

**THE AMERICAN POSITION TOWARDS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF
THE PALESTINIAN STATE: FROM THE OSLO ACCORD TO
THE DEAL OF THE CENTURY (1993–2020)**

Ahmed J. ASMAR*

ABSTRACT: The end of the Cold War period in the early 1990s crowned the United States of America (US) as the sole superpower in the world, allowing it to engage more actively in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The consecutive US administrations of President Clinton, President Bush and President Obama made efforts in addressing the conflict but all failed to reach a settlement where negotiations were stuck during addressing the final status issues including the problem of the Israeli settlements and the status of Jerusalem. Yet, the Trump administration took a different radical approach and imposed a unilateral peace proposal that sided the Israeli narrative known as “Deal of the Century” as announced in 2020. Under these US approaches and initiatives, and under the claim that the Palestinians rejected most of these initiatives or were the side that failed these US peace initiatives, the question that arises in mind is that to what extent did the American position address the minimum aspiration of the Palestinian people in establishing their own independent state? The article, therefore, will attempt to answer this core question. Overall, the paper suggests that the US was not a fair peace broker when it comes the Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts. It did not use any form of pressure on the Israeli side to deal with Palestine question fairly, but instead chose to blame always the Palestinians who have been under the brutal Israeli occupation for the last 70 odd years. The US has so far never taken into account any comments, concerns or reservations of the Palestinians over its own peace initiatives but accepted and adopted the Israeli concerns, comments and wishes. The article writing method generally follows the descriptive analytical approach in addition to highlighting the official statements and documents related to the topic in order to clarify the US position towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, to understand the limits and parameters of the US position, and to eventually give an assessment on the US position regarding any future approach by the US administration to tackle the decades-long conflict.

KEYWORDS: Palestine, Israel, Jerusalem, US administration, Oslo Accord, Deal of the Century.



* Researcher, Future Studies Institute (FSI), Istanbul/ Turkiye, ahmedasmr88@gmail.com,
ORCID: 0009-0002-5808-8220.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

At the same day of the creation of “Israel” in May 1948 following the British withdrawal from Palestine, the United States of America (US) was among the first countries to recognise “Israel” as a state, which was established following the Nakba (catastrophe) events in 1948 which resulted in the expulsion of more than 800,000 Palestinians from their lands and homes, and the destruction of as much as 500 Palestinian towns and villages. Since then, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (or the Arab-Israeli conflict) started to be on the world top agenda where the United Nations (UN) drafted many resolutions addressing the conflict but so far has failed to impose any on the ground.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the US emerged as a superpower that intervened in many areas of the world, which were basically to contain the Soviet’s expansion. However, the US supported the establishment of Israel and from that time, the US aids and assistances started to pour into Israel in addition to the political support and protection from any international effort that could jeopardise the newly established state. It is worth mentioning in this regard that the US did not even view the Palestinians as a people who deserve any political right where the US early administrations during the fifties and the sixties were just viewing the Palestinian question as a refugee problem. The situation continued to deteriorate in the region as a result of the continued hostility between Israel, on one side, and the Palestinians and the Arab countries, on the other side. In June 1967, the Israelis launched a massive war in which it took control of what was left of Palestine; Eastern Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, in addition to the Syrian Golan and the Egyptian Sinai.

The US was following such developments, but kept siding with Israel and provided it with military support. It is noteworthy to mention that the Newsweek magazine said the total American assistance to Israel, from its establishment in 1949 up to 2016, amounts to approximately \$125 billion, making Israel the largest beneficiary of American aid in the post-Second World War era (Frleich, 2017). Moreover, the US foreign policy especially towards the “Middle East” was affected by the influence of the Jewish lobbies in the US, which ensured to keep the US position as close and adoptive to the Israeli narrative as much as they can.

In the early seventies, the US consecutive administrations published a number of political initiatives regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and despite the Israeli intransigence and rejections to most of these initiatives/plans, the US administration did not take any adverse position towards the Israeli government. Nonetheless, all these initiatives have sided with the Israeli narrative and interests. Moreover, the US administrations did not pressure the Israeli governments to abide by the United Nations’ resolutions and accused the Palestinian people and their leadership of not conceding more to the Israelis’ demands. These US attempts did not hint or give any form of recognition to the Palestinian political aspirations in having their own independent state, the

maximum they did was offering a form of self-rule while Israel would keep control and sovereignty over the Palestinians.

During the term of President Richard Nixon (1969–1974), the US Secretary of State, William Rogers, proposed an initiative guided by the UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 and the “land for peace” principle, which called for Israeli withdrawal from Egyptian, Syrian and Jordanian territories occupied in the war of June 1967 along with mutual recognition, even with no mention to any form of political rights to the Palestinians (Suleiman, 1994: 200). However, the Israeli government rejected it. President Jimmy Carter's (1977–1981) National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski presented a proposal that suggests annexing the West Bank to Jordan with a self-rule, the West Bank would be disarmed and Israel could run security patrols there. The proposal suggested that Jerusalem be the capital of Israel; it may, however, be an administrative capital to Palestine region. The Israeli government refused the proposal as it was seeking for more guarantees from President Carter.

US President Ronald Reagan (1981–1989) plan or initiative suggested the establishment of a Palestinian self-rule in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, and to freeze the Israeli settlement construction in the West Bank and Gaza for 5 years. The Israeli government unanimously rejected the plan, and rather slammed President Regan for that proposal (Suleiman 1994: 255), despite the fact that the limits of such initiative were less than the minimum aspirations of the Palestinian, yet, the Israelis –with their influence on the US decision makers– rejected the initiative and was not subjected to any form of pressure by the US administration.

What was common for these previous US efforts and initiatives are that they did not mount to meet the aspirations of the Palestinian people nor did they meet the international legitimacy represented in the UN resolutions, which stressed on the Israeli withdrawal from the Palestinian occupied lands in 1967. Despite that most of these efforts were even rejected by the Israeli side, however, no pressure or blame were directed to the Israeli government but rather the Palestinians were the ones to be blamed harshly as the Palestinian people representative the “Palestine Liberation Organisation” (PLO) was designated by the US government as a ‘terrorist organisation’. It is also worth mentioning that the US over the previous period did not hold any form of official contact with the PLO, because it did not recognise Israel’s right to exist and didn’t renounce violence according to the US perspective. The US kept this policy of not speaking with the Palestinians and kept designating the PLO as a ‘terrorist organisation’ until the Madrid Conference in 1991, which paved the way for an attempt to solve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

THE JEWISH/ISRAELI INTEREST GROUPS IN THE US

As the US constitution gives the freedom for association and the free speech, several local interests and businesses groups organised themselves –under the confines of the US law– in lobbies/interest groups to protect and advocate for

Israeli interests in front of the US authorities, the most famous groups in the US are the National Rifle Association (NRA), the Farm lobby and the American Civil Liberties Union and many others. The political groups also find their way within these interest groups where they realise them as beneficial, which could achieve their goals by influencing public policies in their favour by lobbying members of the US government (Martini, 2012: 1).

The Israeli/Jewish interest groups or the lobbies are one of the most influential groups that affect the US foreign policy, the lobbies were active in campaigning for the candidates who hold their views and commit themselves to keep the US-Israeli ties strong whether they are Republicans or Democrats where the Jewish groups have their influence on both parties. Over the past few decades, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) –established in 1963– was the most influential and active Jewish Israeli group in the US, in which every US presidential candidate make sure to address the group in the course of their electoral campaigns. Yet there are other influential Israeli/Jewish groups that ensure the US-Israeli alliance, these groups are: the Zionist Organization of America, the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, Christians United for Israel, the Jewish Institute for National Security of America, and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, in addition to wealthy Jewish American individuals such as Haim Saban and Sheldon Adelson who also sponsor activities and advocate for keeping the Israeli-US ties strong and unbreakable (Walt, 2019).

These Israeli/Jewish lobbies –like others– use different ways and mechanisms to influence the whole US political life; it may be in the form of contributions to the political parties or politicians, or direct lobbying to the US Congress and Congressmen, or it may be by public outreach activities including opinions in US dailies, books, position-papers, media appearances, etc. By this mixture of means, the Israeli government rely on these means of influence to keep the US position towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict only walks around the Israeli parameters, to influence the American decision making for the interest of Israel, to make sure that the US politicians’ discourse towards the American public is for Israel and Israeli wishes (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2011: 151). Also to make sure no pressure could be made on the Israeli government regarding any of its policies against the Palestinian people including the Israeli policy of illegal settlement construction and the daily crackdown on the Palestinians.

TAKING THE LEAD IN SPONSORING PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI “PEACE” TALKS

Following the end of the Cold War, which crowned the US as the sole superpower in the world, it engaged more actively in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The Madrid peace conference in 1991 was the starting-point of the US efforts in bringing the Palestinians and the Israelis for peace talks to the negotiation table to reach a peace settlement. Since then, the US consecutive administrations put efforts and time for proposing initiatives and road maps to end the protracted

unsolved conflict. The US started to contact with the PLO after the latter accepted the US conditions of recognising Israel, renouncing violence and accepting the UN resolutions. The PLO fulfilled these three conditions in 1988 by an implicit recognition of Israel and accepted the principle of the land for peace ("PLO Accepts Israel's Right", 1988).

In 1992, a secret negotiation channel between the Palestinians and the Israelis was opened in the Norwegian capital Oslo which focused on a framework of self-rule for the Palestinian people in Jericho city, the Gaza strip, and then in the West Bank cities on a gradual basis (Peres, 1995: 382). The US was informed of these developments and adopted it at a later stage. In August 1993, the Palestinians and the Israelis signed an initial agreement for a peace process between them, and was followed with what was referred to as the mutual recognition where both parties –the PLO and the Israeli government– recognised each other in September 1993. In a ceremony held in the White House on 13 September 1993 and was watched by the entire world, both -the PLO and the Israeli government- signed the declaration of principles that led to a new phase of relations between the Palestinians and the Israelis, where the PLO established for the first time an administration on the Palestinian territory under the name of the Palestinian Authority.

According to the declaration of principles, a process of negotiations should have lasted for five years in which all final status issues between the Palestinians and the Israelis would have been addressed with the mediation of the Clinton administration. Palestinian President Yasser Arafat insisted that following the 5 years of negotiations, he would announce unilaterally the Palestinian state. The Israeli side rejected the Palestinian move to announce the Palestinian state, and the US backed the Israeli rejection and cautioned the Palestinians from any unilateral step to be taken by themselves. The US administration stated that a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood would draw strong congressional opposition and that the President should assert that a statehood declaration would violate the Oslo accords (Clyde, 2005: 11). The US Senate in March 1999 also warned that in case the Palestinians declared a State without the Israeli agreement, they would cut off US foreign assistance to the Palestinians (Clyde, 2005: 11). Thus, the US pressure prevented the Palestinians from taking further steps towards announcing the establishment of the Palestinian state where the US position lined entirely with the Israeli side. The status of *Jerusalem*, the *Palestinian refugees*, the *future borders of the Palestinian state* and the *illegal Israeli settlements built on the occupied Palestinian lands since 1967* were left out for the final stage of the negotiations. These final status issues were the basis for the establishment of the Palestinian state and were tackled during the negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Yet, despite the fact that Israel was controlling all these issues, it did not offer real solutions to these issues especially in the issue of Jerusalem and the illegal settlements.

For the US, its position towards occupied Jerusalem was almost the same as the Israeli narrative during the Clinton administration, even the illegal Israeli settlement constructions in occupied Jerusalem were not criticised by the US administration and most weirdly President Clinton confirmed in front of AIPAC that Jerusalem will remain capital for Israel and no pressure from his administration would be made on the Israelis. The Israeli and US intransigence and ignorance to the Palestinians' demand over Jerusalem –as stated within the UN resolutions on occupied Jerusalem– was even an enough factor for the failure of the negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Another round of negotiations was held between the Palestinians and the Israelis under the US sponsorship, which was known later as the Camp David 2 talks in 2000, however, these talks were stuck by the Israeli failure to accept the Palestinian legitimate aspirations –which are under the international and UN parameters– and instead offered the Palestinians suggestions that won't grant the Palestinians any form of sovereignty. The US administration, from its part, kept the pressure on the Palestinians in an effort to force them accept whatever Israeli proposed for them. At the end of the negotiations attempt in Camp David, both the Israelis and the US administration blamed the Palestinian side for the failure, although Israel was not willing to give the Palestinians what was stated within the UN resolutions and to withdraw completely from the Palestinian occupied territories since 1967. Following seven years of negotiations, there was no progress in the peace talks that was supposed to lead to a Palestinian state after addressing the above mentioned final status issues. Yet, the Israeli provocations on the ground continued to take place, which left the Palestinians more frustrated from such policies. Under this tense atmosphere, the Israeli government in September 2000 also allowed hard-line Israeli politician Ariel Sharon to storm into Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied Jerusalem, triggering mass protests by the Palestinians across the occupied territories, and eventually turned into a new Palestinian intifada that lasted for five years.

In the last days of President Clinton in office, he tried to curb the deteriorating situation across the occupied territories and to offer a new –and final– approach for settling the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Under Clinton's new offer, he was proposing around 94% of the West Bank to the Palestinians along with lands exchange between the Palestinians and the Israelis. For Jerusalem, he proposed an ambiguous offer; the Arab/Palestinian neighbourhoods to be within the Palestinian State, while the Israeli illegal settlements* and areas, which were built on occupied lands to remain with Israel. As for the security issue, the administration proposed that the Israeli government could keep presence in the Palestinian areas ("The Clinton Parameters", 2000), which technically meant the Palestinian territories were divided by this proposal. As both parties –the Palestinians and Israelis– provided their disagreements and

* Under international law all Israeli settlements built on the territories occupied in 1967 are illegal.

reservations on the Clinton administration's proposals, President Clinton considered the Israeli reservations as "acceptable" while not only disregarding the Palestinians views, but blaming them for the his own failures (Ross, 2005: 756). Under these circumstances, President Clinton left the White House with no settlement to the conflict, whereas on the ground Israel continued to build *de facto* realities by more illegal settlements.

With the arrival of George W. Bush (2001–2008) as the new President for the US, the US administration did not give much attention to the Palestinian Israeli conflict, unlike the previous administration. Moreover, with the arrival of the new US administration, Ariel Sharon, a hard-line extremist, became Israel's Prime Minister where he continued to persecute the Palestinians during the course of the second Palestinian intifada. The US administration in such stage announced it will play a role of "facilitator" between the Palestinians and the Israelis, that position was proclaimed by US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, when he said that the US will play the role of the facilitator and that the solution lies with the sides of the conflict (Powel, 2002). Israel utilised this US stance, which meant there would not be much pressure from the US administration on Israel. Taking this opportunity, Israel put pressures on the Americans not to engage in talks with the Palestinians, and demanded the US to close the office of the PLO in Washington.

The US used its veto right at the UN Security Council in March 2001 to prevent a resolution to deploy a UN observer force in the West Bank and Gaza territories claiming the resolution was "unbalanced and unworkable" ("U.S. vetoes U.N. observer force", 2001). To cover its failure the US administration blamed the Palestinians for the escalation of the situation in the region and unfairly accused the Palestinians for inciting violence against Israel. Amid the intense military escalation by the Israeli forces against Palestinian cities along with the Palestinians' fighting back with resistance action, the US administration dispatched Senator George J. Mitchell to bring both parties to the table of negotiations and set a number of conditions where both sides agreed to abide by. Although, this did not prevent Israel from continuing its military aggression against the Palestinians. However, the already reluctant US efforts for mediation between Israelis and Palestinians were ended by the 11 September 2000 terrorist attacks, in which the US foreign policy diverted towards what it called the "war on terrorism". This kept the US busy from providing any effort towards finding a meaningful resolution on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as the US engaged with its occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Although the US focus was on Afghanistan and Iraq, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was still present within the administration's foreign agenda, where it realised that no stability in the region was possible without resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Thus, President Bush sought to enhance relations with Arab countries after the toppling of Saddam Hussein through the gate of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In 2001 at the UN General Assembly, President Bush said: "*we are working toward a day when two states, Israel and Palestine, live*

peacefully together within secure and recognize borders as called for by the Security Council resolutions [most notably resolutions 242 and 338]" ("President Bush Speaks", 2001) marking the first US president to mention clearly the establishment of a Palestinian state. Yet, the call was not translated into action on the ground as the US administration kept its neglect policy towards Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, where in 2002 the US administration called for a new leadership of the Palestinians after accusing it "*compromising with terrorism*" ("President Bush Calls", 2002).

In 2002 there were US effort through the International Quartet –an International body formed by the US, the European Union (EU), the Russia Federation and the UN– to draft a new plan/vision for settlement to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and in April 2003, the plan was announced under the name of the Road Map by the US administration. The Road Map plan was a three-stage plan that was meant to end with establishing a democratic viable Palestinian state by 2005. Its first stage called for ending/renouncing violence, building Palestinian institutions that were destroyed by the Israeli forces and to freeze the Israeli settlement activity in the occupied lands. The second stage included a transitional period for the Palestinians to conduct new elections as well as to agree on provisional borders with Israel, while the third stage would have been the final status agreement stage in which negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis should have reached a final settlement stage.

Despite the plan was not far from the Israeli perspective, it was even criticised by the US officials. 88 US Senators attacked the Road Map, saying it did not take "*a strong enough position against Palestinian terrorism*" (Freedman, 2004). The Israeli government under the leadership of Ariel Sharon declared its acceptance to the US –and Quartet– plan, although it set 14 reservation on the plan. These Israeli reservations implicitly mean Israel's rejection of the plan. The Palestinian leadership declared it accepted the plan without any reservation, despite the fact that the plan did not address vital demands of the Palestinians such as the fate of the Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails and the nature of the Palestinian transitional state and its limits of sovereignty. The US administration accepted the Israeli 14 reservation points, a move that voided the plan from any gain to the Palestinians. With the continued Israeli aggression on the Palestinians along with the US backing of the Israeli steps against them, the US administration didn't pose any form of pressure on the Israelis whereas the US presidential elections were approaching, and eventually reduced its interests in continuing with the plan in addition to keeping the blame on the Palestinians which meant the death of the plan.

In the second term for President Bush nothing serious was provided to end the conflict, the administration kept its pressure and blame on the Palestinians. With the end approaching for President Bush's second term, he invited the Palestinians and the Israelis to an international conference in 2007 to revive the peace process. Although, the agenda of the conference didn't provide any new

initiatives but stressed on the early US administration –under President Bush– position of playing the facilitation mission where the conference called on both sides to abide by the Road Map (Migdalvitz, 2007: 2). The aim of the US from the conference was not a real effort to end the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but rather an attempt to create an Arab coalition against Iran where it invited several Arab countries to attend the conference (Morrow, 2007). However, by the end of President Bush’s two terms, nothing tangible was provided to the Palestinian side, but on the other side, it kept its flow of political, military and economic support to the Israelis. It also protected Israel from any condemnation at the UN, and gave Israel more time to expand its illegal settlements on the Palestinian occupied lands, where the settlement activity kept going with no serious suspension from the Israeli side.

In 2009 President Barack Obama (2009–2013) came with the slogan of “change”, a slogan that didn’t only inspire the Americans, but also the entire world with hope of a new administration that could replace the previous one which launched two destructive wars causing chaos contrary to its promises to bring peace and democracy into these states (Afghanistan and Iraq). Nevertheless, as in the case of all US presidential candidates, he also spoke in front of the AIPAC pledging to commit to Israel’s security and not to question the Israeli settlement activity (Zhao, 2009: 19) and not to go beyond the Israel’s “red lines” in addressing the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Anyhow, when Obama assumed office, he started his term with hopes to resume the negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis, as well as the negotiations between Israel and Syria. In his first visit to the region in June 2009, President Obama made a historic speech in Egypt. Obama stressed that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is on the top of his administration priorities and confirmed that the US won’t turn its back to the Palestinians and also stressed that the US administration did not accept the Israeli settlement activity in the Palestinian occupied territories. Although, he repeated the same conditions of the previous US administrations on the Palestinians such as the renunciation of violence, in reference to the Palestinian resistance.

Despite having reservations about Obama’s speech, it was still viewed –by the Palestinians– as promising, but on the other side, the Israeli official remarks on the speech were very critical and challenged it by continuing the settlement activity. However, one year after his speech, no steps were taken on the ground, and the Obama administration did not even manage to convince the Israeli government to suspend –not halt– the illegal settlement activity in the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem. Moreover, the Israeli government intensified its blockade on the Palestinians in Gaza turning it into an open prison. The solidarity activists on the Freedom flotilla, together with the Turkish ship the Mavi Marmara, sailing to Gaza to take humanitarian assistance and to end the blockade, was attacked by Israeli forces in international waters murdering 10 Turkish civilian activists. The US administration did not even condemn the Israeli piracy nor the

killings on the Mavi Marmara, although almost the entire international community condemned the Israeli act.

In 2010, the US State Department announced the launch of what it called a “proximity talks” between the Palestinians and the Israelis, although the US did not give guarantees on the talks nor did it manage to halt the Israeli settlement activity. In addition, the Israeli government conditioned resuming talks with the Palestinians on the basis of recognising Israel as a ‘Jewish state’. In 2011, under the US and Israeli ignorance to the aspirations of the Palestinian people, the Palestinian leadership sought to gain the world recognition of the Palestinian right in establishing an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. The Palestinian leadership moved the issue to the United Nations, despite knowing that the US will hinder the Palestinian effort to claim a full UN membership by vetoing the Palestinian application in the United Nations Security Council, and this is what happened. Prior to the voting in the United Nations Security Council, the US explicitly vowed to take down the Palestinian bid for a full-fledged member of the United Nations. US State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland told reporters at her daily briefing, *“The U.S. opposes a move in New York by the Palestinians to try to establish a state that can only be achieved by negotiations”* (“U.S. vows to veto”, 2011).

After which the Palestinian leadership sought recognition through the United Nations General Assembly in November 2012, where Palestine obtained an overwhelmingly historic vote to have the status of the non-Member Observer State in the United Nations. The US opposed the Palestinian bid and was one of the only nine states that opposed the move. Hillary Clinton, the US Secretary of State, described the vote as *“unfortunate and counterproductive”*. She said: *“Only through direct negotiations between the parties can the Palestinians and Israelis achieve peace that both deserve: two states for two people, with a sovereign, viable and independent Palestine living side-by-side in peace and security with a Jewish and democratic Israel”* (“UN general assembly makes resounding vote”, 2012).

In the second term of President Obama in office, his State Secretary, John Kerry, launched another effort in 2013 to bring both sides on the table of negotiations. The negotiations were scheduled to last up to nine months to reach a final status to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict by mid-2014. Yet, in the light of the Israeli continued-intransigence to continue with the settlements activity as a tool by the Israeli government to impose more –as it could– realities on the ground, the US –this time– couldn’t escape from blaming Israel for the failure or collapse of the negotiations. Martin Indyk, US special envoy to the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, commented on the collapse of the negotiations as saying *“there are a lot of reasons for the peace effort’s failure, but people in Israel shouldn’t ignore the bitter truth – the primary sabotage came from the settlements”* (“US envoy to resign”, 2014).

Following these statements, the Israeli and US relations went on stalemate, however, nothing serious were done against Israel by the US especially in terms of the US military support to Israel, and Israel continued aggressive policies against the Palestinians, undeterred from any consequences that may be taken by the US administration. Such Israeli stance made Kerry state in 2017 that Israel does not want peace; “*the current Israeli government has publicly declared they are not ever for a Palestinian state*”. The US effort was stuck by the Israeli stance where the Israeli government under Benjamin Netanyahu continued with its extreme-right policies to kill any prospect for having a Palestinian state. Anyhow, by approaching the end of Obama’s presidency, the negotiations were disrupted and no talks between the Palestinians and the Israeli took place while the Israelis were keeping their pressure on the Palestinians especially by the illegal settlement activity. The Obama administration made a farewell shot at the Israelis when his administration did not veto –as regularly the previous US administrations did– UN Security Council resolution 2334 condemning Israeli settlements as illegal under international law.

Donald Trump (2017–2021) came to the office with no hope that he could make any kind of breakthrough in the Palestinian Israeli conflict, as he pledged in his electoral campaigns that he will give unlimited support to Israel. Yet, from the entourage of Trump, it was easy to anticipate how the administration would manage its approach towards the Palestinians. Trump appointed pro-Israeli officials who adopted the extreme right wing of the Israeli politics. This included the appointment of David Friedman as the US ambassador to Israel, an Orthodox Jew who worked, advocated and raised funds for building Israeli settlements on Palestinians lands (“David Friedman approved as”, 2017). It could easily be noticed that what Trump offered to Israel during his four-year-term was never expected from any Israeli officials, over the four years Trump helped Israel realise an incredible set of diplomatic and strategic gains at virtually no cost in concessions to the Palestinians. Trump took a bold decision that was never practically taken by the previous US presidents where he recognised Jerusalem as Israel’s undivided capital, disregarding all UN resolutions and the Jerusalem’s status under the international law. Trump annexed the occupied Golan to Israel’s sovereignty, ignoring that they were Syrian occupied territories under the international law. Trump gave a free hand to the Israeli government to expand at the expense of the Palestinian lands and properties and that was followed by a statement by his State Secretary Mike Pompeo when he said that the US won’t view the Israeli settlements as a violation of international law (Jakes, 2019). The Trump administration even went farther by threatening to brand human rights organisations critical of Israel as anti-Semitic; he also cut most of the aids that were allocated for the Palestinians by his predecessors.

In January 2020, US President Donald Trump declared his vision to peace in the “Middle East” which proposes the establishment of a Palestinian state with no genuine sovereignty, unconnected, but blocked from communicating with the

world. It suggests the establishment of a Palestinian state in the form of an archipelago connected through bridges and tunnels under the Israeli security and military control which Israel has full right to enter the Palestinian areas, and in turn, Jerusalem remains fully ‘united’ under the Israeli sovereignty and with no right of return to any of the Palestinian refugees. Besides establishing full Israeli sovereignty over al-Aqsa Mosque and making it open for Jewish worship taking into account the times of their prayers and holidays (El-Awaisi & Yavuz, 2020)

The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) along with all other Palestinian factions and movements rejected the US vision, and most of the countries worldwide rejected the plan as it went beyond the resolutions of international legitimacy. The United Nations rejected Trump’s plan and committed to the two state solution. Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, emphasised on seeking *“a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict”*, and continued saying that *“the position of the United Nations has been defined by General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.”* The European Union’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy described the proposal as departing from internationally agreed parameters, and called to respect the United Nations resolutions related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (*“Key Players Reject Proposed”*, 2020).

According to the Trump’s plan and its political terminologies along with the context of its announcement, it could be described that it is a one-sided unilateral plan that took into considerations the vision of the Israeli point-of-view, even adopting the ideas suggested by the Israeli extremist wing. And it totally neglects the Palestinian side, their rights including the right of return of the Palestinian refugees and the right to self-determination. The US administration ignored the international community and the United Nations with all its relevant resolutions. Washington cornered itself as a biased partner to the Israeli occupation with its violation of international law. Thus, complicating the prospect of reaching peace. The imposition of the proposed plan, is a direct threat to world peace and security, as it imposes a reality by force and with no regard to the international law that governs and guides the international relations. Moreover and in another Israeli unilateral step encouraged by the US unlimited support to Israel, the Israeli government announced another unilateral step, which goes in line with the US Deal of the Century (2020) representing in taking Palestinian lands to Israeli sovereignty, especially areas in the occupied Jordan valley. The Israeli annexation plan –or as Israel calls it *“applying sovereignty plan”*– didn’t just come out of nowhere; the Israeli theft of Palestinian lands extended over 70 years which consolidated its control in occupied West Bank and Jerusalem.

The Israeli plan is based on Trump’s *“peace vision”*, where Netanyahu –Israeli Prime Minister– sought to impose the Israeli sovereignty over 30 to 40% of the West Bank and Jerusalem territories. The Israeli plan includes the large Israeli illegal settlement blocs such as Ma’ale Adumim settlement and Gush Etzion settlement around occupied Jerusalem and a third settlement bloc in northern

occupied West Bank, the Ariel settlement. The Israeli plan also includes keeping its control of the Jordan Valley area, eastern the occupied West Bank, which will deprive the Palestinian State from having a contact with the outside world. As British writer David Hearst said in his article published in the “Middle East Eye” commenting on the Israeli plan that *“The Nakba is not a past event. The dispossession of lands, homes and the creation of refugees have continued almost without pause since. It is not something that happened to your great grandparents”*. However, under the international community pressure and the US hesitancy to support the Israeli move, along with the Palestinian officials’ threat to abolish bilateral agreements with Israel if it goes ahead with annexation, Netanyahu said that he agreed to delay annexation in the occupied West Bank as part of a normalisation deal with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), but the plans still remain “on the table” (“Netanyahu says West Bank annexation”, 2020).

Under such ignorance to the Palestinian aspiration of an independent state, the US administration gave another blow to the Palestinians by sponsoring normalisations deals between Arab countries and Israel, until the end of 2020, four Arab countries, the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco, announced normalisation deals with Israel, breaking the agreed Arab Peace Initiative of 2000, which stipulates making peace with Israel in case of the latter withdrawal from the Palestinian occupied lands since 1967. The normalisation have drawn widespread condemnation from Palestinians at the official and popular level.

CONCLUSION

If answering a Yes/No question, did the US administrations exert efforts towards ending the Palestinian Israeli conflict? The answer would then be “yes, it did”, but a simple look into these initiatives one would realise that these initiatives and efforts were even far from the international legitimacy and the UN resolutions in regard to the Palestinian occupied territories which all stressed on the Palestinian rights in establishing their full independent state. The Deal of the Century and the annexation plan were the last series of the US and Israeli negligence to the Palestinians’ aspirations and rights. Yet, the former US administrations also did not exert efforts to condemn the Israeli illegal settlement activities, which never stopped since the Israeli occupation in June 1967. The illegal Israeli settlement activity on the Palestinian lands whether by annexation, by theft or by expropriation was adopted by all the Israeli governments in which Israeli politicians contested among each other who is bolder to take more from the Palestinian lands.

The Trump’s Deal of the Century’s “peace” plan or the Israeli Annexation plan are the most dangerous US and Israeli attempts to obliterate the Palestinian identity where they disregard the Palestinian right to self-determination, the right to Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Mosque, the right of return of the Palestinian refugees, and the establishment of a full sovereign Palestinian state. The Israeli plans, most notably the Annexation plan, represented a blatant challenge to the international

community and the United Nations relevant resolutions, which clearly call for the Israeli withdrawal from the Palestinian occupied territories as in the 242 UN resolution. The more serious than the annexation plan is keeping the Israeli occupation as a *de facto* on the Palestinian lands; therefore, any move must not only be against the US alleged peace plan or its followed annexation plan, but to end the Israeli occupation as stated by the international legitimacy and in accordance with the requirements of justice.

To return back to the early inquiry or question raised over the article to what extent did the American position address the minimum aspiration of the Palestinian people in establishing their own independent state? The answer then would be that there were efforts by the US administrations, including the Trump administration, to address the Palestinian aspirations of a “state”, as stipulated in the “Deal of the Century” but still, the US administrations didn’t go far from the same Israeli definition and parameters of the nature and structure of the Palestinian state, where such Israeli definition lacks the genuine meaning of a full sovereign and independent state. Thus, the US administrations failed to address the Palestinian aspirations, which are based on the international legitimacy and the United Nations resolutions, and unleashed Israel to keep its occupation of the Palestinian territories.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Clyde, M. (2005, 26 April). "Palestinian and Middle East Peace", *Issues for the United States*. CRS reports for Congress.
- Colin Powel. (2002, 13 June) We Do Plan To Stay Engaged. *The Outlook Magazine* www.outlookindia.com/website/story/we-do-plan-to-stay-engaged/216048?next
- David Friedman approved as US ambassador to Israel. (2017, 23 March). *Aljazeera News*. www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/3/23/david-friedman-approved-as-us-ambassador-to-israel
- El-Awaisi, K., & Yavuz, C. (2020). The Future of Al-Aqsa Mosque in the Light of Trump's Deal of the Century. *Insight Turkey*, 22(3), 215-236.
- Freedman, R. O. (2004, April). The Bush Administration and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: The Record of the First Three Years. *The Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*. www.jcpa.org/jil/vp516.htm
- Frleich, C. (2017, 14 July). How Long Could Israel Survive Without America? *The Newsweek*. www.newsweek.com/how-long-could-israel-survive-without-america-636298
- Jakes, L. (2019, 19 November). In Shift, U.S. Says Israeli Settlements in West Bank Do Not Violate International Law. *The New York Times*. www.nytimes.com/2019/11/18/world/middleeast/trump-israel-west-bank-settlements.html
- Key Players Reject Proposed United States Peace Plan as Failing to Meet Minimum Rights of Palestinians, Special Coordinator Tells Security Council. (2020, 11 February). *The UN News website*. www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14103.doc.htm
- Mearsheimer, J. J., & Walt, S. M. (2011). *The Israel lobby and US Foreign Policy*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.
- Migdalvitz, C. (December 2007). *Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process: The Annapolis Conference*. CRS Report for the Congress.
- Morrow, A. (2007, 28 August). Bush Peace Plan Met with Scepticism. *The Global Policy Forum*. www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/189/38242.html
- Netanyahu says West Bank annexation plans still on the table. (2020, 13 August). *Aljazeera News*. www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/8/13/netanyahu-says-west-bank-annexation-plans-still-on-the-table
- Palestinians happy with Trump's election loss. (2020, 11 November). *Anadolu Agency*. www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/palestinians-happy-with-trump-s-election-loss/2035954
- Peres, S. (1995). *Battling for Peace: A Memoir (The Arabic Version)*. New York: Penguin Random House.
- PLO Accepts Israel's Right to Exist, Opposes Terrorism, Arafat Says. (1988, 7 December). *Los Angeles Times*. www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1988-12-07-mn-1072-story.html
- President Bush Speaks to United Nations. (2001, 10 November). *The White House official website*. <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011110-3.html>
- Ross, D. (2005). *The Missing Peace: The Inside Story of the Fight for Middle East Peace*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.
- Suleiman, M. W. (Editor) (1994). *U.S. Policy on Palestine: From Wilson to Clinton*. Beirut: Association of Arab-American University Graduates.
- The Clinton Parameters on Israeli-Palestinian Peace. (2000). *The Jewish Peace Lobby*. web.archive.org/web/20150117011736/http://www.peacelobby.org/clinton_parameters.htm
- U.S. vetoes U.N. observer force for West Bank, Gaza. (2001, 28 March). *CNN*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/meast/03/28/mideast.un/index.html>
- U.S. vows to veto Palestinian statehood bid at U.N. (2011, 8 September). *Reuters*. www.reuters.com/article/us-palestinians-israel-mitchell-idUSTRE78771Q20110908
- UN general assembly makes resounding vote in favour of Palestinian statehood. (2012, 29 November). *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/nov/29/united-nations-vote-palestine-state>
- US envoy to resign after blaming settlements for talks failure. (2014, 5 May). *The Times of Israel*. www.timesofisrael.com/us-envoy-to-resign-after-blaming-settlements-for-talks-failure/
- Zhao, W. (2009). The New Middle East Policy of the Obama Administration. *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)*, 3(2), 12-24.