



**THE BEGIN-SADAT CENTER
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The Trump Peace Plan: Aiming Not to Make a Deal, but to Make a Deal Possible

Douglas J. Feith and Lewis Libby



Mideast Security and Policy Studies No. 175

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Cover image: President Donald Trump unveils his peace plan for Israel and the Palestinians, Official White House Photo by Shealah Craighead

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The Trump Peace Plan—Aiming Not to Make a Deal, but to Make a Deal Possible

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Trump peace plan tells the Palestinians that the sensible question is not whether a deal provides everything you think you are entitled to, but whether it is the best deal available. If their demands for “justice” include Israel’s destruction, it says, the United States will not support them and will not fight to preserve the status quo for their benefit. A notable feature of the plan is the warning that, if the Palestinians continue to reject peace unreasonably, the US will not block Israel from advancing its own claims to areas that, in the administration’s view, realistic peace talks would leave to Israel.

The plan’s strong language reflects acquaintance with the long, exasperating history of US diplomacy undone by Palestinian rejectionism and terrorism. Knowledge of that history is crucial for assessing the plan.

In the past, US diplomacy aimed directly at a Palestinian-Israeli deal and repeatedly failed. This plan stresses that fundamental Palestinian reforms are required first. It assumes that current Palestinian leaders won’t reform, so it appeals over their heads to the public they are misgoverning and around them to the Arab states.

The plan has some creative elements and some that may not prove realistic, but critics who say that Trump’s plan won’t win acceptance by Mahmoud Abbas are missing its main point, which is that the Palestinians need new leaders. The plan does not hold out the promise of a quick deal. Rather, it has a more limited aim: to improve chances that peace will one day be possible. Meanwhile, it takes the current and future security concerns of Israel seriously and bolsters US support.

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Introduction

The Trump Middle East peace plan arrived in late January 2020, a peculiar moment in Israeli, American and world history. Having had two national elections within a year, with a third one scheduled, Israel remained in political turmoil without a governing coalition. At the same time, China's Covid-19 epidemic, which was killing thousands, was scarily erupting into a pandemic. As a result, Trump's "vision" for peace received only scant attention.

The little it did receive tended to be cursory and negative. Leading Palestinians rejected it even during its preparation. They and other critics say it undiplomatically favors Israel and unrealistically demands Palestinian reforms. It has widely been declared dead on arrival and denounced as offering no hope of producing near-term prospects of a two-state solution.

Such criticism is hardly surprising. Trump's foreign policy is often roundly attacked from left and right and this contrarian peace plan was sure to cause perturbation far and wide. It bucks longstanding conventional views of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It deprecates the Oslo process and rejects the idea that negotiations now on the so-called final-status issues of borders, security arrangements, settlements and so on will achieve peace. It offers criticism with no concern for evenhandedness. It is blistering in its evaluation of the Palestinians' "bad governance," saying that the Palestinian Authority (PA) incentivizes terrorism and is plagued by "failed institutions," including schools and media that "promote a culture of incitement." And, while acknowledging the conflict's importance, it denies its centrality to the interests of the United States or the Arab states.

American politics is severely polarized and Trump is a provoker of controversy. That is regrettable because the plan deserves careful consideration. Having already changed the debate around the world about whether and when Israel should apply its law to

parts of the West Bank, the plan cannot be ignored. Nor should it be, for its approach is creative and promising regarding US strategic and humanitarian interests.

The plan has four particularly notable elements. First, it argues that there can be peace only if the Palestinians reform their political institutions under new leaders willing to end the conflict and accept Israel as permanent.

The second notable element, original to this administration, is a warning: If the Palestinian side continues to support terrorism and reject peace, its cause will suffer. For decades, Palestinian leaders, while refusing peace offers seen as reasonable by top US officials, demanded that the status quo in the territories be frozen pending a peace deal. Democratic and Republican administrations backed that demand. But no longer. The Palestinians are now being told that, if they continue to be unreasonable, the United States will not block Israel from advancing its own claims to areas that, in the administration's view, realistic peace talks would leave to Israel. Those areas, according to the peace plan's Conceptual Map, include not just the major settlement blocs, but also the Jordan Valley.

Publication of that map is the peace plan's third notable element. No prior administration ever defined the territory that Israel could have US support to hold permanently, *with or without a peace agreement*.

The fourth notable element is the plan's idea that Israel can dramatically improve its relations with Arab states before a peace agreement with the Palestinians. The plan envisions advancing US interests on Iran, oil and other issues through expansion of Israel's ties to Arab states and, in turn, using Israel's increasing integration into the region to help resolve the conflict.

In the past, US peacemaking efforts aimed directly at a Palestinian-Israeli deal. This peace plan, however, stresses that fundamental changes are required on the Palestinian side before such a deal can become realistic. The plan proposes ways to bring about those changes, chiefly through action by the Palestinian people and by the Arab states. It therefore does not hold out the promise of a quick peace settlement. Rather, it has a more limited aim: to improve chances that peace will one day be possible.

The Trump plan effectively tells the Palestinians that the sensible question is not whether a deal provides everything you think you are entitled to, but whether it is the best deal available – now and in the foreseeable future. Obviously, the United States cannot force Palestinian leaders to accept a peace that they consider unjust, but if their demands for “justice” include the destruction of Israel, Trump warns that the United States will not support them and will not fight to preserve the status quo for their benefit.

The peace plan's strong language and unequivocal conclusions reflect more than just the president's personal style of talk. They reflect the Trump team's acquaintance

with the long, exasperating history of US diplomacy undone by Palestinian rejectionism and terrorism. The record shows the influence and staying power of ideas about the conflict that deserve reexamination because they have repeatedly been refuted by reality. Knowledge of that history is crucial. Without it, one cannot hope to improve the unhappy political and economic circumstances of the Palestinian people, let alone to achieve a consensual resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Understanding this painful history is critical for answering key questions: Does the plan properly weigh US interests? How well or how poorly does it assess the parties and their situations? Are its recommendations realistic, affordable and reasonably calculated to serve American purposes? How does this approach compare to other options, including those developed by earlier administrations? This essay seeks to help answer these questions.

* * *

Since the Cold War ended, American Presidents have sailed into the head winds of the Palestinian-Israeli dispute by pursuing different tacks. They have zigged, zagged further, zagged and zigged again. The Trump peace plan can be seen as the sixth of these tacks. A review of the preceding five sheds light on its premises.

Tack 1 – Clinton, Rabin, and Oslo’s installation of Arafat and the PLO

For nearly thirty years, Palestinian-Israeli peace diplomacy has been based on the Oslo Accords, which Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat signed in September 1993 at the White House, with President Bill Clinton acting as host. Oslo created the Palestinian Authority (PA) to represent the Palestinians and exercise the authority that Israel was relinquishing in the West Bank and Gaza. Up to that point, Israel’s official view had been that Arafat, living in exile in Tunisia, was nothing but a detested terrorist leader. Now, the Israeli prime minister declared him to be transformed into a peace partner and accepted him as the PA’s first head.

Arafat had risen to prominence as leader of Fatah, a Palestinian terrorist group dedicated to “armed struggle” against Israel. In 1969 he became chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the umbrella entity for armed Palestinian nationalist groups. After waging an unsuccessful civil war in Jordan in the early 1970s, Arafat and the PLO made Lebanon their new base for anti-Israel attacks, soon destabilizing that formerly peaceful and prosperous state.

The 1973 Arab oil embargo and revenue boom generated enormous Arab political power, and Arafat took full advantage. At the United Nations in 1974, introduced as the commander of the Palestinian revolution, a pistol holster on his hip, he addressed the General Assembly and received a standing ovation. He called for a single Palestinian state of Muslims, Christians and Jews that would replace Israel. Arafat

threatened, "I have come bearing an olive branch and freedom fighter's gun. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hands." The gun was real; the olive branch was not.

Arafat opposed Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's 1977 peace initiative, which in March 1979 yielded the first Arab-Israeli peace treaty. Based still in Lebanon, Arafat built up the PLO and increased its terrorist attacks against Israel. In 1982 the Israeli army entered Lebanon to destroy the PLO. A US-brokered deal produced a ceasefire and allowed Arafat and his PLO fighters to flee to Tunis in north Africa. From there, Arafat's PLO continued its anti-Israel terrorist attacks, seeking Arab and wider world support to isolate the Jewish state.

In 1987, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza began the popular uprising that was called the Intifada.¹ Arafat, in distant Tunis, played little role in its origins.² Young Palestinians hurling rocks at Israeli soldiers symbolized the uprising, but greater violence ensued. Israeli losses and international criticism angered Israeli officials seeking to quell attacks.

US anti-terrorism policies had long prohibited official contacts with Arafat. Secretary of State George Shultz said in 1982, "I would hear again and again from credible people that the PLO and Arafat were 'about to change.' Again and again, the predicted developments proved elusive."³ Finally, in December 1988, Shultz arranged for open official US talks with the PLO. The group's Executive Committee had undertaken "to live in peace with Israel" and announced "it condemns individual, group and State terrorism in all its forms, and will not resort to it."⁴ President Reagan approved the talks.⁵ A year and a half later, in June 1990, the George H.W. Bush administration denounced Arafat for violating his promises, citing his refusal to condemn a terrorist attack in Tel Aviv and his failure to expel the perpetrator from the PLO Executive Committee.⁶ That ended, for several years, the official US dialogue with the PLO.

Arafat had aligned the PLO with the Soviet Union in the Cold War and after Saddam Hussein's Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990 he sided with Saddam in the 1991 Gulf War. As a result, the Palestinian cause suffered setbacks as the 1990s opened.⁷ It lost support from the Arab states that backed the US-led coalition that expelled Iraqi forces from Kuwait. And when the Soviet Union collapsed in December 1991, the PLO lost its superpower backer.⁸ Arafat was excluded from the 1991 Madrid Conference on the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁹

The upshot of Arafat's strategic choices was a drastic loss of financial and political power. That the Israeli government then rescued Arafat was something of an ironic diplomatic miracle, or, perhaps in his eyes, a reward for persistent Palestinian violent resistance.

Oslo puts Arafat in control

By 1993, Israel's recently elected prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, was eager to find a way to stop the Intifada.¹⁰ He had criticized his predecessor for not making peace at Madrid, but Rabin himself failed for over a year to close a land-for-peace deal with the non-PLO Palestinians with whom his government was negotiating. Desperate for a breakthrough with the Palestinians, Rabin decided to allow Arafat and the PLO – whom he had always considered murderers – to return from Tunis to rule a new Palestinian entity with limited security forces in the West Bank and Gaza. He hoped Arafat would suppress terrorism and in time agree to peace with Israel. This was the basis of the Oslo Accords.

Three aspects of this new Israeli policy deserve emphasis. Nowadays Rabin is often portrayed as champion of the “two-state solution,” but, until the end, he opposed creation of a Palestinian state. In his last Knesset speech – on October 5, 1995, a month before he was assassinated – Rabin said the conflict's “permanent solution” would be a State of Israel and “alongside it a Palestinian *entity* which will be a home to most of the Palestinian residents living in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.” He specified, “We would like this to be an entity *which is less than a state*, and which will independently run the lives of the Palestinians under its authority.”¹¹

Second, Rabin promised permanent Israeli control of the Jordan Valley. “The security border of the State of Israel,” he confirmed for the Knesset, “will be located in the Jordan Valley, in the broadest meaning of that term.” It was Rabin's Labor Party that, after the 1967 war, had built Israel's original Jordan Valley settlements.

Third, Rabin never consented to “land swaps,” which were premised on the idea that the Palestinians are entitled to control an area equal in size to the pre-1967 West Bank and Gaza. Proponents contended that the Palestinians, in a peace deal, should receive a portion of Israel's pre-1967 land as a “swap” for any parts of the West Bank or Gaza that Israel would retain. Rabin was opposed.

The Oslo process made Arafat the new Palestinian Authority leader. He disappointed expectations, however, that he would use his new power and prestige to promote peace. As PA head, rather, he spoke of a “jihad to liberate Jerusalem” and explained Oslo by reference to the prophet Muhammad's accepting peace so that he could later obliterate his enemy.¹² PA schools and official media stoked hostility to Israel. In demanding an end to “the occupation,” they applied the term to cities within pre-1967 Israel – Haifa and Jaffa, for example – as much as to the territory Israel won in the 1967 war. The PA honored terrorists that killed Israeli civilians, calling them heroes, naming streets for them and urging children to emulate them. The PA enacted legislation that incentivized terrorism by providing official payments to terrorist prisoners held by Israel and to families of “martyrs” (i.e., terrorists killed in action). Critics call such legislation “pay-for-slay.”¹³

More Israelis were killed in terrorist attacks after the Oslo Accords than before. Efraim Karsh, an eminent Israeli historian, relying on data from the Israeli Foreign Ministry, has noted, “In the two-and-a-half years between the signing of the DOP [Oslo’s Declaration of Principles] and the fall of the Labor government in May 1996, 210 Israelis were murdered – nearly three times the average annual death toll of the previous 26 years.”¹⁴

Clinton tried to promote mutual Israeli-Palestinian confidence through accords on practical problems. He focused on water disputes, boundary issues, ways to provide security in particular areas and other so-called final-status questions. His assumption was that diplomacy, by resolving misunderstandings and overcoming mistrust, could advance the parties toward an end to the conflict.

Tack 2 – Clinton, Barak, and the most forthcoming bid for peace

In the final months of his presidency, Clinton devoted himself to bringing about a deal to end the conflict once and for all. Hoping to draw major concessions from Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, he invited them to a July 2000 summit conference at Camp David.¹⁵

Clinton succeeded in winning extraordinary concessions from Barak; but Arafat refused to reciprocate, angering Clinton. No deal was reached. Soon thereafter, Arafat launched an all-out war of terrorism against Israel with many attacks perpetrated by official PA security forces or other individuals responsive to Arafat or protected by him.¹⁶ (This terrorism campaign, known commonly but misleadingly as either the Second Intifada or the al-Aqsa Intifada,¹⁷ ended in 2005, soon after Arafat’s death. Karsh calls it “Arafat’s War.”)

Barak’s concessions surpassed Rabin’s

Barak had arrived at Camp David having already agreed to recognize a Palestinian state, something Rabin had refused to do. Importuned by Clinton, Barak then agreed to end Israel’s military presence in the Jordan Valley within six years, though Rabin, as we saw, was determined that Israel would hold it permanently. Barak also accepted the US position in favor of land swaps.¹⁸ Ultimately, Clinton induced Barak to offer the Palestinians control over an area at least 95 percent the size of the West Bank.¹⁹

What Barak offered Arafat not only exceeded Rabin’s positions, but crossed “redlines” that Barak (according to his memoirs) had set for himself.²⁰ The most remarkable examples related to Jerusalem.

Barak said it was a “principle” for him that “Jerusalem will remain united.”²¹ US officials, however, proposed dividing the city. Clinton said, “of course, Israel would retain sovereignty over the Temple Mount,”²² but he later changed this stand and insisted on Palestinian sovereignty on the Temple Mount and also over the Old City’s Muslim and Christian quarters.²³

Barak submitted. As his memoirs relate, "Arafat would have sovereignty over the entirety of the Old City except for the Jewish Quarter and, of course, the Western Wall and the 'holy space of which it is a part.'" ²⁴ The upshot, Barak said, was "what is Arab will be Palestinian, and what is Jewish, Israeli," ²⁵ which meant that on the Temple Mount "each side would have control of its own holy sites." ²⁶ Barak consented to all this despite having entered the talks saying "one thing no Israeli leader could give up was sovereignty over the Temple Mount." ²⁷ Barak quotes Rabin's widow as complaining, "Yitzhak would never have agreed to compromise on the Old City and Temple Mount." ²⁸

But all this failed to satisfy Arafat, who countered with two demands. One was for Palestinian sovereignty over at least part of the Western Wall, Judaism's paramount holy site. ²⁹ Arafat denied the Jews' interest in Jerusalem, repeating at Camp David his bizarre but oft-expressed canard that no ancient Jewish Temple ever stood in the city – in other words, that there was never a temple on the Temple Mount. ³⁰

Arafat's second demand was Israeli acceptance of a Palestinian "right of return." That would require Israel to admit millions of Palestinians – a small number of original refugees and a large number of their descendants. The "right of return" was intended to end Israel's existence as a Jewish state. "No Israeli leader would ever let in so many Palestinians that the Jewish character of the state could be threatened," President Clinton told Arafat, adding, "The right of return was a deal breaker." ³¹

With talks stalled at Camp David, Arafat signaled that a new wave of violence might soon ensue. Barak had recently fulfilled an electoral campaign promise to remove Israeli forces from Lebanon, where they had been present for eighteen years, fighting Hezbollah forces who were threatening terrorism against northern Israel. Enemies of Israel hailed the Israeli withdrawal as a Hezbollah victory. Palestinian demonstrators proclaimed, "Lebanon Today, Palestine Tomorrow." At Camp David, Arafat threatened, "we can see to it that the Hezbollah [Lebanon] precedent is replicated in the territories." ³²

In fact, the new terrorist campaign – Arafat's War – started two months after the Camp David talks. Calls to "Eradicate the Jews" issued from al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount. Arafat closed PA schools and called a general strike, filling the streets, while official Palestinian television encouraged an uprising. ³³ Arafat had prepared the groundwork over years, exhorting violence and building a 40,000-man "police force." The US government had paid for and trained that force to suppress terrorism, but official Palestinian security personnel carried out many of the attacks against Israeli civilians. ³⁴

The toll of the 2000-2005 violence was high. Over 1,100 Israelis were killed and estimates of Israelis wounded range from 6,000 to over 8,300. ³⁵ Palestinian casualty estimates range more widely, with fatalities numbering between 3,000 and 5,000 and wounded approximately 8,600. ³⁶ Arafat may have seen benefits not only in the terrorism but also in

the Israeli response, for as Clinton adviser Dennis Ross later wrote, “[Arafat’s] strategy over the years had been to make the Palestinians into victims.”³⁷

Over four years, Arafat’s War proved deadlier than Hezbollah’s Lebanon campaign. In Lebanon, Israel had lost roughly 15-20 soldiers a year. Arafat’s War sometimes killed more than 20 Israel civilians in a single day. In total, in around four years, it killed four times the number of Israelis that had died in Lebanon during 18 years.³⁸

In his final weeks in office, despite the ongoing terrorist campaign, Clinton made another effort to close a Palestinian-Israeli peace deal. Though Barak had vowed not to negotiate under pressure of Palestinian violence,³⁹ he cooperated with Clinton, who offered Arafat peace terms (now known as the “Clinton Parameters”) even more forthcoming than what Barak had proposed at Camp David six months earlier.⁴⁰

Ross says that Clinton arranged a peace offer for Arafat that was absolutely as far as Israel could go. “We could not do better,” Ross concluded, describing the offer as “an unprecedented set of ideas that would have produced a Palestinian state in all of Gaza and nearly all of the West Bank; a capital for the state in East Jerusalem; security arrangements that would be built on an international presence; and an unlimited right of return for Palestinian refugees to their own state.”⁴¹ Arafat, however, refused to make peace.

Arafat’s rejectionism and Oslo’s flawed premise

Over eight years, Clinton had praised Arafat as a peacemaker and received him at the White House more often than any other foreign visitor. Clinton had tried both incremental and comprehensive approaches,⁴² but his efforts collapsed into a new and bloodier wave of terrorism. After eight years of Oslo peace talks, the diplomatic failure suggested the conflict was something more fundamental than misunderstandings and lack of trust.

Squarely blaming Arafat, Clinton suggests that the PLO chairman balked because ending the conflict would take “Palestine out of the headlines” and force him instead “to worry about providing jobs, schools and basic services.”⁴³ That’s a reasonable thought, but the explanation may simply be that Arafat actually believed what he had been saying his whole life – that all of Israel is occupied Palestinian Arab territory, which he is committed to liberating.

If this latter explanation is correct, then Oslo’s premise was fundamentally wrong, and the conflict is not actually about the so-called final-status issues. It suggests rather that the problem is ideological, a matter of intense beliefs rooted in religious and nationalist identities. According to Palestinian nationalist ideology, Palestine is an indivisible, inalienable possession of the Arabs, and the Jews are only a religious group, not a people entitled to national self-determination, and have no right to a Jewish majority state anywhere.⁴⁴

Even individuals who are dishonest and corrupt can have a sincere attachment to ideological principles and Arafat and his team sure did uphold their anti-Zionist principles tenaciously – one might even say, sincerely. Decades of diplomacy have been premised on the assumption that Palestinian leaders only posture about destroying the Israeli state – that they can be coaxed into accepting it. Yet such leaders have never actually been willing to renounce, once and for all, Palestinian claims over any territory from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea.

Historian Karsh observes that Arafat viewed the peace process, “as a strategic means not to a two-state solution but to the substitution of a Palestinian state for the state of Israel.”⁴⁵ Ross concludes, “So long as [Arafat] was alive, no change between Israelis and Palestinians . . . was possible.”⁴⁶

Martin Indyk, a senior Middle East policy advisor to Clinton, marveled that US officials held so tenaciously to the delusion that Arafat was a peacemaker. “After eight years, Clinton and our team surely should have known with whom we were dealing,” Indyk wrote, criticizing Clinton for making himself “dependent on the statesmanship of Yasser Arafat.”⁴⁷ Clinton himself told Arafat, you have made me a failure.⁴⁸

When he met George W. Bush, just hours before the latter’s inauguration on January 20, 2001, Clinton spent much of the time warning about Arafat. Saying the Palestinians had been given every opportunity to make peace, the outgoing president complained about the Palestinian leader’s rejectionism and the vicious “intifada” that repaid Barak’s open-handed offer of peace.⁴⁹

Barak lost his reelection bid in February 2001, which was not surprising, given his large, risky, unsuccessful effort to make peace with Arafat. Ariel Sharon became Israeli prime minister.

Tack 3 – Bush’s bid for a two-state solution

Despite Clinton’s warnings and the raging violence, President George W. Bush, Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice entered office willing to invest additional US prestige in mediating between the Israelis and Arafat. Rice recalls, however, that from the inauguration through the summer of 2001, “our goal was simply to calm the region” and “avoid all-out conflagration.”⁵⁰

Bush, Powell and Rice embraced the position of former Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell, whom Clinton had asked for ideas on quelling Palestinian-Israeli violence. Mitchell said the PA should “make a 100 percent effort” to prevent terrorism and the Israeli government should relax its security measures and “freeze all settlement activity.”⁵¹ This suited what Rice described as the State Department’s “traditional view” favoring an “even-handed” approach.⁵²

The Mitchell Plan hatched with ill omens. A series of Palestinian attacks over a dozen days killed or wounded over 100 Israelis.⁵³ On June 1, 2001, a Palestinian bomber

blew himself up in a Tel Aviv beachfront nightclub called the Dolphinarium, murdering 21 Israeli teenagers and wounding 120. Before the Dolphinarium bombing, Sharon had sent his son, Omri, to open a private channel to Arafat. The Dolphinarium massacre cut that connection.⁵⁴ Arafat appeared to be giving a harshly negative answer to the Mitchell Plan and to Sharon's outreach.

Mitchell envisioned joint Palestinian-Israeli security arrangements, but American efforts to set them up proved a bust. Having promoted his plan, Rice eventually concluded that "neither side was ready for even those modest interventions."⁵⁵ Yet this is not quite right. It was Arafat who was not ready; Sharon, despite all the terrorist attacks and top Israelis' distaste for the Mitchell Plan, was willing to accept the proposed security arrangements. That Rice gave Sharon no credit here was a sign of the low regard for Sharon among some senior administration figures.

Like Clinton, who called Sharon "the most aggressive, intransigent leader available,"⁵⁶ Powell and Rice had grave doubts about the Israeli prime minister.⁵⁷ Powell feared "unleash[ing]" Sharon. Rice had met Sharon two years earlier and judged him an "uncompromising hardliner" who "made it crystal clear that not all Israelis were willing to end the conflict on the basis of a deal like Camp David." Sharon was tainted, Rice noted, by his failure to have prevented a massacre of Palestinians by Lebanese Christian militia fighters in 1982, and among Palestinians (and many Americans) he was the most hated Israeli.⁵⁸ In all events, Rice found that Israelis, even when justifiably responding to terrorism, "always seem to go too far."⁵⁹ She saw Sharon embodying this dangerous trait. He "came to power to defeat the Palestinian resistance, not to negotiate," Rice complained, "That was the situation we inherited."⁶⁰

Many Israeli analysts had seen the 1987-1993 Intifada⁶¹ as rising from the streets, but the new campaign of terrorism was generally seen as initiated by Arafat and promoted by the PLO and PA for political purposes. Many Israelis, including on the left, were galled that Arafat had repaid Barak's concessions by instigating horrific attacks against Israeli civilians. The dovish speaker of the Israeli parliament said he had "suddenly discovered" that "what we mean by peace – which is mutual reconciliation – is not being met by the other side."⁶² More and more Israelis came to the conclusion that they could neither persuade nor compel Palestinian leaders to make peace. The slogan "peace now," which implied that Israel could have peace simply by changing its own policies, lost its following. The self-described "peace camp" shrank and lost political influence, which it has not recovered to this day.

Among the lessons many Israelis learned were that PLO leaders would conclude limited agreements – especially if rewarded by foreign donors – but were unwilling to end the conflict permanently. Even agreeing to a Palestinian state would not stop the violence so long as the Palestinian side remained unreconciled to Israel's existence. Israelis in large numbers came to the unhappy realization that they lacked the ability, short of national suicide, to appease their enemies.

They also understood that Palestinian violence would require Israel from time to time to respond forcefully. Appreciation grew in Israel that patience is a strategic asset.

In Washington, State and National Security Council staff officials urged President Bush to do something personal and dramatic to induce Arafat to stop terrorist attacks and reinvigorate Palestinian-Israeli cooperation. Saudi officials, in particular, had pressed for this. On August 29, 2001 the President sent Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah a letter, which mildly complained that Arafat “has not made a 100 percent effort to stop violence and incitement,” but then broke new diplomatic ground by declaring that the Palestinians have a right to self-determination in their own state.⁶³

This was the first time an American president had said it was US policy to favor creation of a Palestinian state.⁶⁴ No commitments from Arafat or Arab states had been obtained in advance; and Bush received little credit from the Arab world, which Rice resented.⁶⁵

Unaware of this development, on September 18, 2001, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger called the White House. He warned that a new peace initiative would only reward Palestinian violence and distract from the post-9/11 war on terrorism.⁶⁶

Within the month, Bush reiterated at the UN General Assembly his commitment to a Palestinian state.⁶⁷ That fall, he accepted Powell’s recommendation to appoint retired General Anthony Zinni to negotiate new Palestinian-Israeli security arrangements. After months of talks, Zinni thought the Palestinians agreed, but Arafat refused to sign.⁶⁸

Arafat took in stride the new US support for a Palestinian state and the appointment of Zinni. The PLO and PA continued to fuel terrorist attacks. Bush was slow to anger, but Arafat’s bad will became insufferable for him after exposure of the Karine A Affair.

George W. Bush learns for himself who Arafat is

In January 2002, Arafat tried to smuggle 50 tons of Iranian-supplied arms – including Katyusha missiles, anti-tank rockets, and 3000 pounds of C4 explosives – into Gaza by sea in violation of his Oslo commitments. Israeli forces intercepted the contraband-laden ship, named the Karine A. Israel briefed US officials and displayed the arsenal to world news media. When US officials questioned him about his role, Arafat lied, repeatedly.⁶⁹

As Arafat’s War had shocked Israel’s political system, the Karine A shook the Bush administration. At the Defense Department, Rumsfeld recognized the political and military importance of the weaponry seized. Arafat was executing his Camp David threat to follow the “Hezbollah precedent.”⁷⁰ Within weeks after 9/11 – after Bush had demanded world leaders to choose sides in the war on terrorism – Arafat opted not only to continue his campaign of terrorism, but to prepare an escalation and to stand with Iran, America’s enemy and a major state sponsor of terrorism. Bush’s concession on Palestinian statehood appeared to have no effect on Arafat’s support for terrorism.

"In retrospect," Elliott Abrams, former Deputy Assistant to President George W. Bush, concludes, the Karine A was clearly a "turning point in perceptions of Arafat."⁷¹ The incident prompted Bush to announce that Arafat was not fighting terror, but "enhancing terror." On CNN, Vice President Dick Cheney said it made it "difficult to take [Arafat] seriously as an interlocutor in that peace process."⁷²

Years later, in her memoirs, Rice recounted that Bush had already viewed Arafat as corrupt and the primary obstacle to peace at Camp David, but after the Karine A "we added 'committed terrorist' to the list of offenses." She wrote that the Karine A exposed "Arafat's duplicity" and "made it absolutely clear that [Arafat] was not going to lead his people to peace."⁷³

Nonetheless, immediately after the ship's capture Rice joined State officials in proposing that Bush write Arafat, chiding him on the Karine A but implicitly assuring him that no serious consequences would follow.⁷⁴ The idea was to put the affair behind them quickly and revive peace talks with Arafat.

One of the authors of this article, Lewis Libby, then Cheney's national security adviser and chief of staff, opposed sending the proposed letter. With his deputy, Ambassador Eric Edelman, a career foreign service officer, Libby briefed Cheney, who understood that the letter would be a kind of absolution,⁷⁵ likely resulting in more killings and undermining the moral basis of the president's anti-terrorism policies. Libby argued that the Karine A presented a rare, clarifying moment that exposed Arafat's true nature and should not be tossed hastily into the memory hole. Begging an unrepentant Arafat for more talks now would, as Clinton's experience showed, result in failure, while depleting presidential prestige.

Libby explained that view to Rice and her deputy, Steve Hadley in a contentious meeting in her office. When Libby refused to endorse the letter, Rice met with Cheney, but he remained opposed.⁷⁶ Cheney and Rice then brought the quarrel to the Oval Office. Bush heard them out and decided to scrap the proposed letter, elevate the Karine A issue and demand that Arafat show clearly that he was changing course. Arafat, however, denied any role in the Karine A, a lie that infuriated Bush.⁷⁷

Arafat's response to all this was to increase anti-Israel terrorism. Over the next two months, Arafat's War included shooting Israeli families in their homes, bombing civilians on streets and in shopping malls and massacring students at a Jewish religious school. The murders occurred day after day, week after week.

Even so, State and NSC staff officials remained intent on quickly moving beyond the Karine A. They wanted to find a way forward with Arafat. Bush, however, was growing less and less receptive to that advice.⁷⁸

One of Bush's top priorities at that time was the problem of Iraq. He had to decide how to handle threats from Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and Iraq's defiance of United Nations Security Council resolutions. Powell and State officials said that Arab

states would not support the US on pressuring Iraq unless Bush reached out diplomatically to Arafat.⁷⁹

Cheney, Rumsfeld and their staffs did not think that the Palestinian issue would determine the policies of other Arab states toward Iraq. Those states had their own interests that would take precedence, as Cheney had heard directly from their leaders in recent conversations in the region.⁸⁰

Arguing that Bush should not invest further in Arafat, Cheney and Rumsfeld said there was no justification any longer for thinking that Arafat may be committed to peace. A new US peace initiative would be futile and damaging because it could look as if Washington were rewarding Arafat for his campaign of terrorism. Douglas Feith, this essay's other author, was working for Rumsfeld on national security matters as Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. Regarding Arafat, Feith proposed adopting an old quip from the famous movie executive Samuel Goldwyn. Known for his broken-English witticisms, Goldwyn once grumbled about someone, "Don't pay any attention to him. Don't even ignore him." In his memo to the president on how to deal with Arafat, Rumsfeld quoted that line.

As Arafat's stock fell in Bush's eyes, Sharon's rose. For nearly a year, Cheney had been hearing that Sharon was more willing than commonly thought to seek compromises with the Palestinians. In early 2001, Natan Sharansky, the former Soviet political prisoner who was now a leading Israeli voice for human rights, had told Cheney that Sharon would work pragmatically for peace,⁸¹ and that spring, Libby had opened discussions with one of Sharon's most trusted advisers, Arie Genger. Coordinating with Rice's staff, Cheney used the Genger channel to learn about Israeli strategic thinking. The talks, Genger has said, marked "the beginning of a new period of mutual respect and trust."⁸² In fall 2001 Sharon said he would accept a Palestinian state, and in conversations with Cheney in early 2002, the prime minister said he wanted a ceasefire and negotiations with Arafat. These helped confirm for Cheney what he had heard from others, that Sharon – and the Israeli public – would readily make peace if given the opportunity.⁸³

Bush and Cheney eventually embraced three insights. First, there was no hope for progress toward peace with Arafat. Second, the Palestinian issue would not bar Arab states' cooperating on important regional concerns, including Iraq. And third, Israel's leaders would do what was necessary if the Palestinian side offered reasonable prospects for security and peace. But before these three insights produced a substantial change in US policy, there would be several last gasps of the old approach.

During Cheney's Middle East trip in March 2002, as Air Force 2 approached Israel, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Bill Burns argued that it was necessary for the vice president to visit Arafat in Ramallah. Failing to do so, Burns warned, would spark a diplomatic firestorm. Cheney's mission was fact-finding regarding Iraq, but State officials saw it as another opportunity to bury the Karine A

affair. Libby, Edelman and John Hannah, another Cheney staff member, said that Arafat had still not done anything to justify a meeting. Cheney reluctantly accepted State's position, though he agreed with Libby that, as a precondition, Arafat should do something positive. What? US Envoy Zinni believed Arafat, the next day, would sign a limited security agreement with Israel, so that became the precondition. To Zinni's surprise, Arafat refused to sign.⁸⁴

Cheney returned home without having met Arafat. A few days later, a Palestinian suicide attack at a Mediterranean resort hotel near Tel Aviv killed dozens of Israelis and wounded more than a hundred. Several other high-casualty attacks swiftly followed. Even so, the Israeli side remained willing to accept Zinni's security plan, while Arafat was unwilling. That was why, Rice has explained, the administration withheld criticism when Israel launched a large operation throughout the West Bank to curtail terrorism.⁸⁵

As part of that operation, Israeli forces blockaded Arafat's Ramallah headquarters, which was the command center for Arafat's War and a shelter for the terrorists who had been convicted of assassinating Israel's tourism minister that winter.⁸⁶ From around the world, diplomats, journalists and others complained that Arafat was being mistreated. At National Security Council meetings, Powell pleaded for Bush to press Sharon to relieve pressure on Arafat. Bush, however, with support from Cheney and Rumsfeld, rejected Powell's view. Sharon was choosing merely to isolate the leadership of Arafat's War, when he could justifiably, as Bush saw it, have crushed it. Bush would hardly have been so lenient with commanders of attacks against America.⁸⁷

Powell still advocated a presidential peace initiative. Bush still refused. Instead, on April 4, 2002, Bush delivered a speech. "Everyone must choose; you're either with the civilized world or you're with the terrorists," he declared, and then said that Arafat, despite his Oslo promises, "has not consistently opposed or confronted terrorists." He noted that Arafat had "renounced terror" and "agreed to control it," but he had "not done so." Though granting that "Israel has a right to defend itself from terror," Bush asked Israel, in the spirit of the Mitchell Report, to "lay the foundations of future peace" by restraining its counter-terrorism operations in PA-controlled areas. He spoke to Israel imperatively, saying its settlement activity "must stop" and the "occupation must end through withdrawal to secure and recognized boundaries." He criticized treatment of Palestinians in the territories, saying that Israel should show them respect and compassion, "sparing innocent Palestinians daily humiliation." He announced that he was sending Powell to the region to promote peace.⁸⁸

Powell then met twice with Arafat in Ramallah. He reported telling Arafat that he was his last friend in Washington. Powell urged Arafat to show some positive sign to satisfy Bush, but none was made.⁸⁹

Nonetheless, while still in the region, Powell tried to negotiate a document to end violence and launch a new peace conference. Rice urged Bush to support Powell's conference proposal.⁹⁰ Powell and Rice also criticized Sharon's new plan to build a security barrier – part wall, mostly fence – that would protect Israelis from attacks launched from Palestinian population centers in the West Bank. Rice resented that Sharon was creating, in her words, “an ugly barrier erected between peoples who were supposed to try to find a way to live in peace.”⁹¹ Sharon responded that mangled Israeli corpses in bombed hotels and buses were the alternative, and they were even uglier.

Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and others opposed the conference proposal.⁹² Powell and Rice were frustrated by this opposition, and both reacted with horror when Bush, on April 18, 2002 told a journalist that Sharon was “a man of peace.”⁹³

Tack 4 – Bush's June 24, 2002 speech repudiating Arafat

Divergent views within the Bush administration were reflected in the divergent positions adopted by the president. Bush stiff-armed Arafat as a deceitful terrorist and condemned the ongoing campaign of terrorism, yet he also gave US support, for the first time, to a UN Security Council Resolution calling for two states and pressured Sharon to relax security measures in hopes of making it easier to do a peace deal with Arafat.

All in all, Arafat could claim credit with his people for persisting in the anti-Zionist armed struggle while causing changes in US policy that favored the Palestinian national cause. Rice had worked for over a year to bring “calm” to the Middle East, but violence had increased. She had not in any way moderated Arafat. Meanwhile, together with Powell, she persuaded Bush to condemn both Arafat's terrorism and Sharon's counterterrorist measures. All this, as Washington sought support from others around the world for its own counterterrorism operations against a network of jihadist groups. These included not only al-Qaeda but also Hezbollah, Hamas and other direct enemies of Israel.⁹⁴

In June 2002, Powell again proposed a peace conference. As Rice writes, “the President again said no, not with Arafat.”⁹⁵ Arab and European diplomats continually criticized Bush for neglecting Palestinian-Israeli peace, so Rice and her staff pushed for yet another presidential speech, one that would advocate “a provisional Palestinian state, founded on democracy, institutional reform, and the renunciation of terror,”⁹⁶ but also call for freedom of movement in the West Bank and an end to Israeli settlement construction. State wanted the speech to address the final-status issues and thus revive the Oslo process, rehabilitating Arafat.⁹⁷

The Cheney and Rumsfeld teams favored a different speech. They wanted Bush to say that Arafat was not a peace partner and there could be no US peace initiative until the Palestinians had new leadership. The president's April 4 speech had hinted

at that; but Bush had not gone that far.⁹⁸ With PA security forces still committing terrorism, Cheney and Rumsfeld argued that now was not the time to pay diplomatic tribute to Arafat or further advance his agenda.⁹⁹

Feith wrote to Deputy National Security Adviser Steve Hadley and suggested that the president say, "Until the Palestinians have a leadership that can speak credibly of peace, prevent terrorism, counter extremism and handle funds honestly and transparently, the goal of a state of Palestine will remain out of reach." The key theme, Feith argued, should be the importance of sound Palestinian governance, with an explanation of how the Palestinians' lives could be improved through rule of law, an independent judiciary, better education and more private enterprise.

This new presidential speech would go through over 30 drafts. State and National Security Council staff officials generally argued for more "carrots" for Arafat, while the Cheney and Rumsfeld staffs argued that peace required new Palestinian leadership.¹⁰⁰ The daily news from the region influenced the debates about the speech. Palestinian suicide bombings on June 18 and 19 killed 26 Israelis and wounded over a hundred. Arafat's hand was evident, which weakened arguments favorable to him.¹⁰¹

Bush was not interested in hosting a diplomatic conference, but he saw value in giving another speech, one that would set out the strong, personal conclusions he had reached regarding the Palestinian problem. There would be no more pretense that Arafat would stop terrorism or had a genuine interest in a negotiated solution to the conflict. There could be no consensual two-state outcome without new Palestinian leadership that would end terrorism, reform governance and accept compromise. In US Middle East policy, this was a major departure.

With the speech preparation deadlocked, the president did an extraordinary thing. He personally chaired a drafting session with a small group that included Powell's deputy Richard Armitage, Libby, Feith and National Security Council staff members. Pen in hand, sentence by sentence, the president reviewed contested portions of the speech. Armitage urged Bush to list the so-called final-status issues and note the progress on each. The president resisted. Armitage pressed until the president replied sharply that he was not willing to get back into the "Oslo rut." The goal, the President told Armitage, was to "change the way people think" about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Bush made clear he aimed to discredit the conventional wisdom. He was dismissing the advice of the many Middle East experts who, having ridden the Oslo train, refused to admit that it was irretrievably off the rails.

Bush did not want to sound neutral between Arafat's terrorism and Sharon's counterterrorism, so his speech did not refer to "cycles of violence," "the necessity for both sides to exercise restraint," and "root causes of terrorism." These were standard State Department phrases that for decades had obscured the PA's ideological extremism and incitement of violent hatred. They implied that Arab terrorism and

Israeli military responses were morally equivalent, a view that Bush, as leader of the war on terrorism, rejected.

Bush slaps Palestinian leadership, foreshadowing Trump

Bush delivered this new speech on June 24, 2002 from the White House Rose Garden. His main point was repudiation of the PA – its leaders and its institutions. Bush called on the Palestinians “to elect new leaders, leaders not compromised by terror.”

Bush condemned PA officials for “encouraging, not opposing, terrorism.” He criticized PA rule for its corruption, opacity and lack of accountability. Bush said that the Palestinians needed “entirely new political and economic institutions based on democracy, market economics and action against terrorism,” to ease Palestinian suffering and make peace with Israel possible.

Blaming the PA for the lack of peace and for Palestinian suffering was novel, even shocking, especially for those wedded to what Rice in her memoirs called “the stale ideas governing policy toward the Middle East.” After the speech, Rice records, “The Arabists in the State Department were appalled.”¹⁰² Yet, when the Saudi, Jordanian and Egyptian foreign ministers met with the president in July, they did not dispute his call for new Palestinian leadership.¹⁰³

Dennis Ross, who had been Clinton’s Middle East negotiator and criticizes Bush for insufficient effort to advance peace, called Bush’s June 24 speech “historic” and praised it for telling the Palestinians that they “could not have a peace built on a foundation of terror and corruption.” Ross added, “President Bush created a new basis for the international community to address Middle East peace. Palestinian reform now became the focal point for activity, with emphasis on creating transparency and accountability in the Palestinian Authority.”¹⁰⁴

Within weeks, State officials argued for Bush to modify his stand. He was committed, however, to never dealing with Arafat again and to encouraging the Palestinians to produce new and better leaders.¹⁰⁵

A few weeks after the speech, Arab diplomats proposed creating a “roadmap” for peace. Powell agreed to draft it as part of a group that would be known as the Quartet and would comprise the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations Secretary-General. The Roadmap called on the Palestinians to end terrorism and reform their political institutions first, and then move toward a provisional state and finally full statehood.¹⁰⁶ The Roadmap would amount to little more than a revival of the Oslo process. In private discussions with White House officials, former Secretary of State Kissinger said the Roadmap lacked Bush’s June 24 vision and was similar to past State Department plans, which, since the Nixon administration, were always the same and always failed.

Abbas, Sharon, and Bush's second term

When Arafat died in November 2004, his longtime Fatah deputy, Mahmoud Abbas, became PLO chairman and PA president. Bush greeted Abbas's accession as a new beginning and treated him as a potential reformer and peacemaker. That was the State Department's advice, now conveyed through Bush's new, more trusted secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice. Others cautioned that Abbas had never shown leadership and was too timid to change the PLO's course.

Seeing no prospect for peace in the near term, Sharon unilaterally pursued two major initiatives of his own. The first was completing the security barrier to make it harder for terrorists to cross into Israel. When erected, the barrier drastically reduced attacks and casualties.

The second initiative was to withdraw all Israelis from Gaza unilaterally – that is, without negotiations or agreements. As Sharon saw it, the costs of defending Israelis living in Gaza were too high, and redeploying military and other assets could strengthen Israeli security elsewhere. He anticipated that Palestinian misrule in Gaza would further discredit the PA, clarifying that its officials were not credible peace partners. In September 2005 the Israeli army completed the Gaza withdrawal, including the removal of all Israeli settlements there.

As Sharon had foreseen, Abbas was an unsuccessful and unpopular leader. He quickly found himself confronted by a serious challenge from the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, which identifies itself as the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and calls for elimination of Israel and killing of Jews as such.¹⁰⁷ The State Department had long designated Hamas a terrorist organization. Hamas would soon seize control of Gaza from the PA.

Less than four months after Israel quit Gaza, the PA held parliamentary elections. Israeli officials argued that Hamas should be excluded unless it acknowledged Israel's legitimacy, abandoned terrorism and disarmed. Israelis also argued that quickly organized elections would favor Hamas. Rice disagreed. Relying on polling and concerned that postponing the election would look bad, she argued to Sharon and others that Fatah, the party of Arafat and Abbas, would win. Once Hamas held a minority position in parliament, she said, it could be induced to disarm. She later admitted this was a mistake.¹⁰⁸

Hamas's election campaign stressed PA corruption and the success of Hamas terrorism in forcing Israel out of Gaza. Hamas won. To the amazement of Rice and other State officials, Palestinian voters decisively rejected Fatah.¹⁰⁹

Hamas – even more extreme in its rejectionism than Fatah – now controlled the PA for several months, and then, over Israeli objections, formed a short-lived unity government with Fatah. Soon afterward, Hamas violently expelled Fatah officials from Gaza. Since June, 2007, Hamas has governed the Gaza Strip, while Fatah (which

dominates both the PLO and the PA) has ruled the West Bank. The two groups have warred with each other and occasional efforts at mutual reconciliation have all failed.

That winter, former Secretary of State Kissinger wrote an op-ed about Palestinian rejection of Israel's right to exist. His point was that Hamas's radicalism makes the PLO look moderate in comparison, but the PLO also supports terrorism and has never, despite Arafat's signature on the Oslo Accords, actually accepted Israel's right to exist: "The emergence of Hamas... should not be treated as a radical new departure. Hamas represents the mindset that prevented the full recognition of Israel's legitimacy by the PLO for all these decades; kept Yasser Arafat from accepting partition of Palestine at Camp David in 2000; produced two intifadas and consistently supported terrorism."¹¹⁰

Even so, State officials restarted peace talks, guided by the Roadmap, which said that the Palestinians should first stop terrorism and adopt political reforms before the parties try to resolve the so-called final-status issues. Terrorism had not ceased, and Hamas's recent election victory suggested that it would continue. Nonetheless, Rice pressed Israeli officials to address final-status issues right away. She argued that Palestinian leaders had to see the "political horizon" – that is, what Israel's concessions would be – before they would agree to end terrorism. The issue of Palestinian political reform – a critical point for Bush – fell far to the rear.

Ehud Olmert, who in January 2006¹¹¹ had become Israel's prime minister, faulted Rice for moving ahead on the Roadmap before terrorism was stopped. In March 2006, he declared that Israel would not wait forever for the PA to implement the Roadmap. If it did not, he said, Israel would set its own borders, separating itself from Palestinian population centers. Making a point that would echo over a dozen years later in the Trump plan, he asked, "How much time will Israel wait? Forever? Will we be captive to a PA that is not willing to make peace?"¹¹²

Though political reforms and an end to terrorism were not in sight, Rice had reverted to State Department positions that predated Bush's June 24 speech. She warned the Israelis of a "strategic imperative to find an Israeli-Palestinian solution," lest Arabs not support US policies against Iran,¹¹³ much as Powell had argued regarding Saddam's Iraq. This remained her line, even though she notes in her memoirs that for Gulf Arab leaders at this time the Palestinian issue had "*fallen down the list of priorities,*" well behind Iran, which was priority "*one, two, three and four.*"¹¹⁴

At Rice's urging, Bush finally consented to host a Middle East peace conference. In November 2007, he brought Abbas and Olmert together in a multinational conclave in Annapolis, Maryland. Nothing came of it but numerous speeches, none memorable.

Over the next year or so, Abbas continually talked peace with Israeli and American officials. Like Arafat, he received a surprisingly forthcoming offer from Israel; but like Arafat, Abbas rejected it without a serious response. Olmert's offer was approximately 94% of the West Bank and a "land swap" from pre-1967 Israel equal to

another 5%; Palestinian sovereignty in East Jerusalem; joint governance of Jerusalem's Old City; and Israeli acceptance of 15,000-20,000 Palestinian refugees over five years. In her memoirs, Rice expressed amazement that Olmert was so forthcoming in his "remarkable" offer, but "Abbas refused."¹¹⁵

Even down to his last days in office, Bush worked to promote a peace deal. He had identified the prerequisites for peace: new Palestinian leaders and reformed political institutions. He knew these changes were being blocked by the corrupt temporizers running the West Bank and the fanatical Islamists ruling in Gaza. Why then persist?

Bush bowed to the relentless conventional wisdom that demanded a peace process. It was obvious that the conditions were not right, but Rice touted the importance of making an effort. Bush may have become convinced that there was no risk in playing the game, for lack of success would be praised as a noble failure. He could always claim that his diplomacy kept a bad situation from becoming worse, and gave the United States a freer hand to pursue its other interests in the region. From a certain point of view, peace processing appeared to be all upside.

But that was not Bush's point of view when he gave his June 24 speech. Then he was concerned that he would be rewarding terrorism, bolstering authoritarianism, betraying Palestinian hopes for better government and damaging the cause of Palestinian-Israeli peace if he pretended that the Palestinians' leaders were in good faith when he knew they were not.

What history is likely to remember about Bush's work on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is not the Roadmap, the Annapolis conference or other will o' the wisps, but his declared conviction that the key to a stable peace is Palestinian political leadership that has its people's best interests at heart and is willing to end the conflict with Israel.

In his thoughtful book *Tested by Zion: The Bush Administration and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, Elliott Abrams concluded,

The lesson of the Bush years is that the road to peace may not be the path that has been taken most often, is accepted most widely, and is safest politically. When President Bush defied conventional wisdom, he was at his most effective, and the United States truly brought peace closer. The conferences and ceremonies that got the most applause did not do so.¹¹⁶

Tack 5 – Obama reverses course to reach out to Palestinians

Barack Obama entered the presidency hoping to transform America's relationship with the Muslim world, seeing the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a principal irritant in that relationship and holding Israel largely to blame for the lack of peace. Bush, he thought, had been too close to Israel, which relieved its leaders from making concessions which Obama expected would bring peace. Obama planned to distance

the United States from Israel on settlements and other peace process issues and position himself as a better friend of the Palestinians.¹¹⁷

In his June 2009 speech in Cairo, addressed to the Muslim world, Obama stressed the centrality of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to the region's politics. He offered some words of sympathy to the Jews¹¹⁸ as well as the Arabs, but his main point was that he would support the Palestinian cause much more strongly than Bush had done. He lamented the "pain of dislocation" of the Palestinians and argued that they have "never been able to lead" a life of peace and security. He said they "endure the daily humiliations – large and small – that come with occupation" and called their situation "intolerable."

Obama urged Palestinians to "abandon violence." He argued that it was wrong and did not succeed when black Americans fought American slaveholders and segregationists, or when black South Africans opposed the apartheid regime or when Eastern Europeans resisted foreign fascist or communist tyrants – historical references that associated Israelis with racists and totalitarians and associated Palestinians with the cause of black liberation. He was effectively telling the world that, in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, he viewed the Arabs as the sympathetic party and the Israelis as oppressors.¹¹⁹

Obama continued, "The United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements" and settlement construction "violates previous agreements." This accusation was especially vexing to Israeli officials because Bush had agreed with Sharon that there was no problem with construction within established settlement boundaries.¹²⁰ Obama was now canceling that agreement.¹²¹

Obama prevailed on Israel to accept a 10-month "freeze" on new West Bank construction. The aim was to spur peace talks. PA officials found themselves having to make more of an issue of the settlements than they had been doing.¹²² Abbas squandered the freeze, failing to negotiate directly with Israel during most of it and then refusing to talk unless Israel extended it.

As he urged Israel to take risks for peace, Obama gave it additional grounds to fear for its security. When Israelis were hit by terrorism and rocket barrages, he publicly urged restraint. Sometimes he joined international condemnations of Israel's retaliation. Obama's signature policies in the Middle East included withdrawing troops, abandoning a "red line" on chemical weapons use,¹²³ supporting a Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt and, most importantly, extending his "unclenched" hand to Israel's foremost threat, Iran.

In his negotiations on the Iran nuclear deal, Obama time and again eased his demands until he produced an agreement that officials in Israel and the Arabian Peninsula criticized as weak. It gave the Iranian regime access to more than \$100 billion of foreign-held financial reserves. These financed Iran's pro-Assad military operations in Syria and funded Tehran's terrorist proxies, including Hezbollah in

Lebanon and Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza. All of this increased Israeli anxieties.

Abbas continued to lead the PA throughout the Obama years – and does so to this day – though he was elected as PA president only once, in 2005, to a four-year term. There have been no new presidential elections since. Obama saw Abbas as the most politically moderate leader the Palestinians may ever have.¹²⁴ Perhaps, but the PA continues to support terrorism and remains undemocratic, corrupt and unwilling to conclude a permanent peace with Israel.

PA leaders have opposed terrorism committed by Hamas and often cooperate with Israel to suppress it. Israeli officials have called this cooperation highly valuable.¹²⁵ At the same time, PA leaders incite and officially fund incentives for anti-Israel attacks perpetrated by non-Hamas terrorists. The PA officially appropriates and disburses hundreds of millions of dollars annually to imprisoned terrorists and to families of terrorists killed in action. On a daily basis, PA schools and official media promote hatred of Israel and honor terrorists. This complex picture explains why some Israeli officials accurately call the PA pro-terrorist, while others, also accurately, say it works effectively with Israeli security forces against terrorism. It is not correct to describe Abbas as anti-terrorism, though he has been careful to calibrate his actions to prevent the kind of large-scale violence that would provoke a major Israeli military response.

Abbas refused to take up Olmert's liberal peace offer. He has shown no willingness to end the conflict. To Secretaries of State Clinton and Kerry, Abbas would regularly say that the Palestinians' compromise for peace was the willingness to recognize Israel within the 1949 armistice lines. At the same time, however, he insisted on a Palestinian "right of return" that would end Israel as a Jewish-majority state. Abbas said he would never recognize Israel as the state of the Jewish people.¹²⁶ Yet the theme of Obama's diplomacy was that Israel is to blame for the lack of peace. As his advisor Dennis Ross put it, "Though [Abbas] had shown little flexibility... President Obama, seeing the Israelis as the stronger party and the Palestinians as the weaker one, put the onus on Israel."¹²⁷

Obama said in March 2014 that time was running out for a peace deal and that Netanyahu should "seize the moment" to take advantage of Abbas's leadership.¹²⁸ Obama "said nothing about what [Abbas] had to do; the responsibility for acting was exclusively Netanyahu's," Ross commented, adding, "Even when... Obama presented to [Abbas] principles that went far toward meeting Palestinian needs on all the permanent status issues... the Palestinian president still would not respond. And yet the administration offered no criticism of him. On the contrary, it gave him a pass by effectively blaming his 'shutdown' on Israeli settlement policy."¹²⁹

Israel's relations with the White House became especially frosty in Obama's second term. The new National Security Adviser, Susan Rice, was distrustful of Israel, Ross observed, and viewed a close, cooperative relationship with Israel as "anathema."¹³⁰

There was no diplomatic progress toward peace. Administration officials disapproved of Netanyahu, criticized his campaign statements and support for settlements and resented his outspoken opposition to Obama's Iran policy.¹³¹ *Atlantic* magazine reported that one senior White House official mocked Netanyahu as a "chicken shit" and others called him "obtuse" and "myopic." *Atlantic* editor Jeffrey Goldberg interviewed Obama and reported that the president scorned Netanyahu for lacking "political courage." Quoting contemptuous comments about the Israeli prime minister from other unnamed members of the Obama team, Goldberg concluded that the US-Israeli relationship in the Obama years was "the worst it's ever been."¹³²

In the lame duck period of his final days in office, President Obama directed attention again to the settlements issue by allowing the UN Security Council to adopt a resolution characterizing the West Bank as "Palestinian territory" and declaring Israeli settlements to be "in violation of international humanitarian law."¹³³ No US president had attacked the legality of Israel's settlements for almost forty years. (As we will see, the Trump administration would soon disavow that Security Council resolution.)

For eight years Obama tested his theory for advancing peace. He distanced his administration from Israel and promoted sympathy for the Palestinian cause. Yet, he had no progress to show for his efforts. He had not appreciably improved the lives of the Palestinians. He had not moved the parties closer to a consensual resolution of the conflict. During his tenure, neither Israel nor the PA made political concessions surpassing those offered during the Clinton and Bush years. The Palestinian side was still wedded to the "right of return," effectively insisting that Israel cease to exist as a Jewish state.

Nor had the Palestinians abandoned violence. Palestinian schools and official news media remained fonts of bigotry and exaltation of terrorist knifings, bombings and car rammings. Neither Obama nor the PA had prioritized Palestinian political reform, and there was none to speak of. Gaza and the West Bank remained politically divided from each other, and Palestinians still labored under violent misrule that stifled their lives, livelihoods and prospects.

There were no peace talks underway when Obama left office.

A Brookings scholar lamented how little Obama's peace diplomacy had accomplished:

Not only has he [Obama] failed to live up to the high expectations he set out at the start of his administration, Obama is on his way to becoming the first US president in more than four decades to break no new political ground in terms of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In fact, his legacy could well be the death of the two-state solution itself.¹³⁴

Tack 6 – Trump, new realities, old-style Bush principles, and patience

Trump rejected Obama's peace policy as thoroughly as Obama had rejected Bush's. Top Trump administration officials do not accept the view that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the main issue in Middle Eastern affairs. They do not believe that the US must distance itself from Israel to promote peace or win cooperation from Arab states. Nor do they think that the key to peace is Israeli willingness to make concessions on "final-status" issues. They disapprove of the Palestinians' leaders – in the PA as well as Hamas. They blame them for harming the Palestinian people as well as refusing to make peace with Israel.

Trump's principal innovation in Middle East peace diplomacy is insisting that there should be consequences if the Palestinian side persists in terrorism and refuses reasonable peace terms. This means that outsiders should not tell Israel to preserve the West Bank status quo if Palestinian officials choose to perpetuate the conflict.

Trump's 2017 National Security Strategy approved efforts to "facilitate" Palestinian-Israeli peace, but stated that the dispute is not "the prime irritant" affecting America's regional goals. Rather, it says, "Today, the threats from jihadist terrorist organizations and the threat from Iran are creating the realization that Israel is not the cause of the region's problems."¹³⁵

As Trump says frequently, he values foreign partners who are active in defense of our common interests – not above the fray, not weak and not free-riders. His team praises Israel for taking initiative, relying on its own troops, generating and sharing valuable intelligence and doing battle successfully for goals that serve American as well as Israeli interests. When Israeli forces have bombed Iranian forces in Syria, destroyed Iranian arms headed to Hezbollah in Lebanon and struck Hamas in Gaza, Trump has given unequivocal support.¹³⁶

Promoting peace by deflating hopes of destroying Israel

A theme of the Obama administration was that Israel fuels terrorism by causing the Palestinians to despair about peace. While expressing sympathy for Palestinian suffering, the Trump team's contrary message is that the primary obstacle to peace is not despair, but hope among Israel's enemies that they will eventually isolate and defeat the Jewish State. That hope sustains Palestinian opposition to a final peace. It is rooted in the well-known propaganda argument that Israel is an alien, artificial presence in the region that can be worn down, demoralized and ultimately expelled as were the Crusaders and, in later centuries, the European imperial powers. Bolstering that unconstructive hope is the belief that international pressure will over time curtail US support for Israel.

The Trump peace plan and the highly visible initiatives that preceded it are all measures that aim at contradicting hope for Israel's elimination. The measures convey a set of mutually reinforcing messages: Israel is as legitimate as any other

state. It is rooted in its land and has rights to security and self-defense. It will not forever be hostage to Palestinian rejectionism. And it will retain US support.

First, in December 2017, Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital and promised to move the US embassy there. This not only acknowledged reality, but also reaffirmed the historical connection of the Jewish people with Jerusalem and the Holy Land. Twenty-two years earlier the US Congress had passed a law favoring such recognition,¹³⁷ but successive presidents, despite campaign promises to move the embassy, invoked a waiver provision allowing them to defer action. They deferred largely because State and intelligence officials warned that recognizing Israel's rights in Jerusalem would spark carnage across the Muslim world. When he defied those warnings, Trump proved them to have been incorrect.

Second, also in the name of owning reality, Trump in March 2019 recognized Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, high ground that dominates northern Israel and has been under Israeli control since the 1967 war. The Heights remain important for Israeli security given the Syrian regime's persistent hostility and strategic alliance with Iran and the awful instability that has been a cause and effect of Syria's catastrophic ten-year civil war.

A third major initiative occurred in November 2019 when Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that Israeli West Bank settlements are not inherently violations of international law. Forty years before Pompeo's statement, Jimmy Carter had become the first US president to call the settlements "illegal." Then in 1981 President Reagan contradicted Carter on the point, implicitly rejecting the contention that Israel's status in the West Bank is that of a mere "occupier."¹³⁸

Reagan's position ultimately rested on the Palestine Mandate, which recognized that Jews have national rights derived from "the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine."¹³⁹

From the Reagan years forward, US officials sometimes criticized the settlements on diplomatic grounds, but administrations of both parties refused to revive Carter's charge until Obama. At the end of his presidency, he allowed the UN Security Council to condemn the settlements as illegal. In repudiating that move, Pompeo stated that the US government was aligning itself once again with Reagan's position. Pompeo's statement is now a factor in Israel's decision-making on whether to assert sovereignty over parts of the West Bank.

The fourth and fifth new initiatives are the two new laws Trump signed that oppose Palestinian terrorism by requiring cuts in US aid to the PA. The March 2018 Taylor Force Act penalizes the PA for pay-for-slay funding to Palestinian terrorists imprisoned by Israel or, if "martyred" (i.e., slain), to their families.¹⁴⁰ The October 2018 Anti-Terrorism Clarification Act¹⁴¹ required the PLO and PA to accept US courts' jurisdiction over claims arising from past terrorist attacks against US citizens

or to forfeit US aid.¹⁴² They chose to lose the aid, and the US, in February 2019, stopped all funding of PA programs.¹⁴³

Sixth, finally, is the December 2018 US withdrawal from membership in UNESCO – the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. In explaining the action, the administration cited UNESCO’s “continuing anti-Israel bias.”

The Trump peace plan: Sympathize with Palestinians but protect security of Israel and the region

The Trump administration took more than three years to develop and announce its Palestinian-Israeli peace plan, entitled “Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People.” The delay reflected in part the complexity of the challenge, but it also, in and of itself, conveyed a message: The United States had important regional interests which it could pursue without first brokering a peace deal.

Making this point explicit, the Trump plan calls for strategic cooperation among the Arab states, Israel and the United States without reference to any Palestinian peace deal. Israel and the Arab countries “have already discovered their common interests” in fighting terrorism and opposing Iran. The Trump plan concludes, “Integrating Israel into the region” would facilitate countering Iran’s threats and “set the stage for diplomatic breakthroughs.”¹⁴⁴

Trump’s Vision states that many Palestinians desire peace. In line with Clinton and Bush diplomacy, it advocates a “realistic Two-State solution” to improve the lives of Palestinians, allow them to govern themselves and give them a respected place in the region. It repudiates, however, the many “unachievable” proposals and ideas for peace advanced over recent decades.

The Trump Vision sees Israel as ready to make necessary compromises for peace, if it has a well-intentioned and competent Palestinian partner. Note is taken of Israel’s history of successful peacemaking with Egypt and Jordan. “Israelis,” the Vision says, “still desire peace,” but Palestinian leaders have never made a reasonable offer because they cannot reconcile themselves to Israel’s being half of a two-state solution.

The Trump team is unapologetically sympathetic to Israeli security concerns. Israel has “extraordinary geographic and geostrategic challenges” that make its security “precarious” and give it “no margin for error,” their plan notes, while recognizing that negative events in the West Bank – a takeover by Hamas, for example – could put Israel under “existential threat.” The plan says,

No government should be asked to compromise the safety and security of its citizens. This is especially true for the State of Israel, a country that since its establishment has faced, and continues to face, enemies that call for its

annihilation. Israel has also had the bitter experience of withdrawing from territories that were then used to launch attacks against it.

Accordingly, the peace plan says,

The United States would only ask Israel to make compromises that we believe will make the State of Israel and the people of Israel more secure in the short and long term. This Vision was designed in that spirit. All other countries should take the same approach.

Respect for Israel's defense is central to the discussion of boundaries and Israeli sovereignty. The plan recognizes that final lines – the legal border between Israel and a future Palestinian state – will emerge only in a negotiated peace agreement, which may be many years off. Meanwhile, the plan provides a "Conceptual Map," which illustrates the US concept of boundaries based on several criteria, including: meeting Israel's security requirements; giving Palestinians significantly more territory; taking into account Israel's "valid legal and historical claims;" avoiding any forced population transfers; providing "pragmatic transportation solutions;" and "enhanc[ing] the commercial viability and economic independence of the State of Palestine."

The Conceptual Map has immediate real-world consequences. For, as Trump has stated, "The United States will recognize Israeli sovereignty over the territory that my vision provides to be part of the State of Israel. Very important."¹⁴⁵ This applies in the West Bank to the land on which large Israeli settlements are already built, and, especially notably, to the Jordan Valley.

The peace plan says, "The Jordan Valley, which is critical for Israel's national security, will be under Israeli sovereignty." It mentions that PM Rabin, even after he signed the Oslo Accords, intended to include the valley permanently within "Israel's security border." There are only a few roads that would allow an armored invasion force to move from Jordan (or from Syria or Iraq through Jordan) across the West Bank highlands to Israel's populated coastal plain. Whoever controls the Jordan Valley controls access to those roads. Holding it in peacetime deters attack, and in wartime it would be key to defeating an invasion from the east.¹⁴⁶

Israel's control of the Jordan Valley also serves other interests that Israel and the United States share. The Valley serves as a buffer between Jordan and the populated, Palestinian-governed portions of the West Bank. Jordan's political stability has been a US interest and concern for decades. If a hostile state or Islamist extremist group ever dominated the Kingdom, control of the Jordan Valley would allow Israel to block efforts to infiltrate and subvert the West Bank. Conversely, if extremists ever gained control of a West Bank Palestinian state (as Hamas did in Gaza), Israeli control of the Jordan Valley would help insulate Jordan from threats and infiltration. In a background interview with an Israeli newspaper, a senior Jordanian official said his

country would not want to see the Jordan Valley become a “geographical connection” between Jordan and a Palestinian state. Rather, he said, Jordan prefers that the Israeli Defense Forces be there. He noted that Jordan objected when the Obama administration proposed transferring most of the Valley to the Palestinians.¹⁴⁷

Current Palestinian leaders: Striving to replace them, not win them over

The Trump plan paints a sorry picture of Palestinian politics: “Gaza and the West Bank are politically divided. Gaza is run by Hamas, a terror organization that has fired thousands of rockets at Israel and murdered hundreds of Israelis.” In the West Bank, the plan says, the PA is corrupt and runs failed institutions and it is “because of the lack of accountability and bad governance that billions of dollars have been squandered.”

Without substantial reform, the Trump plan says, there will be neither improvement in the lives of Palestinians nor peace with Israel. Using language virtually identical to that in Bush’s June 24, 2002 speech, the plan specifies key elements of decent government: rule of law, transparency, accountability to the public, separation of powers and a fair and independent judiciary. Trump, like Bush, blames Palestinian leaders for indoctrinating their publics – children, in particular – to hate Israel and commit terrorism.

This is hardly designed to win favor with current Palestinian officials. It is an appeal over their heads to the people, and around the PA to the Arab states.

Critics who say Trump’s Vision won’t win acceptance by Mahmoud Abbas are missing its main point, which is that the Palestinians need new leaders and that there is no chance of peace with Israel until they get them. In the Trump team’s view, Abbas and his colleagues brought this negative judgment on themselves through a long train of terrorism, ideological extremism and bad-faith diplomacy.

The Vision’s way ahead

Having declared the need for Palestinian reform, the Trump plan proposes ways to encourage the rise of new leadership. It admits that success may prove elusive.

The plan says that only the Palestinians can determine their own path forward, but it suggests three ways for the outside world to help promote the rise of new leadership – leaders primarily interested in improving their people’s lives and willing to make compromises for peace with Israel. The first is the prospect of enormous economic aid and investment. The second is encouraging the involvement of the Arab states. And the third is warning of the high costs of maintaining the Palestinians’ current posture.

The \$50 billion incentive

The plan promises a \$50 billion economic development program if the Palestinians elevate leaders that make needed governmental reforms and accept reasonable terms for peace. The idea is not novel; the amount is.

The plan describes itself as realistic, but the reality is that would-be peacemakers have tried for a hundred years to counter Palestinian anti-Zionism by dangling the prospect of economic betterment.¹⁴⁸ In 1921, British Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill met in Palestine with a delegation of local Arabs and contended that the “increase in the general prosperity of Palestine is one of the very reasons which should lead you to take a wise and tolerant view of the Zionist movement.” He concluded, “If instead of sharing miseries through quarrels you will share blessings through co-operations, a bright and tranquil future lies before your country.”¹⁴⁹ He was eloquent (and even correct), but Arab hostility to Zionism remained undiminished.

For many years since, Britons, Americans and others have argued that peace would bring Palestinians prosperity. Though never carrying so enormous a price tag, the incentives consistently failed to overcome Arab nationalist and religious objections to Zionism and Israel. Palestinian leaders framed their rejectionist case as a matter of honor, justice and duty to the Arab nation and to Allah, considerations that they say outweigh mere material concerns about higher standards of living.

Economic inducements have never yet generated a politically significant Palestinian party in favor of ending the conflict. The Trump plan is testing whether they can work now, under current circumstances of severe Palestinian weakness – in an era of increasing Israeli military and economic might, Palestinian division and strategic anxiety among Sunni states about Iran’s expanding reach. At a minimum, one assumes, the \$50 billion carrot is supposed to communicate that the US looks on the Palestinians sympathetically and hopes to improve their conditions.

Help from Arab states and others

The Trump plan urges Arab states to promote better Palestinian leadership and to reach their own accommodations with Israel. Palestinian rejectionists often won support from the broader Arab world. The Trump plan hopes to win such support now to oppose the rejectionists. Clinton and Bush had similar hopes, but Trump officials think that present circumstances are more favorable.

The Sunni leaders of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman, Jordan and Egypt see Iran and its Shiite proxies as a deadly threat and recognize that Israel is the region’s most effective opponent of Iranian power. Tehran’s regional ambitions, Shiite revolutionary ideology, military power (including its potential nuclear weapons capability), terrorism and subversion threaten these Sunni Arab states, some of which include significant Shiite populations. Iran appears to be trying to encircle its Sunni rivals. It is constructing a so-called land bridge to the Mediterranean in the north, by increasing its influence in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon and, creating a maritime bridge in the south along a route from the Persian Gulf across the Arabian Sea and Gulf of Aden to the Red Sea and Suez Canal.

Israel helps counter Tehran militarily, through strikes against Iranian forces in Syria and against Iran’s proxy Hezbollah, and fights it diplomatically, especially in

Washington, by arguing for economic sanctions and other means of constraint. Arab states need Israel's voice on this issue because their own officials command less attention now that America is not importing Middle Eastern oil as it used to. As a result, those Arab states have shown a greater willingness to deal openly with Israelis and increase their economic and strategic cooperation.¹⁵⁰

The Trump plan also takes account of how Arab states have in recent years revised their attitudes toward the Palestinians. While still expressing sympathy for the people, Arab leaders are antagonized by the Palestinians' political disunity, the power of Hamas – an affiliate of the Muslim Brotherhood, an enemy of Saudi Arabia and other Arab states – growing Iranian influence in Gaza and the corruption and other shortcomings of PA leaders. The Palestinian cause, as we noted, lost influence in the early 1990s when Arafat supported Saddam's brutal occupation of Kuwait, and a similar phenomenon is now at work.

Trump hopes to capitalize on these developments. Is his plan realistic in suggesting that Saudis, Egyptians and Jordanians – and Americans, Europeans and Japanese, for that matter – can influence Palestinian politics? The Palestinians rely heavily on foreign diplomatic and financial support, so foreigners have some leverage. History provides examples of effective influence of this kind by outsiders.

Improving Palestinian governance may be a mission impossible. But it is reasonable to see the task as indispensable for progress toward peace. And it is reasonable to suppose that the Palestinians are unlikely to achieve it on their own. So, there is sense in appealing to regional and other actors to play a role.

Changing strategic calculations

While some aspects of the Trump peace plan are rooted in policies of previous administrations, others are new. An innovative feature is the warning to the Palestinians that steadfast rejectionism will not give them victory, but further erode their position. In other words, time is not on their side, and it is not necessarily even neutral.

That idea is not just a theme of the peace plan; it is a message of the series of policy moves – on Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and the West Bank settlements – that preceded the plan. Administration officials explained those moves as recognition of reality. They said, in effect, that they were dropping pretenses. Jerusalem has all along been Israel's capital and the US government will no longer ignore reality and pretend otherwise. The US government will no longer view the Golan, for fifty years under Israeli control, as part of Syria. And it will no longer deny the reality or legitimacy of Israeli West Bank settlements and claim that the West Bank is "occupied territory" where Jews are not allowed to live. These points are directed at Israel's enemies, Syrians as well as Palestinians.

The Trump team is saying that reality would be different now if all of Israel's neighbors had made peace years ago, but some did not. New US policies will no longer insulate Palestinians from the costs they incur by refusing to end the conflict.

Carrying this line of argument forward, Trump has declared that, if the Palestinians now reject his peace plan, Washington will support an Israeli unilateral extension of sovereignty in parts of the West Bank. These are the parts he expects Israel would keep anyway in any future peace negotiation.

Trump has thus set aside what had been a general principle of US policy since 1967, that changes in the status of the West Bank should be made only through peace negotiations. Negotiated change, of course, would be preferable, but the Palestinians are being warned that, if they refuse to negotiate reasonably, Israel can improve its position, with US backing.

Trump's support for unilateral extension of Israeli sovereignty has generated worldwide controversy over whether PM Netanyahu will and should take the action. Among Israelis, there is broad political support for permanent retention of certain West Bank areas – specifically, the Jordan Valley and the main settlement blocs. Extending sovereignty there, proponents say, would acknowledge that reality, and adjust Palestinian expectations, which may help rather than harm chances for diplomatic progress in the future. Opponents, meanwhile, challenge the move's legality and contend that it would set back the cause of peace. They raise the important question whether Israel would offer citizenship to the areas' Arab residents. Even some conservatives who support continued Israeli control have argued that the damage to Israel's political and diplomatic interests from extending sovereignty would outweigh any benefits.

These are issues worthy of serious debate. News media commentary sometimes does a disservice, however, by mischaracterizing the subject – for example, referring to “the annexation of the West Bank.” Only parts of the West Bank are involved, not the whole. Also, “annexation” implies that one country is taking territory from another that was its rightful owner. That is not the case with the West Bank, however, which has not been under the broadly recognized sovereignty of any country since Britain relinquished the Palestine Mandate in 1948.¹⁵¹

Some opponents of extending sovereignty argue that it would be illegal, but proponents have respectable counterarguments. It is (to say the least) doubtful that this issue – one affecting life and death interests – will ultimately be resolved in a courtroom.

Whatever the Israeli government decides on extension of sovereignty, the Trump peace plan's key goal is to change the diplomatic circumstances that have perversely incentivized the Palestinian side to perpetuate the conflict. Rejectionism, the plan says, will be costly. The Trump team is saying it makes no sense for Palestinian

leaders to support terrorism and reject reasonable offers of peace while expecting US officials to insist that Israel maintain the status quo in the territories.

Trump is handling the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as he likes to handle other negotiating challenges. He declares that the United States hopes to receive the benefits of a deal but will be fine even if none is made. Other parties, but not the United States, should feel pressure. That is radically different from the posture of previous US presidents. Obama, for example, pressed Israel urgently for concessions, not only because he judged them fair, but because he thought resolving the conflict had to be a top US priority because it was the key to crucial US regional aims that could not otherwise be achieved.

Conclusion

The Trump peace plan is the most categorical US government declaration ever that the key to peace is not even-handed US diplomacy and not agreement on the “final status” issues, but new Palestinian leaders with new ideas. What is needed are men and women, operating in reformed political institutions, committed to the well-being of their own people, willing to fight terrorism and reconciled to the permanent existence of Israel as a Jewish state.

The plan is at odds with longstanding conventional thinking. It does not view the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as central to US concerns in the Middle East. Its goals are to increase Israeli security, to encourage regional cooperation that will serve broader US interests and, if conditions develop favorably, to give the Palestinians a state of their own with improved economic opportunities. The intention clearly is to pursue the first two goals even if the third is unachievable.

In prioritizing Palestinian political reform, Trump’s plan builds on ideas laid out in the Bush June 24, 2002 speech, but expands on them dramatically. For the last half century, US officials (even at times during the George W. Bush administration) tried time and again to persuade bad Palestinian leaders to do good - that is, to govern honestly and justly and make peace with Israel. The history reviewed in this essay shows why Trump, like some of his predecessors, came to the conclusion that the Palestinians do not have the necessary leadership. That is why it is fair to say that the Trump plan is not trying to make peace so much as it is trying to bring about changes that will make peace possible.

The plan may not succeed in bringing about those changes. There is virtue, nonetheless, in exposing the falsity of conventional views about the Middle East; pointing to what is truly precluding peace; conserving US efforts for diplomatic projects more likely to bear fruit; and bolstering support for Israel as a strong, productive and democratic US ally. US officials long refrained from taking certain positions on important questions of international law or security lest the “Arab street” explode. Trump’s actions on Jerusalem, the Golan and West Bank settlements

have shown that such fears are hugely exaggerated. In future US policy debates, arguments about the “Arab street” will be evaluated more skeptically.

No one should hold his breath waiting for the Trump plan to produce a peace deal. Its principal themes, however, may have lasting influence for the good. First: America’s ally Israel is healthy, growing stronger and has as much right to exist as any other country in the world. Second: Israel - and American support for Israel - are here to stay. Third: The Palestinian-Israeli conflict will not stop Arab states from cooperating with the United States, or even with Israel, when it serves their interests to do so. Fourth: The Palestinians have no better option than to make peace and deal with Israel as a partner rather than an enemy. And fifth: The United States will help them if they do, but their situation will get worse if they continue to follow leaders committed, by ideology and personal interest, to perpetual conflict.

Notes

¹ The English definition of Intifada is “uprising.” The Arabic term is sometimes translated as “shaking off.”

² See, for example, Dennis Ross, *Doomed to Succeed: The U.S.-Israel Relationship from Truman to Obama* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), p. 210. With the intifada raging, in mid-summer 1988, Jordan renounced all claims to administer the West Bank; and in November PLO leaders gathered in Algiers proclaimed an independent Palestinian state. George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1993), p. 1037.

³ *Ibid.* p. 432.

⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 1041-42, reproducing a December 7, 1988 letter from Arafat.

⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 1042-44.

⁶ Office of the Historian, Department of State, “[The Madrid Conference, 1991](#),” [history.state.gov](#); Youssef M. Ibrahim, “[P.L.O. Proclaims Palestine To Be An Independent State; Hints At Recognizing Israel](#),” *New York Times*, November 15, 1988, p. A1; Robert Pear, “[U.S. Agrees To Talks With P.L.O., Saying Arafat Accepts Israel And Renounces All Terrorism](#),” *ibid.*, December 15, 1988, p. A1; Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, p. 262.

⁷ The Palestinian cause had suffered for many years from its leaders’ bad choices in great-power politics. In World War I, the leading Palestinian Arabs supported Turkey against the Allies, and in World War II, the main Palestinian leader sided with Nazi Germany. During the Cold War, Arafat aligned with the Soviets.

⁸ The Arab states’ grudge lasted for years. Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, p. 257.

⁹ In March 1991, having just liberated Kuwait, protected Saudi Arabia, and beaten Saddam, President George H.W. Bush told Congress, “The time has come to put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict.” The following October, Bush and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev co-chaired a Middle East peace conference in Madrid, where there were delegations representing various Arab states, Israel and non-PLO Palestinians. Some hailed putting Israelis and Arabs together, but follow-on talks in Washington and Moscow petered out. Office of the Historian, Department of State, “The Madrid Conference, 1991.”

¹⁰ Rabin had campaigned on concluding an interim agreement with the Palestinians within nine months of taking office. Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, p. 256.

¹¹ “[PM Rabin in Knesset – Ratification of Interim Agreement](#),” October 5, 1995, Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹² Daniel Pipes, “[Lessons from the Prophet Muhammad’s Diplomacy](#),” *Middle East Quarterly*, September 1999. Pipes notes that Arafat was secretly recorded making these remarks in 1994, and later said similar things on Palestinian TV and in a newspaper interview.

¹³ Douglas J. Feith and Sander Gerber, “[The Department of Pay-for-Slay](#),” *Commentary*, April 2017.

¹⁴ Efraim Karsh, [*The Oslo Disaster*](#) (Ramat Gan, Israel: Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University, 2016), p. 18.

¹⁵ Eager for a peace agreement himself, Barak had pressed Clinton to convene the talks.

¹⁶ Khaled Abu Toameh, "[Arafat Ordered Hamas Attacks against Israel in 2000](#)," *Jerusalem Post*, September 2010 (Mahmoud Zahar, "one of the Hamas leaders in the Gaza Strip," stated publicly that "President Arafat instructed Hamas to carry out a number of military operations in the heart of the Jewish state after he felt that his negotiations with the Israeli government then had failed.").

¹⁷ See Efraim Karsh, *Arafat's War: The Man and His Battle for Israeli Conquest* (New York: Grove Press, 2003), p. 189.

¹⁸ Ehud Barak, *My Country, My Life: Fighting for Israel, Searching for Peace* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2018), p. 359.

¹⁹ Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), p. 936.

²⁰ Barak, *My Country, My Life*, pp. 366, 370, 373, 386.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 352.

²² *Ibid.* p. 368.

²³ President Clinton describes the position on Jerusalem that he recommended and Barak accepted as follows: "the Palestinians should have sovereignty over the Temple Mount/Haram and the Israelis sovereignty over the Western Wall and the 'holy space' of which it is a part." Clinton, *My Life*, p. 937.

²⁴ Barak, *My Country, My Life*, p. 395.

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 391.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 381.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 384.

²⁹ Barak's memoirs say Arafat wouldn't accept Israeli sovereignty over the Wall. Clinton's memoirs say that Arafat asserted that "fifty feet of the Western Wall should go to the Palestinians." Clinton, *My Life*, p. 943.

³⁰ Dennis Ross, *The Missing Peace: The Inside Story of the Fight for Middle East Peace* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2004), pp. 699, 718.

³¹ Clinton, *My Life*, p. 943.

³² Efraim Karsh and Gershon Hachohen, "[Israel's Flight from South Lebanon 20 Years On](#)," Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, May 22, 2020.

³³ See, for example, Charles Krauthammer, "[Arafat's War](#)," *Washington Post*, October 6, 2000, p. A31.

³⁴ Neri Zilber and Ghaith al-Omari, [“State with No Army, Army with No State: Evolution of the Palestinian Authority Security Forces 1994-2018,”](#) The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 2018; Jim Zanutti, [“U.S. Security Assistance to the Palestinian Authority,”](#) Congressional Research Service, January 8, 2010, pp. 5-6.

³⁵ [“Vital Statistics: Total Casualties, Arab-Israel Conflict \(1860-Present\),”](#) Jewish Virtual Library; [“Five Years of Violent Confrontation between Israel and the Palestinians,”](#) Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, October 2, 2005.

³⁶ [“Vital Statistics: Total Casualties, Arab-Israel Conflict \(1860-Present\).”](#)

³⁷ Dennis Ross, *Statecraft: And How to Restore America’s Standing in the World* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), p. 261.

³⁸ Ronen Bergman, “Secrets behind Israel’s historic withdrawal from Lebanon,” Ynetnews.com, March 10, 2016.

³⁹ Barak, *My Country, My Life*, p. 391.

⁴⁰ Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, pp. 295-96.

⁴¹ Ross, *The Missing Peace*, pp. 3-4.

⁴² Following Rabin’s assassination in November 1995, Clinton had even arranged for a summit in Egypt expressly to help Shimon Peres, the Israeli peace candidate, win the 1996 election. Arafat preferred Peres, as well, pretending to annul the Palestinian National Council charter’s provisions rejecting Israel to help him. Nonetheless, Israelis elected Benjamin Netanyahu, who would require Arafat to prove himself. Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, pp. 277-79, 453; Efraim Karsh, *Arafat’s War* (New York: Grove Press, 2003), pp. 79-84.

⁴³ Clinton, *My Life*, p. 944.

⁴⁴ [“The Palestinian National Charter: Resolutions of the Palestine National Council July 1-17, 1968,”](#) The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, Yale Law School, [avalon.law.yale.edu](#), Article 20. See also Khaled Abu Toameh, [“Abbas reaffirms refusal to recognize Israel as a Jewish state,”](#) *Jerusalem Post*, January 11, 2014.

⁴⁵ Karsh and Hachohen, “Israel’s Flight.”

⁴⁶ Ross, *Statecraft*, p. 264. Ross so advised Libby in February 2001, in response to Libby’s inquiries about Arafat and the Clinton-era peace talks, and Powell. Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, p. 302.

⁴⁷ Martin Indyk, *Innocent Abroad: An Intimate Account of American Peace Diplomacy in the Middle East* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), p. 375. See also Bush administration adviser Elliott Abrams’ similar surprise: *Tested by Zion: The Bush Administration and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 25-26.

⁴⁸ Clinton, *My Life*, p. 944.

⁴⁹ Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, p. 5 (“Cheney often repeated later how bitter Clinton had been and how strongly he had warned the new team against trusting Arafat.”).

⁵⁰ Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2011), pp. 54-55.

⁵¹ On May 6, 2001, the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* published the May 4, 2001 Mitchell Report on the cause of the “al-Aqsa intifada.” Mitchell chaired the group that produced the report. The other members were Turkey’s former President Suleyman Demirel, Norway’s Foreign Minister Thorbjørn Jagland, former U.S. Senator Warren B. Rudman and EU High Representative Javier Solana.

⁵² Rice, *No Higher Honor*, pp. 54-55.

⁵³ Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, p. 13.

⁵⁴ Ross, *The Missing Peace*, p. 785; Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Tel-Aviv suicide bombing at the Dolphin disco-1-Jun-2001,” June 2, 2001; Ross, *Statecraft*, p. 263.

⁵⁵ Rice, *No Higher Honor*, pp. 54-55.

⁵⁶ President Clinton called Sharon “the most aggressive, intransigent leader available.” Clinton, *My Life*, p. 944.

⁵⁷ Sharon was aware of and concerned about these adverse sentiments towards him. See, for example, Arie Genger, “[Why Ariel Sharon Thanked Scooter Libby.](#)” *Mosaic*, May 6, 2015; Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, p. 10.

⁵⁸ Rice, *No Higher Honor*, p. 51.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p. 137.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 53-55.

⁶¹ The First Intifada ended in 1993 when Israel and the PLO entered into the Oslo negotiating process.

⁶² Krauthammer, “Arafat’s War.”

⁶³ George W. Bush to Crown Prince Abdullah, August 29, 2001; Ross, *The Missing Peace*, p. 786; idem, *Doomed to Succeed*, p. 311.

⁶⁴ Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, p. 16; Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, p. 306; Ross, *The Missing Peace*, p. 786. Ross notes that Clinton’s December 2000 “Parameters” were mere negotiating premises, never formal US policy and were withdrawn when negotiations collapsed. Robert Satloff, “[The Peace Process at Sea: Karine A Affair and the War on Terrorism.](#)” *The National Interest*, March 1, 2002. The letter to Abdullah had been sent before Bush received comments from Cheney’s office, which called into question the assurances from the NSC staff that the endorsement of a Palestinian state broke no new ground. After the letter was sent, Deputy National Security Adviser Hadley told Cheney’s office that that endorsement had been part of US policy since Madrid or the start of the Oslo process in the early 1990s, but that was not correct. Office of the Vice President, Memorandum of Conversation, August 30, 2001; Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, pp. 307 citing a March 10, 2014 author interview with Ambassador Eric Edelman.

⁶⁵ Rice, *No Higher Honor*, p. 135.

⁶⁶ Office of the Vice President, Memorandum of Conversation with Secretary Kissinger, September 18, 2001.

⁶⁷ George W. Bush, "[Address to the United Nations General Assembly](#)," October 3, 2001, State Department, archived content.

⁶⁸ Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, pp. 30-31.

⁶⁹ Satloff, "The Peace Process at Sea" (The Karine A's cargo "was stunning: scores of professionally manufactured submersible containers that held enough weapons and explosives to supply a small army. The fifty-ton arsenal included dozens of 122 mm and 107 mm Katyusha rockets with ranges of twenty and eight kilometers respectively; hundreds of shorter-range 81 mm rockets; numerous mortars, SAGGER and RPG 18 anti-tanks missiles, sniper rifles, AK-47 assault rifles and mines. The rockets and mortars were of Russian, Chinese, North Korean and Iranian origin. Some were advanced munitions, such as the VR7 seven anti-tank warhead, capable of penetrating the armor of main-battle tanks. Perhaps most ominously, the boat held about 3,000 pounds of C4 explosive, enough for about 300 suicide bombs – three times more than all the suicide bombers Israel has faced in its entire history.").

⁷⁰ See Karsh, *Arafat's War*, p. 181. US, Israeli and EU officials all confirmed that Arafat had sought Iranian arms through Hezbollah intermediaries. Satloff, "The Peace Process at Sea," p. 5; Yonah Jeremy Bob, "[The mega-weapons ship capture that turned the tide on US-Palestinian ties](#)," *Jerusalem Post*, September 28, 2017.

⁷¹ Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, p. 25; Robert Satloff, "The Peace Process at Sea" ("the Karine A-affair... triggered a fundamental reassessment of U.S. policy toward Arafat.").

⁷² "[Cheney: We're keeping papers secret on principle](#)," *CNN*, January 29, 2002. Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, p. 27.

⁷³ Rice, *No Higher Honor*, pp. 135-36.

⁷⁴ Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, p. 26; authors' interview with Ambassador Eric Edelman, former foreign service officer and member of Cheney's staff; Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, p. 312. See also Satloff, "The Peace Process at Sea," which refers to "declarations by senior officials, especially Secretary Powell, that Arafat remains the legitimate Palestinian leader and therefore the principal interlocutor with the United States."

⁷⁵ Authors' interview with Ambassador Eric Edelman; Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, p. 26.

⁷⁶ Authors' interview with John Hannah, former State Department official and member of Cheney's staff; Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, p. 26.

⁷⁷ George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown Publishers 2010), p. 401; Dick Cheney, *In My Time: A Personal and Political Memoir* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2011), p. 373.

⁷⁸ Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, pp. 25-26; Barry Schweid (Associated Press), "[Bush Says Arafat Enhances Terror](#)," *mrt.com*, January 24, 2002; Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, p. 312; authors' interview with John Hannah; Bob, "The mega-weapons ship capture that turned the tide on US-Palestinian ties."

⁷⁹ Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, pp. 311, 315; Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, p. 34.

⁸⁰ Cheney, *In My Time*, p. 373; Stephen F. Hayes, *Cheney: The Untold Story of America's Most Powerful and Controversial Vice President* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2011), p. 372.

⁸¹ Lewis Libby, "Notes from meeting with Natan Sharansky," January 4, 2001. In the Office of the Vice President, Libby reviewed Sharon's record in the winter of 2000-01. Authors' interviews with Hannah and Edelman.

⁸² Genger, "Why Ariel Sharon Thanked Scooter Libby;" Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, p. 10. In February 2001 Libby asked Clinton Middle East Adviser Dennis Ross whether he knew of anyone who could reliably relate Sharon's thinking. Ross suggested Genger, whom Sharon had separately asked to reach out to the White House. Discussions began following Sharon's rocky mid-March 2001 White House meeting with Bush. That fall, Rice developed similar talks with Genger and others of Sharon's close advisers. Authors' interview with Hannah; Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, pp. 310, 456.

⁸³ Cheney, *In My Time*, p. 378; Genger, "Why Ariel Sharon Thanked Scooter Libby;" Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, pp. 311, 321.

⁸⁴ Cheney, *In My Time*, p. 378.

⁸⁵ Rice, *No Higher Honor*, pp. 136-37.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p. 142.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p. 139.

⁸⁸ George W. Bush, "[Remarks](#)," April 4, 2002, Office of the White House Press Secretary; Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, p. 31; Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, p. 313.

⁸⁹ Rice, *No Higher Honor*, p. 139.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.* pp. 139-40; Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, p. 314; Cheney, *In My Time*, p. 380.

⁹³ Rice, *No Higher Honor*, p. 140 ("I thought we'd done long-term damage to our relations in the Arab world.").

⁹⁴ Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, p. 32.

⁹⁵ Rice, *No Higher Honor*, p. 142.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 143.

⁹⁷ Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, p. 39.

⁹⁸ Elliott Abrams, "[Bush on Middle East Peace \(and a Correction on Cheney\)](#)", Pressure Points, Council on Foreign Relations, April 4, 2002. See also authors' interview with Hannah.

⁹⁹ Authors' interview with Edelman and Hannah.

¹⁰⁰ Rice, *No Higher Honor*, pp. 143-4; Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, p. 40; authors' interviews with Edelman and Hannah.

¹⁰¹ Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, p. 41.

¹⁰² Rice, *No Higher Honor*, p. 145.

¹⁰³ Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, p. 319.

¹⁰⁴ Ross, *The Missing Peace*, p. 787.

¹⁰⁵ While Bush condemned Arafat's support for terror, the question of regime change for the PA was left to the Palestinians. Bush later urged that some of Arafat's political powers be transferred to a prime minister.

¹⁰⁶ Bush, *Decision Points*, p. 405; idem, "[President Discusses Roadmap for Peace in the Middle East](http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov)," georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov, March 14, 2003.

¹⁰⁷ " [Hamas Covenant 1988](#)," The Avalon Project. Hamas is an acronym for the Islamic Resistance Movement. Article Two of the Covenant says, "The Islamic Resistance Movement is one of the wings of Moslem Brotherhood in Palestine." See also Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, pp. 142, 160.

¹⁰⁸ Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, pp. 140, 142, 144-48, 152. Abbas later blamed the US for forcing him to hold the elections with Hamas candidates. *Ibid.* p. 221. Rice, *No Higher Honor*, p. 415 ("In retrospect, we should have insisted that every party disarm as a condition for participating in the vote.").

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* p. 163; Rice, *No Higher Honor*, pp. 416-17.

¹¹⁰ Henry Kissinger, "[Sharon's legacy and Hamas](#)," *New York Times*, February 15, 2006.

¹¹¹ That month, Sharon suffered an incapacitating stroke from which he never recovered.

¹¹² Herb Keiron, Gil Hoffman, and Etgar Lefkovits, "[Olmert: We Will Separate within Four Years](#)," *Jerusalem Post*, March 9, 2006.

¹¹³ Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, pp. 200, 459, fn. 135.

¹¹⁴ Rice, *No Higher Honor*, p. 550 (italics in original); Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, p. 332.

¹¹⁵ Rice, *No Higher Honor*, p. 723.

¹¹⁶ Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, p. 318.

¹¹⁷ Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, pp. 345-47 ("it was the outreach to Muslims that led President Obama to see value in demonstrating some distance from the Jewish state.").

¹¹⁸ Most notably, he spoke of America's "unbreakable" bonds with Israel, of the Holocaust and of the "tragic history" underlying the Jewish people's "aspiration for a Jewish homeland."

¹¹⁹ Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, p. 346.

¹²⁰ Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, p. 74. Clinton and Bush administration officials recognized that Israel had in the past more than once removed settlements. This meant that its settlement construction was at risk, especially in areas more likely to be relinquished by Israel in a peace agreement. If a future deal required the removal of settlements, as the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty had obliged Israel to remove all of its Sinai settlements, then Israel would lose its investment in those neighborhoods. Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, p. 371.

¹²¹ Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, p. 74.

¹²² Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, pp. 351, 372, 375-8 ("Not surprisingly, with the president [Obama] publicly supporting the extension of the moratorium, [Abbas] was unwilling to budge.").

¹²³ Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, p. 346 ("To the Israelis, it was a profound and unsettling shock.").

¹²⁴ Jeffrey Goldberg, "[Obama to Israel – Time is Running Out](#)," *Bloomberg*, March 2, 2014.

¹²⁵ "[Ex-Israeli Army Chief Warns of Dangerous Security Crisis With Palestinians](#)," *Haaretz*, May 16, 2019; Yossi Kuperwasser, "[Yes, we know the Palestinian Authority sponsors terror](#)," *The Blogs, The Times of Israel*, August 27, 2018.

¹²⁶ Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, pp. 378, 384, 387.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 378, 400. Ross relates that Susan Rice likewise believed this.

¹²⁸ Goldberg, "Obama to Israel – Time is Running Out."

¹²⁹ Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, pp. 390-1.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 361-62 (Susan Rice "nearly always took the view that the Israelis were hurting us and never took our needs into account.").

¹³¹ *Ibid.* pp. 388-9.

¹³² Jeffrey Goldberg, "[The Crisis in U.S.-Israeli Relationship is Officially Here](#)," *The Atlantic*, October 28, 2014.

¹³³ [United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334](#), adopted December 2016. Often over the years, Washington vetoed anti-Israel resolutions. Here, Obama directed that the United States abstain, permitting the resolution to pass. "[Obama says Israeli settlements making two-state solution impossible](#)," *Reuters*, January 10, 2017; Eric Cortellessa, "[Choosing not to veto, Obama lets anti-settlement resolution pass at UN Security Council](#)," *Times of Israel*, December 23, 2016; Joseph S. Spoerl, "[Understanding Resolution 2334: Did the Obama Administration Betray Israel at the UN?](#)" Jerusalem Institute for Public Affairs, March 14, 2017.

¹³⁴ Khaled Elgindy, "[Obama's Record on Israeli-Palestinian Peace - The President's Disquieting Silence](#)," *Foreign Affairs*, October 5, 2016.

¹³⁵ Donald J. Trump, [National Security Strategy of the United States](#), December 2017, pp. 48-49.

¹³⁶ Regarding Israel's 2007 bombing of a secret nuclear facility in Syria, for example, John Bolton, while serving as Trump's National Security Adviser, praised the attack as a warning that remains fresh for Iran: "The lesson Iran took from the 2007 bombing was that if you conduct illicit nuclear

operations, do them far away from Israel.” Caroline Glick, “[A Conversation with John Bolton](#),” *Jerusalem Post*, August 25, 2018.

¹³⁷ “[Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995](#),” November 8, 1995, P.L. 104-45. The law passed with large bipartisan majorities in both houses.

¹³⁸ As a member of the National Security Council staff in 1981, Feith wrote a short memo to the National Security Adviser for the president regarding the settlements. The body read, in full, as follows:

- In February 1981, President Reagan noted that the Carter Administration had labelled the settlements “illegal.” President Reagan observed, ‘They are not.’
- The settlements *are legal*, but the issue is properly a *political* question, *not a legal* question.
- The *USG has recognized no country’s sovereignty* over the West Bank *since Britain* controlled the area under the Palestine Mandate.
- The issue of sovereignty is open and will not be closed until the actual parties to the conflict *formally consent* to a peace agreement.
- In the meantime, there is no law that bars Jews from settling on the West Bank. No one should be excluded from an area simply on account of his nationality or religion.

Feith memo for Richard V. Allen, “Notes on Legality of Israel’s West Bank Settlements,” June 16, 1981, Reagan Presidential Library. For a facsimile of this memo, see Douglas J. Feith, “[US policy on the legal status of Israel’s West Bank settlements](#),” *Jewish News Syndicate*, January 27, 2020.

¹³⁹ The League of Nations approved the Palestine Mandate in 1922. “[The Palestine Mandate](#),” The Avalon Project. The Mandate was a basis of the declaration of Israel’s independence, and scholars have argued that it provides legal grounds for Israel’s West Bank settlements. Eugene V. Rostow, “The Peace-Making Process: UN Resolutions 242 and 338” and Douglas J. Feith, “The League of Nations Mandate for Palestine,” both in Douglas J. Feith, et al. (eds.), *Israel’s Legitimacy in Law and History* (New York: Center for Near East Policy Research, 1993); Rostow, “[‘Palestinian Self-Determination’: Possible Futures for the Unallocated Territories of the Palestine Mandate](#),” *Yale Studies in World Public Order*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1979), pp. 154-62; Julius Stone, *Israel and Palestine: Assault on the Law of Nations* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 180-1; Abraham Bell and Eugene Kontorovich, “[Palestine, Uti Possidetis Juris, and the Boundaries of Israel](#),” *Arizona Law Review*, vol. 58 (2016), pp. 681-82.

¹⁴⁰ Title X of P.L. 115-41.

¹⁴¹ P.L. 115-253.

¹⁴² “Because the ATCA attempts to use U.S. aid to Palestinians as a means of establishing this jurisdiction, and Palestinian leaders apparently want to avoid that outcome, the ATCA might indirectly lead to a complete end of U.S. bilateral aid to the Palestinians by February 2019.” Congressional Research Service, “[U.S. Foreign Aid to the Palestinians](#),” RS22967, updated December 12, 2018.

¹⁴³ “The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has ceased all assistance to Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza, a U.S. official said on Friday. The halt was requested by the Palestinian Authority The decision was linked to a Jan. 31 deadline set by new U.S. legislation under which foreign aid recipients would be more exposed to anti-terrorism lawsuits.” Stephen Farrell and Maayan Lubell, [“USAID assistance in the West Bank and Gaza has ceased: U.S. official,”](#) *Reuters*, February 1, 2019.

¹⁴⁴ [“Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People,”](#) whitehouse.gov, January 2020.

¹⁴⁵ [“Remarks by President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu of the State of Israel in Joint Statements,”](#) whitehouse.gov, January 28, 2020.

¹⁴⁶ Efraim Inbar, [“Netanyahu’s Annexation Plan Can’t Be Stopped,”](#) Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security, April 29, 2020.

¹⁴⁷ Daniel Siryoti and Ariel Kahana [“Jordanian official: We won’t damage security ties with Israel for Palestinians,”](#) *Israel Hayom*, June 19, 2020.

¹⁴⁸ Early on in the Arab-Zionist conflict - in the late 1800s and early 1900s - Arabs in Palestine often said they feared the Zionists would take away their livelihoods, steal their property and otherwise damage them economically. Zionists commonly answered that they wanted to create a Jewish state in Palestine based on a Jewish majority but would be happy for the Arabs to remain there in their homes and on their farms under laws that protected their property rights, jobs and economic interests. Palestinian Arabs widely disbelieved the Zionists’ professions of good intentions.

¹⁴⁹ [“Reply by Mr. Churchill \[to deputation of Executive Committee of the Haifa Congress at Government House,”](#) March 28, 1921], CO 733/2, fols. 70-71. Churchill advised them, “you can see with your own eyes” Jewish economic activity in the country, “how sandy wastes have been reclaimed and thriving farms and orangeries planted in their stead.”

¹⁵⁰ The UAE has hosted Israeli sports teams. The Sultan of Oman hosted a visit by Israeli PM Netanyahu. The UAE and Bahrain have openly welcomed other Israeli officials. And Saudi Arabia recently received an Israeli rabbi at a well-publicized meeting in the kingdom.

¹⁵¹ Jordan controlled the territory from the 1948-49 Arab-Israeli war until 1967, but the world in general never recognized its claim of ownership. From 1967 till today, Israel has controlled the West Bank but has never yet asserted sovereignty, taking the position that sovereignty should be determined in peace negotiations.

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