of Humanities, University of Oslo, 2014), 10.

<sup>7</sup> Eugene L. Rogan, *Araberne: historien om det arabiske folk*, 2. utg., Gyldendal pocket (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2012), 230; Simen Zernichow and Hilde Henriksen Waage, “The Palestine Option: Nixon, the National Security Council, and the Search for a New Policy, 1970\*,” *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 1 (January 1, 2014): 185, <https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dht090>.

<sup>8</sup> Zernichow and Waage, “The Palestine Option,” 185.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, Seventh edition (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2012), 38.

One can indeed argue that differentiating narratives are reflected in the historiography on Israel and the Palestinians. The following pages will outline how a selection of prominent contemporary historians engaged in the modern Middle East have interpreted this topic, as well as its connection to U.S. foreign policy. In doing so, this section will present the field's key scholarship, as it explores the scholarly gap which this thesis seeks to fill. On the topic of Israel and the Palestinians – and their respective relations with the United States – the prominent historians are many. This thesis does not address them all. Rather, the next pages seek to interpret the key historiographical notions at hand.

In that regard, a certain group of revisionist Israeli scholars who emerged in the 1980s are of great importance. Occasionally being referred to as the “new historians” or “post-Zionist historians,” these scholars confronted the official Israeli account of Zionism's origins and of how Israel came to be.<sup>10</sup> Zionism had arisen in Europe in the late 1880s in response to the growing persecution of Jews.<sup>11</sup> While emerging as a national revival movement, it was linked with the colonization of Palestine by the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> However, new grounds were uncovered when official documents were declassified thirty years after the Israeli state was established. The new historians explored this fresh source material and opened a debate on the events of 1948 – as well as the causes and courses of the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>13</sup> A new historiographical current was unleashed. Until this point, the new historians argue, “mainstream” historians had taken the “Jewish right” to Palestine for granted, and merely presented evidence for that belief rather than questioning it.<sup>14</sup> The new historians confronted the one-way narrative. “We challenged the many myths that have come to surround the birth of Israel and the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948,” historian Avi Shlaim explains.<sup>15</sup> Their view of the past is more closely linked with the Palestinian historical narrative, rather than that of Zionism.<sup>16</sup> Historian Ilan Pappé elaborates:

In the historiography, Zionism began as a national awakening in Europe but turned into a colonialist movement when it chose Palestine as its target territory. It is bewildering that such a view had not emerged earlier in the Israeli academy. What else could one call an immigration movement from Europe into the heart of the Arab world at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century?<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ilan Pappé, “Fifty Years Through the Eyes of ‘New Historians’ in Israel,” *Middle East Report*, no. 207 (1998): 14, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3013159>.

<sup>11</sup> Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 11.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Avi Shlaim, *Israel and Palestine: Reappraisals, Revisions, Refutations* (London: Verso, 2009), x.

<sup>14</sup> Pappé, “Fifty Years Through the Eyes of ‘New Historians’ in Israel,” 14.

<sup>15</sup> Avi Shlaim, *Israel and Palestine*, x.

<sup>16</sup> Pappé, “Fifty Years Through the Eyes of ‘New Historians’ in Israel,” 14.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

The overarching aim of the new historians, Pappé continues, was to end the long period in which the Palestinians' history has practically removed from the "Israeli national ethos."<sup>18</sup> The main victims of the clash between the Zionist ideals and the Palestinian reality, Pappé argues, are the "hundreds of thousands of refugees who lost their land and hopes for normal existence as people in their own homeland."<sup>19</sup> Moreover, he asserts that Israel is "exclusively culpable" for the Palestinian refugee issue for which it "bears the legal as well as moral responsibility."<sup>20</sup> Rewriting this history, then, is a way to acknowledge the Palestinians' struggle and legitimizing their historical narrative.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, the new historiography challenged the national collective memory of many Israelis. Historian Haim Gerber argue that this self-critical approach should be extended to the entire Palestinian history.<sup>22</sup> The revisionist trend has largely continued since. The more access historians gain to gradually disclosed archive material, the more there is to contest about Israel's general narrative. Essentially, there are vast grounds to be explored from a historian's perspective.

In addition to leading scholars such as Shlaim and Pappé, the group of emerging new historians also included Benny Morris. In 1988, Morris published a groundbreaking book on the Palestinian refugee issue: *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*. It gained international attention and was pioneering due to its thoroughness and source work. The book remains perhaps the most significant work on the Palestinian refugees to this date. In 2004, Morris again stirred attention through a revised edition: *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*. While it covered new archival material, the new edition included a drastic adjustment in his reasoning of the conflict. Essentially, Morris began to blame the Palestinians, and them alone, for the failure to reach a political settlement in the conflict.<sup>23</sup> On this development, Shlaim writes:

Willingness to re-examine one's thinking is always a commendable trait in a historian. Unfortunately, in Benny's case the re-examination is confined to only one protagonist in the Middle East conflict: the Palestinians. As a consequence, his new version of the recent history of the conflict has more in common with propaganda than with genuine history.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Pappé, "Fifty Years Through the Eyes of 'New Historians' in Israel," 14.

<sup>19</sup> Pappé, 17.

<sup>20</sup> Pappé, *Ten Myths about Israel*, 64.

<sup>21</sup> Pappé, "Fifty Years Through the Eyes of 'New Historians' in Israel," 17.

<sup>22</sup> Haim Gerber, "Zionism, Orientalism, and the Palestinians," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 33, no. 1 (2003): 23, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2003.33.1.23>.

<sup>23</sup> Shlaim, *Israel and Palestine*, x.

<sup>24</sup> Shlaim, *Israel and Palestine*, 361–65.

Pappé and Shlaim have sustained their belief that “Israel bears the primary responsibility for both the persistence and the escalation of the conflict.”<sup>25</sup> While Morris’s scholarship may be contested in that regard, his source work remains solid.

The scholarship of several new historians is drawn upon throughout this study. Especially that of Shlaim: *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences* (2012), which he has edited along with historian Wm. Roger Louis, serves an indispensable cornerstone account of the war.<sup>26</sup> As the authors write, a considerable share of literature on the 1967 war views it from a Western angle. Generally, Western scholars tend to write about the Middle East in terms of international powers rather than of local ones. In their rich volume, Louis and Shlaim express an urge to restore the balance, while acknowledging the role of great powers in “shaping the history and politics of the region.”<sup>27</sup> By paying more attention to local actors, however, they aim to observe the historical event from “the inside looking out,” rather than only from “the outside looking in.”<sup>28</sup> The analysis is of great value to the study at hand. So is Shlaim’s *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (2001), which provides a generous historical framework.<sup>29</sup>

Another important book in the new historiography, which also stirred international attention, is Pappé’s *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (2006). Here, Pappé stresses that the events of 1948 must be recognized as an operation of ethnic cleansing to reconcile Israel and the Palestinians. “As long as the full implications of Israel’s past and present ethnic policies are not recognized and tackled by the international community, there will be no solution,” he writes.<sup>30</sup> While the 1948 expulsion of Palestinians remains the “most formative event in the modern history of the land of Palestine,” according to Pappé, it has since been “systematically denied” – let alone “acknowledged as a crime.”<sup>31</sup> As the Palestinian refugees are at core of the conflict, then, ignoring them undermines any effort to resolve the conflict.<sup>32</sup> Yet, the refugee issue has been consistently excluded. Accordingly, Pappé argues, these past evasions are “the main reason for the collapse of all previous peace accords.”<sup>33</sup> The perspective highlighting the importance of the Palestinian refugee issue in peace efforts is adopted throughout this thesis.

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<sup>25</sup> Shlaim, *Israel and Palestine*, 1.

<sup>26</sup> Wm. Roger Louis and Avi Shlaim, *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences*, Cambridge Middle East Studies (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> Louis and Shlaim, “Introduction,” 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (London: Penguin Books, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, 236–37.

<sup>31</sup> Pappé, xiii.

<sup>32</sup> Pappé, 236–37.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

This is in accordance with both Pappé’s analysis and a larger trend within both historiography and modern discourse on the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.<sup>34</sup>

Historian Rashid Khalidi is regarded as a pioneer within studies on Palestinian identity, which is another dimension of the historiography on the Palestinians and Israel. Additionally, he has written extensively on several other dimensions of the topic, such as the conditions of the Palestinian struggle for statehood as well as the United States’ role in the Arab-Israeli conflict. His 2013 book, *Brokers of Deceit: How the U.S. has Undermined Peace in the Middle East* shares several of the themes of this study, although it touches upon a different time frame.<sup>35</sup> More important, then, is Khalidi’s *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance* (2020).<sup>36</sup> Here, he highlights six key moments – labeled as six “declarations of war” in the Palestinian struggle from 1917 to 2014. In doing so, Khalidi describes the “colonial nature of the hundred years’ war on Palestine” while exposing the “indispensable role of external powers in waging it.”<sup>37</sup> Throughout his innovative volume, Khalidi argues that one cannot overlook the “formidable international and imperial forces” arranged against the Palestinians. His aim, then, is to reflect their “remarkable resilience” and recover parts of what has been “airbrushed out of the history by those who control all of historic Palestine and the narrative surrounding it.”<sup>38</sup>

In terms of historical works of reference, the highly influential *The Arabs: A History* (2009) by historian Eugene Rogan cannot go unheeded.<sup>39</sup> Here, Rogan delves into five centuries of Arab history, tracing them elegantly together until modern time. The book has emerged as a landmark study within modern history writing on the Middle East and represents a significant frame of reference for any historian engaged in the topic. As for the global Cold War, historian Odd Arne Westad’s *The Cold War: A World History* (2017) has a comparable purpose. It is a brilliant book which this study leans on in its discussion of the larger Cold War. Additionally, the works of eminent diplomatic scholar William B. Quandt, who also dealt with the Arab-Israeli conflict on the U.S. National Security Council Staff in the 1970s, are deemed relevant.

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<sup>34</sup> For instance, on February 25, 2014, Filippo Grandi, Commissioner General of the United Nations Work and Relief Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), stated that a “just solution” to the Palestinian refugee issue is “crucial” to build a stable Middle East. This was during a lecture on the U.S. University in Beirut, which can be found in its entirety here: <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/crossroads-crisis-yarmouk-syria-and-palestine-refugee-predicament>

<sup>35</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit: How the US Has Undermined Peace in the Middle East* (Boston, Mass: Beacon, 2013).

<sup>36</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance* (London: Profile Books Ltd., 2020).

<sup>37</sup> Khalidi, 14.

<sup>38</sup> Khalidi, 15.

<sup>39</sup> Rogan, *Araberne*.



His contributions through the volume *Peace Process: U.S. Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli conflict Since 1967* (1993) are of great value to this thesis' discussions on Washington policymaking.

In general, the scholarship on Israel and the Palestinians is diverse and multidisciplinary. Among the pioneers outside of the history discipline, is political scientist Naseer Aruri. He has researched U.S. relations with both Israel and the Palestinians. Within his scholarship, much emphasis is placed on the 1990s peace efforts in which the United States acted as a mediator. From this, Aruri makes an important argument: "A striking feature of United States policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict since the 1967 occupation," he writes, "was the insistence by the U.S. on playing the role of chief arbiter, if not sole peacemaker, when in fact it has been co-belligerent."<sup>40</sup> On that note, *Perceptions of Palestine: Their Influence on U.S. Middle East Policy* (1999) by political analyst Kathleen Christison is also noteworthy.<sup>41</sup> Although not a historian by discipline, Christison succeeds in presenting a detailed outline of the unique U.S.-Israeli relationship by tracing the U.S. presidencies throughout the twentieth century. The result is a highly relevant analysis of which implications this relationship has had on how the Palestinians are perceived within the U.S. public opinion.

However, one of the most significant scholars on Israel and the Palestinians, regardless of discipline, is the late intellectual pioneer Edward Said. Although primarily a scholar of comparative literature, Said's legacy transcends numerous academic disciplines. Shlaim portrays Said as an "extraordinarily versatile and prolific scholar," and "the most eloquent spokesman on behalf of the dispossessed Palestinian people."<sup>42</sup> Most influential is Said's groundbreaking study *Orientalism* (1978). Here, he traces the history and nature of Western attitudes toward "the Orient," while exposing the ideological biases these perceptions entail.<sup>43</sup> Said argues that the West deals with the Orient by "making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it" – virtually dominating it.<sup>44</sup> Orientalism, then, encompasses a certain political vision which promotes the distinction between "the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them")."<sup>45</sup> enables writers, philosophers, and policymakers to deal with an otherness when it comes to

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<sup>40</sup> Aruri, *The Obstruction of Peace*, 19.

<sup>41</sup> Kathleen Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine: Their Influence on U.S. Middle East Policy* (Berkeley: University of California press, 1999).

<sup>42</sup> Shlaim, *Israel and Palestine*, 343.

<sup>43</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin Modern Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2003); Shlaim, *Israel and Palestine*, 343.

<sup>44</sup> Said, 3.

<sup>45</sup> Said, 43.

Eastern beliefs, customs and cultures. Christison connects the orientalist gaze with U.S. perceptions of the Palestinians since Israel's establishment as the following:

To the extent that (...) policymakers in the United States thought about the Palestine situation at all, it was within an orientalist framework in which Palestine stood forth as a holy and biblical land destined by divine writ for reclamation by Christians and Jews and in which the native Arab inhabitants were unimportant. (...) Within this framework, Arabs, simply put, did not fit.<sup>46</sup>

Nevertheless, Khalidi stresses that Said has done more than any others to establish an idea of “basic humanity” of the Palestinians among U.S.s.<sup>47</sup> Said's scholarship was also of great influence on the new historians within Israeli academia. His reveal of Western perceptions, Pappé concludes, was applicable to the wave of new scholars as they were driven “to view the ideological leanings of their predecessors with suspicion.”<sup>48</sup> Essentially, Said's work has influenced scholarship interested in the Middle East across disciplines while encouraging an open-mindedness toward the Palestinian historiographical narrative.<sup>49</sup> As shown in this thesis, however, the Zionist narrative gained more traction in U.S. policymaking.

Henceforth, where does the Palestinian refugee issue place itself in the extensive historiography at hand? Scholars contend that the question remains the most difficult and complex one within the dispute between Israel and the Palestinians.<sup>50</sup> Yet, within academic works on the conflict and the peace efforts connected to it, the refugee issue has not been studied correspondingly as such.<sup>51</sup> Rather, the issue has mainly been observed as one of many. Broad accounts on a larger context do not necessarily grant analytical continuity on themes as specific as the Palestinian refugee issue. Yet, this flaw in historiography on the Palestinians and Israel is gradually shrinking. Significant in placing the Palestinian refugees in focus, is the scholarship of historian Marte Heian-Engdal. In her 2021 volume, *Palestinian Refugees after 1968: The Failure of International Diplomacy* (which is based on her 2014 doctoral thesis), she provides a remarkably rich study on the international treatment of Palestinian refugees from 1948 to

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<sup>46</sup> Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*, 25.

<sup>47</sup> Rashid I. Khalidi, “Edward W. Said and the American Public Sphere: Speaking Truth to Power,” *Boundary 2* 25, no. 2 (1998): 162, <https://doi.org/10.2307/303619>.

<sup>48</sup> Ilan Pappé, “Introduction: New Historiographical Orientation in the Research on the Palestine Question,” in *The Israel/Palestine Question: A Reader*, ed. Ilan Pappé (London: Routledge, 2007), 4.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Jørgen Jensenhaugen, *En kort introduksjon til Israel-Palestina-konflikten*, 1. utgave., En kort introduksjon.. (Oslo: Cappelen Damm akademisk, 2022), 153.

<sup>51</sup> Heian-Engdal, “Twenty Years of Crocodile Tears,” 31.

1967.<sup>52</sup> This thesis aims to resume this purpose, although it focuses on the United States and deals with a significantly shorter time frame.

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<sup>52</sup> Marte Heian-Engdal, *Palestinian Refugees after 1948: The Failure of International Diplomacy* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2021).

## II: The Emerging “Problem”

In 1948, Dean Rusk, director of the UN Affairs office at the time and later Secretary of State under Kennedy and Johnson, concluded that the Palestinian refugee problem constituted the “key to war and peace in the Middle East.”<sup>53</sup> As the Cold War progressed, U.S. policymakers observed the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees across the Middle East as a potential hotbed for communism.<sup>54</sup> In this important geopolitical region, such a potential outcome – and the destabilizing ripple effects it could cause – would be crushing, according to Washington in the late 1940s. The refugee issue was viewed as an integral part of the pending Arab-Israeli peace process, even if the presidents’ genuine concerns and motives can be questioned in retrospect. However, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the Palestinian refugee problem rapidly relegated further and further on the U.S. political agenda in the Middle East. The contrast is striking. What caused this shifting stance?

This chapter outlines the context and surroundings in which the Palestine refugee problem was treated by the United States government prior to the 1967 war.<sup>55</sup> Its initial paragraphs will grant a swift elaboration on the first year following the Nakba, as it was rather unique – in contrast to the succeeding decades – in terms of how the Palestinian refugee problem was interpreted.

### **Palestinian Refugees in the *Nakba* Aftermath**

When the Palestine Conciliation Commission (PCC) was established by UN Resolution 194 in late 1948, it was meant to primarily focus on nonmilitary subjects, such as the refugee problem and the future status of Jerusalem.<sup>56</sup> The issue of armistice and of what were meant to be temporary borders, on the other hand, were settled through the 1949 Rhodes Negotiations – from which the refugee issue was completely left out.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, Waage suggests that the Rhodes

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<sup>53</sup> Heian-Engdal, *Palestinian Refugees after 1948*, 11.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> For a comprehensive study of the international community’s treatment of Palestinian refugees from 1948 to 1967, see Marte Heian-Engdal’s book *Palestinian Refugees after 1948: The Failure of International Diplomacy* (2021).

<sup>56</sup> Heian-Engdal, *Palestinian Refugees after 1948*, 17.

<sup>57</sup> After the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948, UN Mediator and U.S. diplomat Ralph Bunche negotiated this armistice agreement between Israel and Egypt on the Island of Rhodes in 1949; Heian-Engdal, *Palestinian Refugees after 1948*, 17; Hilde Henriksen Waage, “The Winner Takes All: The 1949 Island of Rhodes Armistice Negotiations Revisited,” *The Middle East Journal* 65, no. 2 (2011): 24, <https://doi.org/10.3751/65.2.15>.

Negotiations represent the first of many agreements predominantly based on Israel's premises, who preferred to lead the conversation in other directions than to the refugee issue.<sup>58</sup>

For Israeli leadership, the solution was clear: Resettlement of Palestinian refugees in neighboring Arab countries, because their return to Israel was out of the question.<sup>59</sup> In the PCC discussions, however, Arab leaders called for total repatriation for Palestinian refugees. Not only was it a demand, but it was also considered an essential condition for *any* further negotiations with Israel on unresolved issues, including that of borders.<sup>60</sup> The tension between the two factions of repatriation and resettlement dominated subsequent coming international efforts to approach the problem. The gap widened as the fronts stiffened over the years: While Israel demanded *full* resettlement, the Arab states called for *full* repatriation.<sup>61</sup>

At the same time, the refugee problem created tension in the Israeli-U.S. relationship. So did the Jerusalem issue. As Israel sought UN membership in 1949, PCC eyed an option for leverage: The international community controlled something Israel desired, meanwhile, the PCC wanted to encourage the United States to develop a tougher position toward Israel, especially on refugees.<sup>62</sup> However, Abba Eban, Israeli representative to UN at the time, hoped that concessions on Jerusalem would evade the need to concede on the refugee issue.<sup>63</sup> In short, progress on Jerusalem appeared more vital, or at least more attainable, as U.S. diplomats came to understand that they could not “get Israel to move on both issues.”<sup>64</sup> Hence, Israel was essentially able to sustain its position, which implied that any alteration would only come as a natural consequence of a more general peace agreement – if even then. The Arab states, on the other hand, maintained that the refugee problem had to be settled *before* possibly proceeding to other peace agreements.<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, the Israeli government worked decisively to establish new facts on the ground by expelling more and more Palestinians from the new state. The expulsion further constrained the prospects of the Palestinians' pending return, which became increasingly difficult to imagine.<sup>66</sup>

The overall framing of the Palestinian refugee problem was radically altered as a new decade commenced after the *Nakba*. The international community, including the United States, largely perceived the refugee issue as a matter of politics from 1948 through 1949: The return

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<sup>58</sup> Waage, “The Winner Takes All,” 27.

<sup>59</sup> Heian-Engdal, *Palestinian Refugees after 1948*, 18.

<sup>60</sup> Heian-Engdal, 19.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Heian-Engdal, 21.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Heian-Engdal, 23–24.

<sup>65</sup> Heian-Engdal, 26.

<sup>66</sup> Heian-Engdal, 34.

principle was held high, and the idea of repatriation was largely sympathized with. However, the approach became gradually more humanitarian in essence. “The efforts that were undertaken sought to dissolve – rather than solve – the Palestinian refugee problem,” writes Heian-Engdal.<sup>67</sup> The establishment of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in late 1949 served as the materialization of this pivotal shift of treating the issue humanitarily rather than politically, she further notes. Thereby, Heian-Engdal concludes, the call for refugee repatriation changed significantly in this one year: First from the discussion of substantial to limited repatriation, and then to a nearly complete focus on large-scale settlement and development structures.<sup>68</sup> From then on, the Palestinian refugees were firmly wiped out of the equation, despite later U.S.-initiated concepts such as the Alpha Plan and the Johnson Project.<sup>69</sup> In essence, the lack of consideration for Palestinian refugees was becoming a consistent trait of U.S. Middle Eastern policy.

### **The Post-War Pillars of U.S. Policy in the Middle East**

It is essential to establish the larger context in which the United States behaved in the region within the timeframe at hand, namely 1967 to 1968. In doing so, this thesis recognizes three continuous post-war features of the United States’ foreign policy in the Middle East: supporting Israel, securing oil, and containing the Soviet Union. While seemingly different, these traits are somewhat intertwined. In general, the Cold War remained the most prominent trait in U.S. foreign policy throughout its duration, which naturally also greatly influenced the Middle East. As Westad adequately puts it: “For Soviets and U.S.s, the Middle East was a maelstrom that threatened to pull them in toward its vortex, driven by forces they firmly believed they had an interest in, but still always found hard to gauge.”<sup>70</sup>

Washington did not only fear the spread of communism. U.S. leadership was also concerned that the Soviet Union would gain control of raw materials which the United States and its allies depended on for economic prosperity.<sup>71</sup> Resource politics influenced the Cold War dynamics greatly, and both parties strived for absolute control. This meant that anything that furthered the enemy’s influence over vital resources, strategically or economically, posed a core

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<sup>67</sup> Heian-Engdal, *Palestinian Refugees after 1948*, 34.

<sup>68</sup> Heian-Engdal, 35.

<sup>69</sup> For further consideration of the Alpha Plan and the Johnson Project, see chapter 3–5 in Heian-Engdal’s book, *Palestinian Refugees After 1948* (2021).

<sup>70</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (London: Allen Lane, 2017), 449.

<sup>71</sup> Westad, 267.

challenge.<sup>72</sup> While the included access to metals essential to the military industry, the most important strategic resource during the Cold War remained oil.<sup>73</sup>

Oil rose from being a minor source of energy to becoming integral for modern states by the mid-twentieth century. The Western European dependence on oil for energy consumption went from less than ten percent in 1945 to over a third in 1960 – and already by 1950, eighty-five percent of oil imports came from the Middle East.<sup>74</sup> Hence, many of the United States’ allies depended on a reliable access to foreign oil. Moscow knew this and did not compete for its own sake – the Soviet Union was already self-sufficient by 1954. Despite this, Moscow still sought increased influence over Middle East oil, as it emerged as a major strategic asset. Not only so: The largest oil producers of the region – Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states – were all countries which the British imperial power had controlled up until then.<sup>75</sup> The United States did not want to lose the West’s control to the communists in the East, thus, securing vital oil supplies and maintaining Western presence was critical.<sup>76</sup>

In terms of Western presence, the Israeli state surfaced at a convenient time as seen from Washington. Its establishment in 1948 had introduced “Western modernity” to the Middle East, which together with its strategic location, made Israel a suitable ally amid the greater Cold War context.<sup>77</sup> Among the U.S. public, the land of Israel also appeared as a refuge for Jews fleeing the Holocaust. Not only so: The mere establishment of it signified a biblical prophecy. Many U.S. Christians and Jews connected Zionism’s ideological origins with what the Bible proclaimed for Palestine – namely, an eternal, ancestral, God-given Jewish homeland. This provided modern political Zionism with an integral religious timbre which Zionists gladly adorned themselves with. As Khalidi rhetorically asks: “For how could Jews be ‘colonizing’ the land where their religion began?”<sup>78</sup> Consequently, Khalidi claims that a certain blindness toward the issue itself has surfaced:

The conflict is portrayed as, at best, a straight-forward, if tragic, national clash between two peoples with rights in the same land. At worst, it is described as the result of the fanatical, inveterate hatred of Arabs and Muslims for the Jewish people as they assert their inalienable right to their eternal, God-given homeland.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Westad, *The Cold War*, 267.

<sup>73</sup> Westad, 267–68.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Westad, 450.

<sup>77</sup> Westad, 451.

<sup>78</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine*, 9.

<sup>79</sup> Khalidi, 9.

Making this connection is important to understand the way in which Israel and Palestine have been – and still are being – perceived by a large portion of the U.S. public. Zionist leaders sealed the issue of Palestinian land as a merely religious matter – and the United States arguably took the bait. To many U.S.s, Israel became a soft spot, even a cause close to the heart. This was something that Zionist leaders benefited would come to benefit greatly from. Because within this larger context, there was little room left for the Palestinian cause, to say the least, both within the U.S. public opinion and in the White House. This would become increasingly clear when it came to the Palestinian refugees.

### **No Room for Palestinians: Zionism’s Colonial Project**

Although Zionism entails very particular characteristics, it shares several elements with European colonial projects. Since its 19<sup>th</sup> century establishment, Zionism’s body of thought has leaned on the premise that Jewish immigration to Palestine would benefit its indigenous inhabitants.<sup>80</sup> Thereby, as Khalidi points out, founder Theodor Herzl employed the same justification and argumentation as colonialists “at all times and in all places” – with the “smug self-assurance so common to nineteenth-century Europeans.”<sup>81</sup> He continues:

This condescending attitude toward the intelligence, not to speak of the rights, of the Arab population of Palestine was to be serially repeated by Zionist, British, European and U.S. leaders in the decades that followed, down to the present day. As for the Jewish state that was ultimately created by the movement Herzl founded . . . , there was to be room there for only one people, the Jewish people: other would indeed be “spirited away,” or at best be tolerated.<sup>82</sup>

From the Zionist point of view, as Pappé notes, the land of Palestine was occupied by “strangers” – meaning non-Jewish people who had inhabited the land since the Roman period – and these had to be removed.<sup>83</sup> Certainly, the land appeared “empty”: To Zionists, the native Palestinians, as well as their individual rights, were invisible. This tone is broadly replicated to this day, and it remains evident in much of the discourse on the Palestinians in both Israel and the West – particularly in the United States.<sup>84</sup> Here, the Zionist attitude describing Palestine as “a land without people for a people without a land” has gained traction, both in political life

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<sup>80</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine*, 6.

<sup>81</sup> Khalidi, 6–9.

<sup>82</sup> Khalidi, 6–7.

<sup>83</sup> Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, 11.

<sup>84</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine*, 10.



and popular culture. This notion continues to portray Palestinians as non-existent – or at least non-deserving of the country that they allegedly neglected.<sup>85</sup>

Pappé argues that while Zionism secularized and nationalized Judaism, Zionist thinkers declared Palestine as a biblical territory on their quest to an exclusively Jewish state. “Neither rocks nor Palestinians” were to hinder the desired Zionist “redemption” of land.<sup>86</sup> Accordingly, Khalidi argues that Palestine’s modern history is best understood as a colonial war which forced the indigenous population to surrender their homeland against their will.<sup>87</sup> Ultimately, he suggests that the colonial nature of the Palestinian case has been generally underappreciated.

Instead, when colonialism took on a “bad odor” in the post-war period, Israel’s colonial origins were conveniently whitewashed and rebranded in the West, Khalidi notes.<sup>88</sup> Since then and until today, the Palestinian case is very rarely described in colonial terms, which arguably affects policymaking on the issue. “To some degree,” Khalidi writes, “every US administration since Harry Truman’s has been staffed by people making policy on Palestine whose views indicate that they believe Palestinians, whether or not they exist, are lesser beings than Israelis.”<sup>89</sup>

## **The Presidents and the “Problem”**

The Arab-Israeli conflict arguably competed for top priority on the United States’ foreign policy agenda more than any other regional conflict.<sup>90</sup> Besides, Quandt argues that it “without a doubt” has been tangled up in domestic U.S. politics.<sup>91</sup> Evidently, many senators and representatives undertake their positions on the conflict merely as part of their domestic reelection strategy. Moreover, Israel usually enjoys deep support in Congress, where pro-Israeli lobbies mainly channel their efforts. In sum, Israel exerts great influence over the arena in which U.S. foreign policy budgets are decided upon.<sup>92</sup> These factors contribute to the position Israel holds in both U.S. politics and within the public opinion.

Nonetheless, Quandt argues, the most significant factor of U.S. engagement in the conflict remains the president and his closest advisors. Quandt writes that one must even

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<sup>85</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine*, 11.

<sup>86</sup> Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, 11.

<sup>87</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine*, 9.

<sup>88</sup> Khalidi, 13–14.

<sup>89</sup> Khalidi, 12.

<sup>90</sup> William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967*, 3rd ed. (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), 7.

<sup>91</sup> Quandt, 8.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

consider the four-year cycle of presidential elections into the equation – which to some extent impose a four-year cycle of policymaking processes as well:

One should hardly be surprised to find that every four years the issue of moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem reemerges, arms sales to Arab countries are deferred, and presidential contenders emphasize those parts of their programs that are most congenial to the supporters of Israel. Nor should one be surprised to find that once the election is over, policy returns to a more overhanded course.<sup>93</sup>

Yet, it is safe to say that a generally strong support of Israel remains an obvious part of that “overhanded course.” President Harry S. Truman (1945-53) earned the nickname “Israel’s midwife” when he extended a de facto recognition of Israel eleven minutes after Israel declared statehood on 14 May 1948.<sup>94</sup> Truman’s fundamental support set the tone for the US-Israeli relationship in decades to come. Indeed, Christison argues that through the succeeding three presidencies, a whole generation of policymakers came of age not knowing, and not deeming it necessary, to understand the Palestinian cause.<sup>95</sup>

At the center of Dwight D. Eisenhower’s presidency (1953-61) was the Cold War and containment of Soviet influence. He was dazzled to discover that Arab states disliked Zionism more than Communism, and his pressure toward Israel during the Suez war was exceptional in the line of Zionist friendly presidents.<sup>96</sup>

Eisenhower’s successor John F. Kennedy (1961-63) stood out in a different regard: When he came to power, a hope for an U.S.-led effort to resolve the refugee problem was sparked at the U.S. State Department – although it can be noted that even then, the administration talked around the refugees themselves.<sup>97</sup> However, Kennedy’s aspirations to seriously carry out such an idea always came second or third to other U.S. interests in the region.<sup>98</sup> Conversely, US-Israeli relations continued to grow closer under Kennedy. He was the one to coin the term “special relationship” and was the first president to sell arms to Israel.<sup>99</sup>

When Kennedy was assassinated and Lyndon B. Johnson took office, he assured Israel: “You have lost a great friend, but you have found a better one.”<sup>100</sup> This phrase certainly reflected his attitudes toward the conflict during his presidency from 1963 to 1969. “If

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Jørgen Jensehaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter: The U.S., Israel and the Palestinians*, Library of Modern Middle East Studies (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 14.

<sup>95</sup> Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*, 95.

<sup>96</sup> Jensehaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter*, 14.

<sup>97</sup> Heian-Engdal, *Palestinian Refugees after 1948*, 74; Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*, 105.

<sup>98</sup> Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*, 105.

<sup>99</sup> Jensehaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter*, 14; Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*, 107.

<sup>100</sup> Jensehaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter*, 15.

Johnson's predecessors had shaped a policymaking frame of reference in which Israel was increasingly important and the Palestinians played no part at all," Christison writes, "Johnson cast that frame of reference in concrete," – noting that Johnson "never even made a show of addressing the refugee problem."<sup>101</sup> Consequently, Kennedy's exit and Johnson's entry marked the end of U.S. attention – although it had been modest – devoted to solving the Palestinian refugee problem.<sup>102</sup> Kennedy turned out to be the last U.S. president who actively sought a solution for the Palestinian refugees – who remained "a problem, not a people."<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*, 109.

<sup>102</sup> Heian-Engdal, *Palestinian Refugees after 1948*, 121.

<sup>103</sup> Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*, 106; Jensehaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter*, 15.

### III: The watersheds of 1967

President Johnson inherited a volatile global puzzle from Kennedy. On top of his list was continuous containment of Soviet influence and the attempt to soothe the disastrous ramifications of the U.S. intervention in Vietnam. Essentially, Washington had little attention left to devote to the Middle East, and even less to the Palestinian refugees. Johnson spent little time and political capital on Middle East peacekeeping at all, but more important than any bias, was the fact that the region unquestionably came second to the chaos in South-East Asia.<sup>104</sup> Hence, Johnson did not substantially approach the Arab-Israeli conflict until he was forced to in 1967. When war erupted, however, the U.S. position was ambiguous. Nevertheless, the 1967 war radically altered the Middle East in more ways than one. This chapter outlines Washington's stance toward the 1967 war, while elaborating on its main consequences.

#### **Johnson and the Palestinians**

Regarding Israel, Johnson could not overlook the vigilant domestic dilemma in which the Jewish U.S. opinion ought to be considered – especially as he aimed for re-election in 1964. Johnson was prepared to follow Kennedy's line on supporting Israel, particularly in military terms.<sup>105</sup> Subsequently, the Israeli-U.S. "special relationship" progressed to higher levels throughout his presidency. Not only so: Johnson personally admired Israel.<sup>106</sup> This did not mean he was principally hostile toward Palestinians, but generally, he had little sympathy for their cause.<sup>107</sup> However, Johnson did not welcome Arab nationalism out of fear that the Soviet Union would exploit it to limit Western influence in the region.<sup>108</sup>

If Johnson was to consider the Palestinians at all, it was as potential communists. As his predecessors, Johnson saw them mainly as a security threat amidst the larger Cold War logic. Consequently, he deemed the rise of a Palestinian national movement as a radical product of the Cold War and part of surging global communism. Yet, the 1964 establishment of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) grew out of regional developments. Indeed, it happened within the larger notion of pan-Arabism, which incorporated Palestinian liberation as

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<sup>104</sup> Heian-Engdal, *Palestinian Refugees after 1948*, 121; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 24.

<sup>105</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, 23.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Quandt, 23; Louis and Shlaim, "Introduction," 15.

<sup>108</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, 23–24.

a common denominator.<sup>109</sup> Supporting the Palestinian cause was vital to gain credibility among the Arab public, but Arab leaders, such as Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, did not want the PLO to form a fully politically independent body.<sup>110</sup> Therefore, Nasser ensured that the PLO was established largely under the supervision of Egypt and the Arab League. This resonated with a more than decade-long continuity in Arab politics: Arab regimes tended to exploit the Palestinian cause in their own rivalries.<sup>111</sup> Consequently, the United States regarded the movement as an Egyptian puppet and, thus – due to Soviet's backing of Nasser – a communist puppet.<sup>112</sup> This enabled Washington to initially ignore the PLO. In fact, in March 1965, Dean Rusk, then Secretary of State under Johnson, declared that the U.S. government did not recognize PLO as an official representative of the Palestinian people. The PLO had no “official status whatever” and its statements were “almost invariably hostile to the United States” because of the continuous U.S. support of Israel.<sup>113</sup> This view reflected the official U.S. attitude towards the PLO until well into the 1970s.<sup>114</sup> As Jensehaugen aptly sums up, the way in which both Arab and U.S. leaders viewed the Palestinians resonated with Karl Marx' general verdict of the colonized: “They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.”<sup>115</sup>

The years leading up to the 1967 war, however, would reflect a change of dynamic within Arab politics: As the PLO gained momentum, the Arab states were forced to consider it as an independent actor on the intra-Arab stage.<sup>116</sup> When the war ultimately erupted on June 5, 1967, it revealed Arab leaders' lack of cooperativeness – serving as yet another illustration of the “perennial predicament” of how these regimes kept getting in one another's way.<sup>117</sup>

## Six Days of War

Historians have established that the 1967 war was the result of a “crisis slide” out of control, rather than any deliberate planning by the parties.<sup>118</sup> In this equation, the United States' position was ambiguous. Also here did Vietnam put domestic restraints on the State department, as

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<sup>109</sup> Jensehaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter*, 15.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Heian-Engdal, *Palestinian Refugees after 1948*, 122.

<sup>112</sup> Jensehaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter*, 15.

<sup>113</sup> Doc. 199, “Circular Airgram from the Department of State to Certain Posts,” March 30, 1965, U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1964–1968*, Volume XVIII, *Arab-Israeli Dispute, 1964–1967*.

<sup>114</sup> Zernichow and Waage, “The Palestine Option,” 186.

<sup>115</sup> Jensehaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter*, 15.

<sup>116</sup> Heian-Engdal, *Palestinian Refugees after 1948*, 122.

<sup>117</sup> Louis and Shlaim, “Introduction,” 8; Heian-Engdal, *Palestinian Refugees after 1948*, 122.

<sup>118</sup> Louis and Shlaim, “Introduction,” 6; Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, 236.

Johnson could not afford to be dragged into another war.<sup>119</sup> He stressed that a new war in the Middle East had to be prevented, but still, the signals from Washington were mixed. Quandt highlights a letter to Prime Minister Eshkol on June 3, in which Johnson urged firm and calm steps toward “a satisfactory solution.”<sup>120</sup> At the same time, however, Johnson assured his commitment to Israel’s “territory integrity” and wrote that he would “provide as effective U.S. support as possible” to maintain “the peace and freedom” of Israel.<sup>121</sup> Eshkol replied on June 5, the same day Israel launched its strike, and wrote that “Israel’s existence and integrity have been endangered.”<sup>122</sup> Thereby, he arguably echoed the message and wording of Johnson’s letter two days before. In Johnson’s letter, Quandt argues, the president insinuated that a “yellow light” was given from the United States.<sup>123</sup> Like most motorists, however, Israel regarded the yellow light as a green one.

Therefore, it can be argued that the United States enabled the outbreak of war by tacitly giving Israel a free hand to respond to the alleged Egyptian challenge as it deemed fit. Johnson did not attempt to curb the outbreak of war, and ultimately, Israel could not have gone to war without the implicit support from its superpower ally – even though the 1967 war developed from regional rivalries.<sup>124</sup> As Quandt subsequently notes, U.S. policy toward the Middle East was about to be drastically overhauled – as the conflict Washington had tried to put in the “icebox” for the last decade could no longer be “so casually ignored.”<sup>125</sup> The 1967 war irrevocably revealed Johnson’s loyalty to Israel and set the maturing U.S.-Israeli alliance in concrete. Thereby, the United States was adorned with a new and firm position in the Middle East.

When the dust settled on June 10, Israel enjoyed an absolute and unparalleled victory against Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. The Arab states suffered an equally crushing defeat, both militarily and morally. Nasser termed the war *al-Naksa*, translating to “the setback” from Arabic. Its result was shattering: Major parts of the Arab armies had been utterly wiped out – in only six days. The Egyptian Sinai Peninsula, the Syrian Golan Heights, and the Palestinian (but Jordanian-controlled) Gaza strip and West Bank, including East Jerusalem, had succumbed to Israeli occupation – in only six days.<sup>126</sup> With deliberate reference to the six days of the

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<sup>119</sup> Louis and Shlaim, “Introduction,” 8.

<sup>120</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, 41.

<sup>121</sup> Doc. 139, “Letter From President Johnson to Prime Minister Eshkol,” June 3, 1967, *FRUS*.

<sup>122</sup> Doc. 158, “Telegram From the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State,” June 5, 1967, *FRUS*.

<sup>123</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, 41.

<sup>124</sup> Louis and Shlaim, “Introduction,” 8.

<sup>125</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, 41.

<sup>126</sup> Rogan, *Araberne*, 392–93.

Creation in the book of Genesis, Moshe Dayan, Israel's then Defense Minister, swiftly and effectively branded the overwhelming triumph as *the Six Day War*.<sup>127</sup>

The West Bank and Gaza were welcomed additions to Israeli territory. The only problem, however, was the large numbers of Palestinian living there: "We won the war and received a nice dowry of territory, but it came with a bride whom we don't like," said Israeli prime minister Levi Eshkol a month later.<sup>128</sup> This phrase was later reiterated in various forms, and reflected a subsequent twin ambition of the post-1967 War Israel: The desire to keep as much of its newly seized territories as possible, while dodging the so-called "demographic danger" by restricting the number of Palestinians inhabitants.<sup>129</sup>

The substantial territorial expansion more than doubled the territory Israel originally was allocated through the 1947 partition plan. Not only so: It defied the 1949 armistice borders.<sup>130</sup> Essentially, several lines were redrawn in the wake of the 1967 war. It only lasted six days, but the war's shadows continue to obscure the larger conflict to this day. It was a watershed moment in more ways than one.

## **The Crucial Consequences**

Since the establishment of Israel, Arab states had shared an ideal of unity and a common enemy. Israel was the singular issue on which all Arab states usually agreed, regardless of other disputes. This opposition is rooted in the belief that all Arabs across state lines make up a shared nation, Heian-Engdal notes, and by its existence, Israel violates this nation's rights.<sup>131</sup> As the military balance shifted in Israel's favor in 1967, however, pan-Arabism experienced a shattering demise.<sup>132</sup> In retrospect, one may argue change was imminent as several states were gradually forced to adapt to their (no longer so) new neighbor.

Subsequently, Louis and Shlaim argues that intra-Arab politics are characterized more by conflict than by cooperation: While the idea of unity may have been maintained rhetorically, the question of how to deal with Israel in their respective operational terms gradually emerged

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<sup>127</sup> Avi Shlaim, "Israel: Poor Little Samson," in *The 1967 War: Origins and Consequences*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis and Avi Shlaim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 22.

<sup>128</sup> Avi Raz, *The Bride and the Dowry: Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinians in the Aftermath of the June 1967 War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 39.

<sup>129</sup> Raz, 39; Heian-Engdal, *Palestinian Refugees after 1948*, 123.

<sup>130</sup> Heian-Engdal, *Palestinian Refugees after 1948*, 123.

<sup>131</sup> Louis and Shlaim, "Introduction," 4–5.

<sup>132</sup> Louis and Shlaim, 2.

as a major source of friction in inter-Arab relations.<sup>133</sup> This was reiterated through the 1967 failure. Although the Palestinian question remained at heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict, a fundamental dimension of it changed: The involvement of Arab states in the conflict was now aimed at recovering the territories lost to Israel during the war – and not primarily about supporting the Palestinians.<sup>134</sup> Therefore, the 1967 war altered the way in which Arab states behaved in the struggle against Israel. Consequently, the Arab-Israeli conflict would proceed on two levels: The interstate conflict between Israel and the neighboring Arab states, as well as an intercommunal conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.<sup>135</sup>

In this vacuum, the emerging Palestinian entity truly entered the stage. Initially, many Palestinians had considered pan-Arabism as part of their imminent structure for liberation. However, the 1967 war revealed that Arab armies could not recover the land of Palestine.<sup>136</sup> It proved that pan-Arabism was not the answer, rather, the Palestinians had to take matter into their own hands.<sup>137</sup> The Palestinians managed to utilize the power momentum exposed by the shattering Arab defeat as it shifted some power back to themselves.<sup>138</sup>

Historian Paul Thomas Chamberlin has argued that in hindsight, the Johnson administration witnessed a breakpoint moment in regional affairs as the PLO arose, however blind it was at the time.<sup>139</sup> Nevertheless, shortly after the war, an U.S. diplomat seemed “genuinely surprised” when urged to recognize the Palestinians as a representative for their own cause and a necessary participator in peace settlements.<sup>140</sup> The idea that it would be impossible to gain peace without including the Palestinians, however, did not reach the White House until a decade later. In the late 1960s, Washington still regarded the Palestinians merely as refugees, which largely seemed invisible and in lack of a political role.<sup>141</sup> In this depiction, there was no room for Palestinian nationalism.<sup>142</sup> Yet, the dreaded Palestinian entity consolidated on Johnson’s watch.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Louis and Shlaim, “Introduction,” 5.

<sup>134</sup> Raz, *The Bride and the Dowry*, 14.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Jensehaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter*, 15–18.

<sup>137</sup> For more on the developments of Palestine and pan-Arabism, including the rise of Fatah, see chapter 2 in Jensehaugen’s *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter* (2018).

<sup>138</sup> Heian-Engdal, *Palestinian Refugees after 1948*, 121.

<sup>139</sup> Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive. The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 38.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Jensehaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter*, 20.

<sup>142</sup> Jensehaugen, 19.

<sup>143</sup> Heian-Engdal, *Palestinian Refugees after 1948*, 121.



While the president was looking the other way, the Palestinians were about to forcibly change the way in which the United States saw them. The PLO increasingly generated problems for both Israel and Arab states.<sup>144</sup> This proved challenging for the United States as potential formal encounters with the Palestinians could jeopardize Washington's influence and relations with its main allies in the region. This was first and foremost Israel, which depended on military control of the land seized both in 1948 and 1967, but also Jordan, which had become an appreciated pro-Western ally.<sup>145</sup> Its head of state, King Hussein, had long ago taken upon a role as a sole representative of the large Palestinian population both in Jordan and on the West Bank. He did not wish to face the reality of his position being threatened by the new, emerging movement.<sup>146</sup>

As seen from Washington, the new Palestinian uprising formed yet another front that needed to be fortified to secure U.S. influence in the larger Cold War.<sup>147</sup> Since the 1950s, the Middle East was immersed in what historian Malcolm Kerr termed the *Arab Cold War*.<sup>148</sup> When the 1967 war broke out, however, the "inter-Arab bickering" was overshadowed by the global Cold War between East and West.<sup>149</sup> Throughout the preceding two decades, both the United States and the Soviet Union had their respective Middle East allies, for whom they served as patrons and supplier of arms. Yet, when the third full-scale Arab-Israeli confrontation was launched in June 1967, the superpower involvement was drastically reinforced.<sup>150</sup>

Ultimately, every aspect of the wide-ranging conflict between Israel and the Palestinians grew larger as result of the 1967 war – it was a turning point in the evolution of the conflict itself. The underlying causes for the Palestinians' struggle for rights, self-determination, recognition, and a state, multiplied as Israel launched the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Consequently, between 200,000 to 300,000 Palestinians fled these areas, most of them to Jordan's East Bank. Israel initiated rule over around one million remaining Palestinians – as it refused to part with its newly seized territories.<sup>151</sup> Consequently, the Palestinian refugee problem – and the Palestinian call for right of return – increased both in extent and complexity due to the 1967 war. Meanwhile, it appeared to be the view of the U.S. state department that Palestinian refugees "did not really wish to return."<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Zernichow and Waage, "The Palestine Option," 185.

<sup>145</sup> Zernichow and Waage, 187.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive*, 5.

<sup>148</sup> Kerr, *The Arab Cold War*.

<sup>149</sup> Raz, *The Bride and the Dowry*, 13.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Zernichow and Waage, "The Palestine Option," 185.

<sup>152</sup> Doc. 6, "Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel," December 4, 1967, *FRUS*.

Essentially, the 1967 war changed the Middle East forever. While the Palestinian entity rapidly emerged as an independent actor with both strength and influence, the diplomatic efforts of the war's aftermath would attend to issues of territory, not people.<sup>153</sup> The ultimate result was the UN's resolution 242. What now, for the Palestinian refugees?

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<sup>153</sup> Heian-Engdal, *Palestinian Refugees after 1948*, 123; Raz, *The Bride and the Dowry*, 15.

## IV: Blame Game

Since 1948, the UN's official approach to the question of Palestinian refugees had been based on the UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (III). It affirmed their right to return: "The refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date."<sup>154</sup> It was a position supported by the Palestinians as well as the Arab states. Israel, however, rejected responsibility for the refugees on claims that they were result of an Arab-initiated war, namely the war of 1948.<sup>155</sup> Since then, this difference of opinion regarding the emergence of Palestinian refugees – and of those who were to blame – has developed into one of the post profound and belligerent issues at core of the conflict. Nevertheless, Resolution 194 remained at center of the UN's official position toward the refugees in the following decades. What then, when another full-scale Arab-Israeli war was launched in 1967?

The official Israeli stance is still that the war was one of self-defense: It was an inevitable and morally justified war, forced on Israel by its hostile Arab neighbors. In the Arab world, however, the 1967 war is considered a deliberate act of aggression rooted in Israel's hidden agenda of territorial expansion. In 1967, Israel merely seized an opportunity to achieve it, Arab states contend.<sup>156</sup> Either way, the 1967 war altered both the political and geographical map of the Middle East – and the new reality affected the parties' approach to the refugee question.

### **From "Uncertain Armistice" to "Durable Peace"**

The United States' enhanced support of Israel was demonstrated throughout the war. Its core was clear: In Johnson's Washington, Israel was the ally, the Arab states were the enemies, and the Palestinians remained virtually non-existent.<sup>157</sup> Nevertheless, the international community sought to bring Israel and the Arab states together with hope of achieving a lasting peace.<sup>158</sup>

Already on June 19, Johnson delivered a speech on what would be "the bible of U.S. policy" and the basis of the coming UN resolution.<sup>159</sup> Here, the president presented five

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<sup>154</sup> United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 (III), December 11, 1948.

<sup>155</sup> Jensehaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter*, 12.

<sup>156</sup> Shlaim, "Israel: Poor Little Samson," 22.

<sup>157</sup> Jensehaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter*, 17; Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*, 109.

<sup>158</sup> Rogan, *Araberne*, 394.

<sup>159</sup> Charles D. Smith, "The United States and the 1967 War," in *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis and Avi Shlaim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 184.

principles which he deemed essential to gain peace in the Middle East.<sup>160</sup> First, he said, “every nation in the area has a fundamental right to live, and to have this right respected by its neighbors.” Second, “another basic requirement for settlement,” was a “human requirement,” – namely “justice for the refugees.” Johnson did not specify in what sense such would be assessed. Third, “maritime rights must be respected.” Fourth, he addressed the “danger of the Middle Eastern arms race of the last 12 years,” and called upon the UN’s members to “report all shipments of all military arms into this area.” Lastly, Johnson declared that the “crisis underlines the importance of respect for political independence and territorial integrity of all the states of the area,” further stressing how “the nations of the region” needed “recognized boundaries.” Simultaneously however, he also called for an “adequate recognition of the special interest of three great religions” in Jerusalem. These principles were fundamental, Johnson said. “Taken together, they point the way from uncertain armistice to durable peace. We believe there must be progress toward all of them if there is to be progress toward any,” he declared.<sup>161</sup>

Among the Arab regimes, however, there was significant disagreement whether the Arab-Israeli conflict should be settled diplomatically or not.<sup>162</sup> This rift was affirmed at an Arab summit in Khartoum in late August 1967, where the Arab leaders met for the first time since the astounding defeat in June. Here, the famous “three noes” was adopted: No recognition, no negotiation, and no peace with Israel.<sup>163</sup> For Egypt and Jordan, however, Khartoum marked a turning point: Nasser and King Hussein sought to explore the possibility of a peaceful settlement with Israel as means to regain their lost territory, and thereby, formed a front against the Arab hard-liners.<sup>164</sup> The contrasting positions of the Arab world collided in Khartoum.<sup>165</sup>

In Washington, this change of heart was seen as an opening the United States could not miss: “We don’t think time is on our side,” Walt Rostow said to Johnson on October 3, advising: “Time works against us in the Arab world because the longer Israel sits on occupied territory, the harder it will be to convince friendlier Arabs that we’re not renegeing on our commitment to territorial integrity.”<sup>166</sup> On October 24, Rostow reiterated the message: “Nobody knows better than we how hard it is to make peace. (...) We can’t afford to lose this real opportunity to build

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<sup>160</sup> “Address at the State Department’s Foreign Policy Conference for Educators” June 19, 1967. *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (PPP): Lyndon B. Johnson, 1967. Book I: January 1 to June 30, 1967, 632–633.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Rogan, *Araberne*, 395.

<sup>163</sup> Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, 258.

<sup>164</sup> Shlaim, 258–59.

<sup>165</sup> Kerr, *The Arab Cold War*, 139.

<sup>166</sup> Doc. 455, “Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson,” October 3, 1967, *FRUS*.

a permanent peace. Hard as it is, we have to find the way to peace this time,” he wrote.<sup>167</sup> From their correspondence, it was also clear that Washington was not blind to Israel’s inflexibility: “We’re frankly afraid Israel will take such a hard position that it will kill chances for a settlement. We don’t believe time is indefinitely on the side of Israel or of peace.”<sup>168</sup> In a meeting with Eban, amongst others, Johnson echoed this message, stating that “the Israelis should not forget what we had said about territorial integrity and boundaries” and that he “could not countenance aggression.”<sup>169</sup> Johnson warned the Israelis that the “further they get from June 5 the further they are from peace.”<sup>170</sup> The end result, however, had a slightly different tone.

## A Just Settlement?

Throughout the fall, Johnson’s advisors struggled to adapt his five-point plan in the UN.<sup>171</sup> On November 22 – after months of wary negotiations and word quarreling – the UN Security Council unanimously agreed upon the result: Resolution 242. It requested the following:

Withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict (...) acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries (...) *Affirms further* the necessity (...) For achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem.<sup>172</sup>

Johnson had gained traction.<sup>173</sup> Yet, his fifth principle was clearly accentuated: Resolution 242 proposed a so-called land-for-peace formula, in which Israel would get peace in exchange for returning the territories it had conquered from the Arab states. In that sense, the resolution was able to recognize the Arab claims of territory while supporting Israel on the issue of peace. “The resolution was a masterpiece of deliberate British ambiguity,” Shlaim concludes, as its wording made the resolution vague enough to be acceptable to all members of the Security Council.<sup>174</sup> It was the omission of the definite article *the* concerning the territories in question that made it tolerable for Israel, which again was imperative to secure U.S. support. This ambiguous

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<sup>167</sup> Doc. 487, “Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson,” October 24, 1967, *FRUS*.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> Doc. 488, “Memorandum of Conversation,” October 24, 1967, *FRUS*.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 281; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 46.

<sup>172</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, November 22, 1967.

<sup>173</sup> Little, *American Orientalism*, 282.

<sup>174</sup> Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, 260.

phrasing provided a gap for maneuvering, as it allowed Israel to contend that some of the territories could be kept.<sup>175</sup> To complete the confusion, the definite article was included in the French translation (“*des territoires occupés*”), which by UN procedures carries the same weight as the English-language one.<sup>176</sup> The Israeli government, however, swiftly stressed that it would regard the English as the binding one.<sup>177</sup>

This linguistic loophole is not the only problematic premise of Resolution 242. Additionally, it refers to the “recent conflict” – which essentially establishes the June 1967 borders as the point of reference, thus denouncing the former blueprint for partition of the land. Furthermore, the resolution only refers to states, and thereby excludes the Palestinians as an actor. Instead, they are reduced to a “refugee problem” – which is the resolution’s only (indirect) reference to the Palestinians. Moreover, the resolution did not include any specifics on the way in which the “just settlement” it called for, is to be achieved.

Because of these features, Resolution 242 was unacceptable to the Palestinians. Apart from Egypt and Jordan, it was also rejected by the other Arab states: The three noes of Khartoum ruled out any approval of Resolution 242.<sup>178</sup> This development further underscores the setback pan-Arabism experienced as a result of the 1967 war. At the same time, one of Israel’s main tasks became significantly simpler due to this particular process: Instead of having to deal with the Palestinians, Israel could now bilaterally deal with the separate Arab states whose territory it had occupied – thanks to Resolution 242.<sup>179</sup> Khalidi argues that in this regard, the United States was of great help by using its power to play on Arab rivalry while retaining Washington’s interests: The disruption of Arab unity helped secure the United States’ regional dominance and its alignment with the oil autocracies of the Gulf.<sup>180</sup>

Resolution 242 established the legal framework of all coming efforts to resolve the entire conflict between Israel, the Palestinians, and the Arab states.<sup>181</sup> Indeed, all succeeding attempts at peace have departed from Resolution 242, and thus, all processes continue to require the recognition of it as a starting point for participation. This happened even though the resolution overlooked basic dimensions of the conflict, such as a comprehensive treatment of the refugee issue. Unsurprisingly, the lack of Palestinian presence and acceptance has also

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<sup>175</sup> Shlaim, 260; Jensehaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter*, 17; Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine*, 105.

<sup>176</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, November 22, 1967.

<sup>177</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine*, 105; Little, *American Orientalism*, 282.

<sup>178</sup> Rogan, *Araberne*, 396.

<sup>179</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine*, 109.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> Khalidi, 107.

proven to be a major hindrance in peace efforts since. U.S. policymakers, however, generally regard the adoption of Resolution 242 as a successful case.<sup>182</sup>

The discussions in the UN had reflected the West's lack of understanding for the Palestinians' national ambitions. The process itself illustrated the consistent lack of Palestinian participation in, and acceptance of, discussions concerning the Palestinian fate. Yet again, the Palestinians were at the losing end of post-war diplomacy. The new resolution scrapped the idea of an independent Palestinian state.<sup>183</sup> In other words: The Palestinians were not mentioned in the central document meant to resolve the conflict and decide their fate.<sup>184</sup> Khalidi summarizes the process accordingly:

Thanks in large part to SC 242, a whole new layer of forgetting, of erasure and myth-making, was added to the induced amnesia that obscured the colonial origins of the conflict between Palestinians and the Zionist settlers. The resolution's exclusive focus on the results of the 1967 war made it possible to ignore the fact that none of the underlying issues resulting from the 1948 war had been resolved in the intervening nineteen years. ... Indeed, Resolution 242 exacerbated the problem.<sup>185</sup>

Ultimately, Resolution 242 did not acknowledge the Palestinians, their losses, or their objectives. More so, it did not acknowledge a crucial dimension of the conflict itself: The refugees. The process recognized them merely as "Arabs" who would be absorbed by the other Arab states with time.<sup>186</sup> Under the land-for-peace plan, there was no room for the refugee issue.<sup>187</sup> Not only so: With Resolution 242, the UN abandoned its own commitment to the Palestinian refugees' rights which had been enshrined in Resolution 194 from 1948.<sup>188189</sup>

Resolution 242 did, however, suit Israel's aims. Luckily for Israel, the toughest and most uncomfortable questions had been avoided.<sup>190</sup> Conversely, the Israeli state was affirmed: The concept of its national borders, as well as its affiliation to the international community, was widely accepted. Israel was even permitted to colonize and later formally annex some of the occupied territories occupied in 1967.<sup>191</sup> "Repeated United Nations condemnations of these moves, unsupported by even a hint of sanctions or any genuine pressure on Israel," Khalidi

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<sup>182</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, 424.

<sup>183</sup> Rogan, *Araberne*, 396.

<sup>184</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*, 107.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> Rogan, *Araberne*, 396.

<sup>187</sup> Heian-Engdal, *Palestinian Refugees after 1948*, 125.

<sup>188</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*, 107.

<sup>189</sup> United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 (III), 11 December 1948.

<sup>190</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*, 107.

<sup>191</sup> Khalidi, 105.

writes, “have over time amounted to tacit international acceptance of them.”<sup>192</sup> Additionally, Resolution 242 introduced a new phase in Israel’s negotiations narrative: There were no Palestinians, and therefore, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict was that Arab states refused to recognize Israel. When the then-newly appointed Israeli Prime Minister, Golda Meir, declared that there was “no such thing as Palestinians” and that “they did not exist” two years later, the lack of international objections again reflected this notion.<sup>193</sup> To this day, her statement remains an infamous example of Israeli denial of Palestinian people. Meir’s message has been reiterated on several occasions, at the latest by Israel’s current far-right finance minister, Bezamel Smotrich, in March 2023.<sup>194</sup>

### **Jarring’s Mission Impossible**

In addition to the features discussed above, Resolution 242 called for “the Secretary-General to designate a Special Representative to proceed to the Middle East” who were to “assist efforts to achieve peaceful and accepted settlement” in accordance with the resolution’s principles.<sup>195</sup> As the resolution only mentioned the Palestinians indirectly, the representative would not deal with the Palestinians – only with member states of the UN.<sup>196</sup>

The renowned Swedish diplomat Gunnar Jarring was chosen for the job, and by December 1967, he had set up a headquarters for his mission in Cyprus. From there, he would shuttle back and forth to Jordan, Egypt, and Israel for the next almost four years.<sup>197</sup> Jarring served as Sweden’s ambassador to the Soviet Union when he was appointed, though he was also respected in Washington, D.C. While the Arabs were eager to move ahead, the Israelis had no expectations for Jarring’s mission – and told him so.<sup>198</sup>

A bigger problem, however, was that Israel did not trust the UN’s capacity to mediate.<sup>199</sup> Already in May 1967, Rusk made Johnson aware that Israel had “absolutely no faith in the possibility of anything useful coming out of the U.N.”<sup>200</sup> Israel’s tactic, then, became to feed

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit*, 9; Rogan, *Araberne*, 396.

<sup>194</sup> Seraj Assi and Zachary Foster, “‘There’s No Such Thing as Palestinians’: The Ignorant Bigotry of pro-Israel Propagandists,” *Haaretz*, March 21, 2023, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-03-21/ty-article-opinion/.premium/theres-no-such-thing-as-palestinians-the-ignorant-bigotry-of-pro-israel-propagandists/00000187-03b9-dde5-ab8f-23bd95600000>.

<sup>195</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, November 22, 1967.

<sup>196</sup> Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, 262.

<sup>197</sup> Waage and Mørk, “Mission Impossible,” 831.

<sup>198</sup> Little, *American Orientalism*, 283.

<sup>199</sup> Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, 260.

<sup>200</sup> Doc. 71, “Memorandum From Secretary of State Rusk to President Johnson,” May 26, 1967, *FRUS*.



Jarring with proposals in order to keep the mission somewhat alive – at least enough so that if the issue went back to the UN, Israel would not be blamed for its failure.<sup>201</sup> As Johnson sought assurances that “the Israelis aren’t going to sit themselves tight into a ‘fortress Israel,’” Eshkol replied that the Arabs were “not really committed to peace.”<sup>202</sup>

It did not help that Jarring did not represent a great power himself. Although it was the Security Council who had ordered his mission, Jarring lacked the carrots and sticks necessary to push the parties into concessions. Essentially, he was given a weak starting point, and throughout his mission, the odds against him continued to grow.<sup>203</sup> In March 1971, Jarring returned to his previous position in Moscow. The mission had not produced results, and Jarring himself did not find it constructive enough to sustain.<sup>204</sup> “Given the asymmetry of power between Israel and the neighboring Arab states, and the special representative’s lack of muscle to enforce any solutions there,” Waage and Mørk asks, “had Jarring in fact been tasked with a mission impossible?”<sup>205</sup> The underlying flaw in the premise of his mission, they conclude, was his lack of power:

A powerless mediation process like the Jarring mission was fatally unable to bear the entire burden of a conflict resolution that needed to address the intractable situation existing in the Middle East in the wake of the 1967 war. (...) Jarring had no means of keeping the parties engaged in the negotiating process or of leaning on them to make concessions. For that he needed Great Powers like the United States or the Soviet Union, and neither was willing or able to bury the hatchet and put effective pressure on its respective allies.<sup>206</sup>

Meanwhile, the 1967 war had left Israel with all the bargaining cards – and no external incentive to return any of its newly-conquered territories. In fact, Israel demanded several compensations, such as U.S. arm supplies, if it even were to talk.<sup>207</sup> So when it came to it – as Israel grew stronger – why should it even negotiate? Israel had occupied territories three and a half times larger than itself, some of which it could yield to secure more peaceful relations with Egypt and Jordan. Besides, Israel could cash in global good-will after accepting the resolution that the Palestinians rejected. In other words, Israel had already gained what it wanted the most. Nevertheless, the most valuable card at Israel’s hand, was the seemingly unlimited support from the United States.

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<sup>201</sup> Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, 261.

<sup>202</sup> Doc. 33, “Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson,” January 5, 1968, *FRUS*; Little, *American Orientalism*, 283.

<sup>203</sup> Waage and Mørk, “Mission Impossible,” 831–32; Little, *American Orientalism*, 283.

<sup>204</sup> Waage and Mørk, “Mission Impossible,” 844.

<sup>205</sup> Waage and Mørk, 831.

<sup>206</sup> Waage and Mørk, 845.

<sup>207</sup> Waage and Mørk, 846.

## V: “Eroding the Problem”

Most U.S.s, including Johnson, admired Israel’s sweeping victory in 1967. Indeed, Israel’s support among U.S.s reached its peak after the war.<sup>208</sup> Historian Douglas Little argues that Israel’s 1967 triumph finalized a transformation of Jews from victims to victors among the U.S. public: “For a generation that remembered appeasement as a dirty word and regarded Nasser as a Hitler on the Nile,” he writes, “the Six Day War closed the book on Anne Frank and fulfilled the dream of *Exodus*.”<sup>209</sup> The Arabs, on the other hand, were branded as “feckless, reckless, and weak.”<sup>210</sup> Naturally, this did not exactly encourage the president to get involved in the post-war diplomacy. Neither Johnson nor the Democratic Party wanted to. Nevertheless, Washington knew that it was important to keep the Jarring Mission going and to stay out of its crossfire: It was ideal to maintain the complex negotiations within a UN context, so that the United States did not risk having to deal with the conflict itself. Like Israel, the United States did not want to be blamed for failure. Essentially, Washington was not willing to coerce Israel – nor was it willing to support the Jarring Mission if it meant that Israel would have to lose its newly conquered territories.<sup>211</sup>

At the same time, U.S. policymaking toward the Arab-Israeli matters gradually shifted to being steered from the White House rather than from the State Department.<sup>212</sup> The most significant alteration was Washington’s rejection of its former stance on territorial integrity. What did this development entail for its approach to the Palestinian refugee issue? Already in May 1966, Johnson had been made aware that Israel viewed the refugee situation as “tolerable,” while “repatriating Arab refugees” would present a “Trojan horse.”<sup>213</sup> Time, however, was “gradually eroding the problem.”<sup>214</sup> Throughout 1967, it seemed as if the U.S. policymakers shared this line of thinking on the Palestinian refugee issue.

### A Special Relationship

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<sup>208</sup> Waage and Mørk, “Mission Impossible,” 845.

<sup>209</sup> Little, *American Orientalism*, 32.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>211</sup> Waage and Mørk, “Mission Impossible,” 835–45.

<sup>212</sup> Smith, “The United States and the 1967 War,” 167.

<sup>213</sup> Doc. 291, “Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson,” May 21, 1966, *FRUS*; Doc. 297, “Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson,” May 31, 1966, *FRUS*.

<sup>214</sup> Doc. 291, “Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson,” May 21, 1966, *FRUS*.

“The United States and Israel are strong partners and friends,” the U.S. State Department still affirms on its official website.<sup>215</sup> The partnership is described as “rock solid” – in fact, it has “never been stronger.”<sup>216</sup> Although the U.S.-Israeli relationship has never been specified or legally formalized by a political or military alliance, each side holds an extraordinary position within the other’s foreign and domestic policies.<sup>217</sup> Essentially, the two states consider one another in their respective policymaking. Already in 1962, Kennedy declared a “special relationship” existed between Israel and the United States. Due to several factors, however, historians regard the 1967 war as the actual starting point of their informal alliance, mainly expressed in military terms at the time.<sup>218</sup> What contributed to the alteration of their relationship – and how did it affect the Palestinian refugees?

Firstly, the 1967 war had caused the Middle East to become deeper embedded in the larger Cold War dynamic.<sup>219</sup> Conversely, the U.S.-Soviet rivalry were drawn into regional affairs to a larger extent, and in 1967, there was a victor: The United States’ ally had won, and those of the Soviet Union had lost.<sup>220</sup> Israel had defeated Moscow’s most important regional allies, namely Egypt and Syria. For Israel’s friends in Washington, this was a huge win: The tiny nation had been transformed from a liability into an asset in a significant geopolitical area. As historian Efraim Karsh notes:

The fear that U.S. troops would have to rush to the rescue of the Jewish state at the expense of wider U.S. interests in the region, a primary argument among opponents of US recognition of Israel in 1948, had been clearly overtaken by events. ... Israel ... had instead become a formidable barrier to the spread of Soviet influence in the Middle East.<sup>221</sup>

Hence, Israel’s 1967 victory was key because it alleviated a fear among its U.S. critics, namely that Israel would potentially depend on the United States for rescue in its armed struggles.<sup>222</sup> Instead, the triumph solidified Israel’s position as the most impressive military capacity in the Middle East – which made U.S.-Israeli political and strategic cooperation much more attractive

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<sup>215</sup> “The United States-Israel Relationship,” *United States Department of State* (blog), accessed June 3, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/the-united-states-israel-relationship/>.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>217</sup> Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, “The United States and Israel since 1948: A ‘Special Relationship’?,” *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 2 (April 1, 1998): 231.

<sup>218</sup> Smith, “The United States and the 1967 War,” 189.

<sup>219</sup> Jensehaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter*, 18.

<sup>220</sup> Efraim Karsh, “Israel,” in *The Cold War and the Middle East*, ed. Avi Shlaim and Yezid Sayigh (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 163; Louis and Shlaim, *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War*, 188.

<sup>221</sup> Karsh, “Israel,” 164.

<sup>222</sup> Bar-Siman-Tov, “The United States and Israel since 1948,” 240–41.

in Washington.<sup>223</sup> For the first time during their relationship, the security interests of the United States and Israel converged significantly in 1967.<sup>224</sup>

Meanwhile, U.S.-Arab relations were way colder under Johnson than what they had been under Kennedy.<sup>225</sup> Before the 1960s, it had been imperative for the United States to contain the Soviet Union by seeking close cooperation with the Arab world.<sup>226</sup> However, as the Cold War progressed, the increasing deliveries of Soviet weaponry to Arab states triggered both U.S. support and weapons to Israel.<sup>227</sup> During the 1960s, then, the United States left behind its prior reluctance to merge its security interests with Israel. Besides, amid Arab rivals – or perceived Soviet proxies – Israel’s claims of insecurity were seen as increasingly genuine in Washington. Kennedy approved the first sales of weaponry and thus facilitated for the process to accelerate under Johnson.<sup>228</sup> For Israel, it was an important development: Having relied primarily on France for arms since its establishment, it had now turned to the United States. Therefore, as Smith concludes, the “special relationship” had been practically accomplished from Israel’s side already before the 1967 war.<sup>229</sup> When the war broke out, then, Israel could demonstrate its military superiority over its Arab rivals.

### **The “Human Bomb”**

As its alliance with Israel grew stronger, Washington feared further Soviet-Arab rearmament after the 1967 war. Such a scenario seemed more plausible given the magnitude of the Arab military defeat. Could further Soviet-Arab fraternization threaten the enhanced U.S. position in the region? This notion was stressed by Johnson himself in a meeting on October 24, 1967:

It is essential ... not to overlook the humiliation the Arabs suffered and their own need to recoup their loss of prestige. The United States must try to maintain its position throughout the area to keep the USSR from putting its tentacles on other nations.<sup>230</sup>

As Washington saw it, the Palestinian refugees were at risk for being stung by these “tentacles.” “I was shocked at the bitterness expressed by old and particularly young refugees against the USG [The United States Government],” special advisor Eugene R. Black wrote Johnson after

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<sup>223</sup> Bar-Siman-Tov, 240–41.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine*, 102–3.

<sup>226</sup> Bar-Siman-Tov, “The United States and Israel since 1948,” 236.

<sup>227</sup> Jensehaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter*, 18.

<sup>228</sup> Smith, “The United States and the 1967 War,” 189.

<sup>229</sup> Smith, 190.

<sup>230</sup> Doc. 488, “Memorandum of Conversation,” October 24, 1967, *FRUS*.

visiting the refugee camps in Jordan in February 1968.<sup>231</sup> He described the camps' conditions as "tragic" and "appalling," while he observed a general "prevailing mood" of "bitter frustration" among Arab states.<sup>232</sup> Besides, he perceived the Arab attitude toward the Jarring Mission as "one of doom." His conclusion, then, was that the Arab world was in desperate need of attention from the U.S. government: "Time is short on the 'human bomb' with these hundreds of thousands of homeless, helpless people. Action is needed immediately ... Time is of essence in making some positive forward gesture."<sup>233</sup> Any kind of gesture, however, remained largely unpolitical. At the same time, Washington regarded the Palestinians' calls for repatriation as "largely symbolic," which also enabled it to sustain its take on the refugee issue as merely humanitarian.<sup>234</sup> The impoverished Palestinian refugee camps in the Arab states were seen as hotbeds for communism, but through UNRWA, the United States were able to contribute to the improvement of the refugees' daily life. In that sense, aid seemed like a convenient deterrent against Soviet influence.<sup>235</sup>

Effectively, the Palestinian refugees were merely attended to in either one of two ways: as a humanitarian cause in need of economic aid, or as potential Soviet proxies. As showed by idea of a "human bomb," however, the two were somewhat intertwined as seen from Washington. Nevertheless, the United States sought to further strengthen its bond with Israel. Washington had an urge to stabilize the power balance.<sup>236</sup> Besides, the fact that several Arab states had already fraternized with Moscow, reduced the possible risk of damaging Washington's Arab interests if it were to intensify its relations with Israel.<sup>237</sup> The fronts were already set. Hence, the evolving U.S.-Israeli relationship must be seen in context with deteriorating U.S.-Arab relations.<sup>238</sup> In the wake of the 1967 war, then, the United States was more openly on Israel's side than ever before.

## **Shifting Policy, Shifting Policymakers**

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<sup>231</sup> Doc. 80, "Memorandum From Eugene R. Black to President Johnson," February 14, 1968, *FRUS*.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>234</sup> Heian-Engdal, "Twenty Years of Crocodile Tears," 331.

<sup>235</sup> Heian-Engdal, 330.

<sup>236</sup> Bar-Siman-Tov, "The United States and Israel since 1948," 238–39.

<sup>237</sup> Bar-Siman-Tov, 236.

<sup>238</sup> Bar-Siman-Tov, 238–39.

Khalidi argues that if Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy occasionally showed some semblance of balance toward Israel, this perception was abandoned under Johnson.<sup>239</sup> Besides, domestic political considerations was more prominent in U.S. Middle East policy during Johnson's presidency than those of his predecessors.<sup>240</sup> This was influenced partly by his long-standing sympathy and personal admiration for Israel, but also the U.S. public's increasing opposition to Johnson's foreign policies.<sup>241</sup> As for the Middle East, then, Johnson could not afford getting on bad terms with the voters who sympathized with Israel as he contemplated running for re-election in 1968.<sup>242</sup> Johnson hoped that his firm backing of Israel would be popular enough to quell the growing criticism toward his policies in Vietnam, which had grown rapidly since he intensified U.S. involvement in 1965.<sup>243</sup>

These factors paved the way for an ensuing shift in the United States' policy toward Israel and the Palestinians.<sup>244</sup> Meanwhile, the mere policymaking process evolved in Washington. It had started already before the war: Throughout the spring of 1967, the State Department was largely sidetracked and detached from weighing in on policy discussions related to the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>245</sup> In other words: U.S. diplomats and politicians differed on the course of action and the road ahead – and it was the latter who gained traction. While the State Department was increasingly overruled by the White House, it was mainly advisors close to the president who were seated at the table, such as the senior officials Harold Saunders and Walt Rostow.<sup>246</sup>

To them, Israel had showed itself as a reliable partner against the perceived Soviet expansion in the Middle East. Subsequently, 1967 marked a turning point in U.S.-Israeli relations. It was a realignment of priorities. From here on, the “special relationship” between Israel and the United States developed into the full-scale – although informal – alliance it presents as today, in which common political and strategic interests forms the rationale.<sup>247</sup> To some extent, apparent efforts to isolate the State Department from decision-making on the Arab-Israeli conflict has continued since.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*, 105.

<sup>240</sup> Smith, “The United States and the 1967 War,” 167.

<sup>241</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*, 102–3; Smith, “The United States and the 1967 War,” 167.

<sup>242</sup> Waage and Mørk, “Mission Impossible,” 832.

<sup>243</sup> Little, *American Orientalism*, 102; Smith, “The United States and the 1967 War,” 167.

<sup>244</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*, 102–3.

<sup>245</sup> Smith, “The United States and the 1967 War,” 189.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*, 106.

<sup>248</sup> Louis and Shlaim, *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War*, 192.

## Strategy Over Peace?

As for the Palestinians, the 1967 shift in Washington had particularly one crucial consequence: The United States abandoned its stance of preserving the territorial status quo.<sup>249</sup> In accordance with Resolution 242, the United States permitted Israel to keep its newly conquered territories until it reached peace agreements with the individual Arab states. This was a radical alteration in the official U.S. position, because Washington had never issued any formal support of Israel's territorial integrity.<sup>250</sup>

While Resolution 242 had echoed the ambiguous message of Johnson's June 19 principles, it contradicted what Washington had expressed before the outbreak of the 1967 war.<sup>251</sup> Indeed, the topic had been discussed extensively during the post-war diplomacy prior to the resolution's adoption; On October 3, 1967, Rostow wrote to Johnson: "Will we make good on our pledge to support the territorial integrity of all states in the Middle East? Our best answer is that we stand by that pledge ... But we all know that could lead to a tangle with the Israelis."<sup>252</sup> Hence, the setting posed a dilemma. In a letter to Rostow a few weeks later, Saunders summarized the situation accordingly: "*So here we are: The Secretary of State intimating that we are honor-bound to go back to 4 June lines if only we can establish conditions of peace. ... The President saying, at least for effect, that we can't go back to June 4 lines.*"<sup>253</sup> The State Department, however, was omitted from the discussion.<sup>254</sup>

Effectively, it appeared as if the question was a choice between prior principles (the commitment to territorial integrity) or long-run strategy (strong relations with Israel). Besides, domestic dynamics was at play. In his letter, Saunders emphasized the latter, stating: "The professional levels of our government frankly doubt that the President will be willing in an election year to exert the kind of pressure on Israel that would be necessary to restore armistice lines."<sup>255</sup> In the end, Resolution 242 affirmed the United States' tolerance toward Israel's territorial ambitions.<sup>256</sup> Since then, Washington has never attempted to force Israel into renouncing the territories occupied through the 1967 war.<sup>257</sup> This is revealing, Khalidi argues:

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<sup>249</sup> Smith, "The United States and the 1967 War," 165.

<sup>250</sup> Bar-Siman-Tov, "The United States and Israel since 1948," 234.

<sup>251</sup> Louis and Shlaim, *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War*, 167.

<sup>252</sup> Doc. 455, "Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson," October 3, 1967, *FRUS*.

<sup>253</sup> Doc. 476, "Memorandum From Harold H. Saunders of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant (Rostow)," October 17, 1967, *FRUS*.

<sup>254</sup> Smith, "The United States and the 1967 War," 165.

<sup>255</sup> Doc. 476, October 17, 1967, *FRUS*.

<sup>256</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*, 104.

<sup>257</sup> Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit*, xxviii-xxix.

This fact is an indication of how crucial the Cold War was in shaping U.S. views of Israel as a strategic asset. Pursuit of Cold War advantage in the Middle East was so important, moreover, that at times it took precedence over all else, including peacemaking.<sup>258</sup>

Conversely, this adjustment represented an explicit confirmation of the United States' nonexistent attention to the thousands of Palestinians who had fled some of the exact territories in question. Not only so: It affirmed Washington's lack of understanding for what was seen as not only a Palestinian prerequisite for peace, but an Arab one: Namely, the right to return and the "respect for UN resolutions on refugees."<sup>259</sup>

### **Peace "Process"**

In the aftermath of the 1967 war – and within the renewed U.S.-Israeli alliance – Johnson avoided any real pressure on Israel. Washington's regime was simple: the United States said and did only the bare minimum to maintain some sort of talks, to keep some sort of process going.<sup>260</sup> Quandt describes this timbre of the United States' post-war diplomacy as a "procedural bias." As such, Washington's emphasis shifted from spelling out the "ingredients of peace" to the "process" of getting there.<sup>261</sup> For policymakers, procedures are easier to deal with, according to Quandt, because they are "less controversial than substance, more susceptible to compromise."<sup>262</sup> On few other topics has this been more evident than on that of the Palestinian refugees. Crucial in this "process," was the idea to separate the refugee issue from the others, thus putting it aside for later negotiations. Together with Jerusalem, the Palestinian refugees remained a "final status" issue.<sup>263</sup> Since 1948, these have been deemed the most difficult issues, and therefore, something that had to be dealt with the last. This has been reflected accordingly in peace efforts since. In 2023, they have yet to be properly addressed in diplomacy surrounding the Palestinians and Israel.

Nevertheless, in line with preceding notions, the idea to separate refugees from the larger negotiations appeared in several ways in the aftermath of the 1967 war, as well as in the following year. One year and five days after Resolution 242 was adopted – on November 27,

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<sup>258</sup> Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit*, xxviii-xxix

<sup>259</sup> Doc. 454, "Telegram From the Mission to the United Nations to the Department of State," October 3, 1967, *FRUS*.

<sup>260</sup> Waage and Mørk, "Mission Impossible," 844.

<sup>261</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, 1.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>263</sup> Heian-Engdal, *Palestinian Refugees after 1948*, 8–9.



1968 – the United States Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA) Interdepartmental Regional Group for Near East and South Asia gathered in Washington. According to the memorandum from the meeting, a White House representative (though it is not immediately clear who) recommends that “the Arab refugee problem be cut loose from the rest of the Arab-Israel confrontation,” and that the United States should “try to make progress on this issue as a separate matter.”<sup>264</sup> Generally, Washington’s view was that few Palestinian refugees “would opt to return.”<sup>265</sup>

The idea to temporarily remove refugees from the equation was also reiterated by Jarring that same fall. He regarded the “most productive approach” to be to “separate out key elements of problem which are susceptible to early agreement,” while the issue of Jerusalem and refugees, would be put aside “for further study and agreement at later stage,” according to a memorandum dated October 3.<sup>266</sup> The Israeli government had already echoed this notion on September 18: As they understood it, “such problems as refugees” would be “put aside for later Security Council action.”<sup>267</sup>

Meanwhile, the logic of permitting Israel to keep seized territory to achieve peace, was rarely questioned in the White House. This was Johnson’s diplomatic legacy concerning Israel and the Palestinians: The United States limited itself to the spelling out of *general* principles of peace through Resolution 242.<sup>268</sup> His successors largely conformed to that approach. Before the resolution was adopted, U.S. officials continuously expressed that “time was not on the side of peace.” In retrospect, it seems as if this was another way of emphasizing the lack of time available to deal with problematic issues such as the refugees. Nevertheless, Quandt’s concept of “peace process” resonates with the Washington’s diplomatic efforts in the aftermath of the 1967 war. While historians contend that the unresolved Palestinian refugee question lays at core of the larger Arab-Israeli conflict, Washington deemed the process of “getting there” as more important than the “ingredients of peace.”<sup>269</sup>

Conversely, considerations related to the Cold War was paramount in U.S. foreign policy.<sup>270</sup> In the CIA meeting on November 27, as referred to earlier, this message was reiterated in a remarkably clear manner: “The general consensus” among the meeting’s participants, “was

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<sup>264</sup> Doc. 334, “Memorandum from the Record,” November 17, 1968, *FRUS*.

<sup>265</sup> Doc. 326, “Telegram From the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State,” November 19, 1968, *FRUS*.

<sup>266</sup> Doc. 271, “Telegram From the Mission to the United Nations to the Department of State,” October 3, 1968, *FRUS*.

<sup>267</sup> Doc. 256, “Memorandum of Conversation,” September 18, 1968, *FRUS*.

<sup>268</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, 425.

<sup>269</sup> Little, *American Orientalism*, 280; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 1.

<sup>270</sup> Little, *American Orientalism*, 270.

that the humanitarian aspect of the Arab refugee problem was completely subordinate to international political considerations.”<sup>271</sup> Although an advisor had described the Palestinian refugees as a “human bomb,” they were eventually detached from the larger Cold War context.<sup>272</sup>

### **“The Old Will Die and the Young Will Forget”**

Ironically, as Israel defeated the Arabs in 1967, it concurrently resurrected the Palestinians.<sup>273</sup> Since Israel’s establishment, its leaders had comfortingly expressed that “the old will die and the young will forget.”<sup>274</sup> The henceforth consolidation of the Palestinian entity showed that, clearly, this was not the case. In fact, “return” quickly became one of the most central purposes of the Palestinian national movement.<sup>275</sup> As Palestinians demanded recognition, however, Israel sought to connect them with hatred. If the Palestinians had to be mentioned, then, it would be as a terrorist threat rather than a just cause. Khalidi calls this strategy a “remarkably successful public relations offensive,” which especially gained traction in the United States in the next decade after the 1967 war.<sup>276</sup> Indeed, as some parts of the international community listened to the appeals of the Palestinians to a certain degree, the United States tried to “keep its head in the sand” in line with Israeli interests and Resolution 242. Washington chose to rather pretend as if the Palestinians did not exist.<sup>277</sup> This was enabled by the massive support Israel experienced within the U.S. public opinion, in contrast to the lacking pro-Palestinian sentiment.<sup>278</sup>

The United States’ present Middle East policy exists in “the shadow of decisions made during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War,” historian Charles D. Smith concludes.<sup>279</sup> This can also be said of the general approach to the Palestinian refugee issue. As Israel became a prominent U.S. ally in the Middle East, both states were able to enjoy a profitable and multidimensional “special relationship.”<sup>280</sup> Israel’s territorial goals were accommodated to, while the United States entrenched its Middle East position within the larger Cold War. For the Palestinians, however,

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<sup>271</sup> Doc. 334, November 17, 1968, *FRUS*.

<sup>272</sup> Doc. 80, February 14, 1968, *FRUS*.

<sup>273</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine*, 109.

<sup>274</sup> Khalidi, 117.

<sup>275</sup> Khalidi, 125.

<sup>276</sup> Khalidi, 117.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>278</sup> Khalidi, 118.

<sup>279</sup> Louis and Shlaim, *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War*, 165.

<sup>280</sup> Karsh, “Israel,” 164.

this shift in U.S.-Israeli relations represented a renewed testimony to their dispossession.<sup>281</sup> From then on, the Johnson administration's stance toward the Palestinian refugee issue was imbedded in its position on territory. Regrettably for the exiled Palestinians, this policy undermined their chances of return to their homes.<sup>282</sup> While 1967 was a year of watersheds, it was also a point of no return for the Palestinian refugees.

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<sup>281</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*, 106.

<sup>282</sup> Candace Karp, *Missed Opportunities: US Diplomatic Failures and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-1967* (Claremont, Calif: Regina Books, 2005), 283.

## VI: The Peace Paradox

“On the refugee problem, we are convinced that within a peace context, this is a question that can and should be solved,” Prime Minister Eshkol told President Johnson on the LBJ ranch that cold January day in 1968.<sup>283</sup> While Eshkol’s obvious appreciation for Johnson’s staunch support was reflected throughout his visit, this message exemplifies the vague approach both Israel and the United States have held on to when faced with the Palestinian refugee issue. Indeed, during the days of Israeli-U.S. talks on Middle Eastern peace prospects in Texas that winter, the Palestinians were not directly mentioned once, according to official U.S. archived memorandums. It appears as a deliberate act of oblivion. Either way, it reflected the lack of attention devoted to the Palestinian refugees.

In 1967, the Middle East was polarized along lines of an Arab Cold War, running increasingly parallel to the global one. As such, the topic in question must be placed within the larger Cold War logic. The focus on Vietnam and the Cold War restrained the Johnson administration from engaging comprehensively in other crises – and the Palestinians did not figure in the equation.<sup>284</sup> Nor can the domestic influence on the United States’ stance toward Israel go unheeded. This was the foundation on which the “special” U.S.-Israeli relationship developed.

Resolution 242 affirmed Washington’s tolerance of Israel and its territorial ambitions. Conversely, the development represented an explicit confirmation of the United States’ lack of attention to the thousands of Palestinians who had fled some of the exact territories in question. Not only so: It affirmed Washington’s lack of understanding for what was seen as an Arab and Palestinian prerequisite for peace, namely the rights of the Palestinian refugees. Washington failed to recognize the political dimensions of the Palestinian refugee issue, and the Palestinians themselves were marginalized as political actors. Therefore, Resolution 242 represented a paradox: It expressed an ambition for lasting peace, but how could peace be achieved if not the core of the conflict was agreed upon? Evidently, however, peace was not the first thing on Johnson’s mind in 1967. As Israel was becoming a prominent U.S. ally in the Middle East, both states were able to enjoy a profitable and multidimensional relationship amid the Cold War.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Doc. 39, January 7, 1968, *FRUS*.

<sup>284</sup> Westad, 337.

<sup>285</sup> Karsh, “Israel,” 164.

For the dispossessed Palestinians, however, this shift in U.S.-Israeli relations represented yet another blow. For them, the legacies of 1967 are as visible today as they were then.<sup>286</sup>

Additionally, the process rephrased several aspects of the larger conflict. In 1967, Israel did not only gain a tremendous military triumph. Its Zionist origins had also secured a brilliant triumph in the discursive battle over the Palestinian “problem.” After the adoption of Resolution 242, which the Palestinians rejected, their existence was largely reduced to being related with terrorism, or at best, labelled a fundamentally hopeless humanitarian problem. This view was purveyed by Israel, but over time, it was principally adopted by the United States.<sup>287</sup>

In sum, the diplomatic activity in the wake of the 1967 war tended to territory rather than people. Therefore, a point of no return for the Palestinian refugees occurred as Resolution 242 was established. While the resolution called for a “just settlement of the refugee problem,” it lacked any sufficient details or strategy for the way in which such was to be achieved. While it designated a UN Special Representative to the Middle East in the aftermath of war, it was quickly evident that this mission lacked the muscle of enforcement from its beginning.

Yet, Resolution 242 established the benchmark for all coming peace efforts devoted to solving the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. As Israel sees it, nothing that occurred prior to 1967, will ever be negotiable.<sup>288</sup> By making Resolution 242 the point of departure in negotiations, the international community walked away from the principles of refugees’ right to return which itself had enshrined in the 1948 Resolution 194. Thereby, Resolution 242 removed the Palestinian refugee issue from the peace agenda. Thus, there are grounds to claim that already in 1967, the Palestinian refugees were pushed aside and left out. While peace efforts continue to be centered around territories, the Palestinian refugees remains a problem, not a people.

Yet, the refugee issue kept appearing in correspondence between Israel and the United States occasionally. However, it was almost always in vague terms in virtually all circumstances. Nor were the refugees referred to as Palestinian. Was this merely a façade preserved for the Arab world? Either way, Washington did not wish to get on bad terms with states it sought closer relations with, or at least, more influence over than that of the Soviet Union.

The United States’ singular emphasis on Israel’s angle has restricted it from carrying out the peacemaker role it has assumed for itself. With this self-declared broker role in mind, it

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<sup>286</sup> Karp, 283.

<sup>287</sup> Khalidi, 106.

<sup>288</sup> Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, 239.

is remarkable how little the United States has acknowledged Palestinian claims. This asymmetry will arguably linger for as long as U.S. policymakers ignore the Palestinian stance. Ever since the mere establishment of Israel, the Palestinians has not been internationally recognized as an individual people with national rights. There has not been a credible peace effort which included the Palestinian refugee issue. This study finds that Resolution 242 concluded the process of acquiring a solution to the Palestinian refugee problem, which was largely due to the U.S.-Israeli relationship. The ambiguous wording of Resolution 242 continues to postpone the prospects for peace. No one can know what the future will hold for the Palestinian refugees, but history reveals a bleak depiction.

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