PALESTINIAN QUESTION
IS THERE A SOLUTION?

The struggle to establish an Arab state in Palestine has bedeviled Middle Eastern politics—and international diplomacy—for much of the 20th century and, since the founding of Israel in 1948, has helped fuel five regional wars. The demand by Palestinians—now 5 million strong—for a state of their own has been endorsed by much of the international community. Their fate, however, remains unresolved.

Two decades of occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, areas which Israel took from Jordan and Egypt, respectively, in the 1967 war, bred an alienated generation that despaired of achieving independence and felt abandoned by their Arab brethren. Since 1985, when Israel began to crack down hard on protesters in the occupied territories, tension has grown. A major uprising, or intifada, to use the Arabic term, against Israeli rule broke out in December 1987 and continues to this day.

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the leading group representing Palestinian interests, buoyed by the international sympathy aroused by the intifada, seized on it to push for statehood. In a major policy reversal, the PLO announced its acceptance of UN Security Council Resolution 242, which calls for trading land for peace. The PLO also recognized Israel's right to exist and renounced terrorism.

The uprising ended the illusion of normalcy on the West Bank and in Gaza, and forced Israelis to rethink their policies. At stake, most Israelis believe, is the very survival of their state. There are, at present, 3.2 million Jews and 750,000 Arabs in Israel, and 1.7 million Palestinians in the territories. Should Israel satisfy Palestinians' longings for "a flag and a passport" in the interests of peace? Or would an independent Palestinian state pose an unacceptable danger to Israel and become a hotbed of terrorism? Are there options short of statehood that Palestinians will accept?

By late 1989, both the peace process and the intifada were faltering. Israel could not end the Palestinian uprising, and the Palestinians had been unable to wring any significant concessions out of the Israelis.

The U.S. has long been Israel's most dependable—and occasionally only—supporter in the international community. President Harry S. Truman played a key role in Israel's independence in 1948 by assuring U.S. recognition of the new state. Beginning with Dwight D. Eisenhower and culminating with Jimmy Carter, who brokered the Camp David accords between Israel and Egypt, American Presidents have attempted to promote peace in the region.

Unlike most U.S. Presidents, George Bush came into office already well-briefed on the issues underlying the Arab-Israeli conflict. Although this Administration's support of Israel appears to be more restrained than Ronald Reagan's, so far the U.S. has not applied pressure on Israel's government to make concessions to the Palestinians.

The Administration's policy is constrained by strong support for Israel in Congress and among the American public. Israel receives $3 billion annually in U.S. military and economic aid. But bilateral relations have come under considerable strain since the intifada began. Television and newspaper ac-
counts of Israeli brutality in the occupied territories have evoked sympathy for the Palestinians, and many American Jews and members of Congress have begun to criticize Israeli policies. The U.S. faces hard policy choices: whether to press Israel to relinquish the territories or support Israel’s claim to the land. U.S. diplomacy helped restore peace to the Middle East after the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars. Can it do so again?

Palestinians and Israelis

Palestinians and Israelis both claim the territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River as their ancestral home. Each people looks back to a golden age when their culture flourished. Both have known the loss of their homeland and have been sustained by the dream of reclaiming it. Jews and Muslims both revere Jerusalem as one of their holiest sites. During their 2,000 year diaspora (or dispersal), the Jews suffered inquisition, pogroms (organized massacres) and the death of 6 million in the Holocaust. The Palestinians, for their part, recall the exile and hardships suffered at the hands of Israel as well as the Arab states since their diaspora in 1948.

The nature of the struggle by the two sides for a homeland has changed form several times during the 20th century. At first, it pitted Palestinian nationalists against Jewish Zionists. With the birth of Israel in 1948, the conflict changed to one between Israel and the Arab states; since the 1967 war, it has reverted to being primarily a struggle between Israelis and Palestinians.

Painfully aware of their own tragic histories, Israelis and Palestinians have often been indifferent to the other’s suffering. Possessed of their own national dreams, each today has great difficulty acknowledging the legitimacy of the other’s political claims. The problem is not between a right and a wrong, but between two peoples asserting competing rights to the same land.

A tangled history

During antiquity Palestine was conquered by numerous outsiders, including Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Seleucids and Romans. According to the Bible, God led the Hebrew tribes out of bondage in Egypt to safety in Palestine, which they called “the land of Israel.” Although never the sole occupants of Palestine, the Jews (the word originally meant “one from Judea,” the region surrounding Jerusalem) formed lasting ties to the land and were in possession of most of what corresponds to present-day Israel by 1100 B.C. They held power on and off for the next 1,200 years. In A.D. 66 the Jews revolted against Roman rule, and after seven years their rebellion was crushed. Jerusalem was later destroyed and plowed under by the Romans, and most surviving Jews were sold into slavery or otherwise scattered throughout the Roman world.

The Palestinians claim descent from the Canaanites, Philistines and other tribes who were ancient inhabitants of the land known in Arabic as Filastin. Most of the local population, largely Christian at the time, converted to Islam after the Arab conquest in A.D. 637, although an indigenous Christian community has always lived in Palestine. In the Middle Ages, Christian crusaders from Europe fought to regain the Holy Land from the Muslim “infidel.” They established short-lived Crusader kingdoms, the last of which succumbed in A.D. 1291. The Ottoman Turks, based in Istanbul, captured Palestine early in the 16th century and held it until World War I.

The contest for Palestine began in earnest in the late 19th century as Jews and Arabs were both affected by the tide of nationalism sweeping Europe. Arabs under Ottoman domination wanted independence from their Turkish overlords. Jews, who throughout their diaspora had yearned to return to Zion (one of the Biblical names for Jerusalem), sought a state of their own.

Theodore Herzl, a Jewish journalist living in Vienna, Austria, was one of the founders of modern Zionism. Herzl made his appeal for a return of the Jews to Palestine at a time of virulent anti-Semitism, manifested by the Dreyfus Affair in France (1894–1906) and the pogroms of czarist Russia.

Many Jews, particularly in the U.S. and Western Europe, were not Zionists but identified with the countries where they lived. Nor were all Zionists Jews; some Christians believed that the return of Jews to Palestine had to precede the second coming of Christ.

The Balfour Declaration

The Zionist dream was summed up by the phrase, “a land without a people for a people without a land.” The problem was that the ancestral land of the Jews was by no means uninhabited. The Ottoman Empire opposed Jewish colonization in Palestine, but that did not stop Jews from immigrating there. Some came in the late 1880s, and many more arrived from Russia after the 1905 revolution failed. By 1914, 85,000 Jews lived in Palestine alongside some 600,000 Arabs, both Muslim and Christian.

During World War I, Britain promised to support the creation of independent governments in the Ottoman-controlled portions of Arab lands if the Arabs would revolt against the Turks. This promise conflicted, however, with later commitments the British made. In an effort to attract Jewish support for the allies and to ward off French claims to Palestine, Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour promised that Britain would work to establish a Jewish national home in Palestine. He wrote in 1917, “His Majesty’s Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people...it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine...”

The Balfour Declaration, a masterpiece of equivocation, did endorse the Zionist desire for a homeland, but it did not promise to transform Palestine into a Jewish state. After all, most of the inhabitants were not Jewish. Satisfying the competing claims of Arab and Jew has proven impossible ever since.

British mandate

After the war, Britain and France carved up the Arab portions of the Ottoman Empire into zones of influence that were known as mandates and technically supervised by the League of Nations. The mandate for Syria (including present-day Lebanon) was awarded to France and that for Iraq and Palestine (including present-day Jordan) to Britain. The mandates for Syria and Iraq were intended to prepare those countries for independence, but the Palestine mandate was designed to bolster Britain’s strategic position in the
Middle East as well as accommodate Zionist goals. Arab nationalists protested bitterly that Britain had gone back on its wartime promises of supporting their right to self-determination. Zionists were also unhappy because, by creating the Emirate of Transjordan in the area east of the Jordan River, Britain reduced the portion of Palestine available for a Jewish homeland.

Jewish-Arab relations worsened in the 1930s, as more Jews immigrated to Palestine to escape Nazi persecution. In 1936 Arabs held a six-month general strike which the British High Commissioner characterized as "a state of incipient revolution." The strike was followed by an Arab rebellion that lasted until 1939.

That year Britain, which wanted to forestall Arab hostility during the anticipated war with Germany, announced the ending of its mandate in 10 years, if conditions permitted. In the meantime Jewish immigration would be strictly limited and restrictions placed on land purchases. The Jews felt betrayed, especially since the 1937 Peel Commission, sent by Britain to examine the causes of the strike, had recommended partition, with a small portion of Palestine allotted for a Jewish state.

Israel's birth

After World War II, the British announced their intention to leave Palestine, and they turned the problem over to the United Nations. In November 1947, the General Assembly passed a resolution partitioning Palestine into independent Arab and Jewish states. The area around Jerusalem was to become an international zone administered by the UN as a permanent trusteeship. The Jewish state would include more than half the territory of Palestine, although Jews only constituted a third of the population. The Arabs rejected the plan and fighting broke out.

Israel declared itself a sovereign state on May 14, 1948. The following day Arab armies from Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt invaded, along with token forces from Saudi Arabia. Israeli forces prevailed due to their tactical skills and greater numbers, the lack of an effective Arab command and poor morale among the Arab armies. Israel extended its control to 78% of the territory, more than it would have received under the UN plan.

Dr. Ralph J. Bunche, an American diplomat serving the UN, chaired the negotiations that led to an armistice between Israel and Egypt in February 1949. In July Israel reached similar agreements with Lebanon, Transjordan and Syria.

The war resulted in major population shifts. In 1947, the Arab population in Palestine was estimated at 1.3 million and the Jewish population, 560,000—or 33% of the total. After the war, the Jews constituted about 77% of the population in the part of Palestine that became Israel.

About 133,000 Arabs remained and became Israeli citizens and an estimated 600,000 to 760,000 became refugees. The largest number fled to the West Bank. The rest went to Gaza, occupied by Egypt in 1948, and to other Arab countries, especially Lebanon, Syria and the East Bank. Emir Abdullah annexed the West Bank and joined it with the East Bank (formerly Transjordan) to form the new state of Jordan.

Why the Palestinians left has been a subject of bitter controversy. The most thorough analysis, published in 1987 by Israeli scholar Benny Morris, concludes that "the Palestinian refugee problem was born of war, not by design, Jewish or Arab. It was largely a by-product of Jewish and Arab fears and of the protracted, bitter fighting...[I]n smaller part, it was the deliberate creation of Jewish and Arab military commanders and politicians." The Palestinian exodus was paralleled by an influx of 500,000 Jews from Arab countries into Israel.

The politics of exile

Among Arabs the events of 1948 are referred to as al-nakba, the disaster. Many Palestinians suddenly found themselves homeless refugees, their political aspirations—which in other areas culminated in Arab sovereignty—cut short by the founding of Israel. Arab governments did not want to integrate them into their own countries for politi-
cal and economic reasons, and most Palestinians did not want to be assimilated, lest their demand for a homeland be forgotten.

The reception accorded the Palestinians in exile varied. Only Jordan offered them citizenship. Skilled workers and professionals found employment in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. In Lebanon, where the refugees threatened to upset the numerical balance between Christians and Muslims, strict curbs were placed on residence and employment. Egypt and Iraq took few Palestinians, whereas Syria assimilated large numbers.

Many Palestinians ended up in refugee camps, where they were cared for by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). But they never forgot the “paradise” they had left. An anthropologist interviewing Palestinians in the camps in Lebanon in the late 1970s found that “there is no detail of village life, from crops to quarrels, that people cannot remember in microscopic detail, in spite of—or perhaps because of—the completeness of their past.”

Starting in the 1950s, and especially in the 1960s, Palestinians formed popular organizations that mobilized groups such as women, teachers, students and workers and kept alive a sense of national identity that later found expression in political organizations like the PLO.

Rise of the PLO

The six-day war in June 1967 was a political turning point for the Middle East. Israel delivered a humiliating blow to the Egyptian, Jordanian and Syrian armies and tripled the size of its territory. Israel took the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) from Jordan; the Gaza Strip and Sinai (the latter was returned in 1982) from Egypt; and the Golan Heights (incorporated into Israel in December 1981) from Syria. Over 200,000 refugees, including many Palestinians who had taken refuge on the West Bank in 1948, fled to Jordan.

The sense of frustration and despair that was widespread among Arabs was particularly acute among the Palestinians. With their hope that the Arab states could restore their homeland crushed, they became more militant under the leadership of the PLO.

The PLO is an umbrella organization for various Palestinian factions. It was organized by Arab leaders in 1964 as a means of controlling the Palestinians. The predominant group within the PLO is Fatah, which was founded by Yasir Arafat in the late 1950s. Arafat’s ability to mediate between competing factions in the PLO is legendary, as is his reluctance to alienate any of them.

Fatah’s main rival is the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a Marxist group. Founded in 1967 by a Greek Orthodox physician, George Habash, the PFLP has appealed to Christians who favor a secular ideology based on Arab unity.

Under Arafat, who was elected chairman in 1969, the PLO carried out terrorist acts to publicize its cause. It drew recruits from a new generation, especially in the refugee camps, that had grown up with a hatred for Israel and a determination to regain their homeland.

The turn to terrorism boosted morale among Palestinians but it did not seriously damage Israel and it outraged international public opinion. The PLO was associated in Western minds with deeds such as the massacre of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics in September 1972, the assassination of U.S. and European diplomats in the Sudan in March 1973, and the killing of many Israeli civilians in raids on schools, buses and towns, including Ma’alot, Kiryat Shemona and Nahariyya.

By 1970, the increasingly aggressive activities of Palestinian forces in Jordan posed a challenge to the authority of King Hussein. The PFLP’s hijacking and destruction of three Western jet planes set the stage for a bloody showdown. In “Black September” 1970 King Hussein’s predominantly Bedouin army attacked the Palestinian guerrilla bases and refugee camps in Jordan, killing thousands. The survivors fled into Lebanon and Syria.

Turn to diplomacy

In October 1973 Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack on Israel. Although Israel, aided by a massive airlift of U.S. arms, prevailed militarily, the Arab armies performed creditably and restored a large measure of Arab pride and confidence. The Arab oil-producing states penalized the U.S. for helping Israel by placing an embargo on oil deliveries and quintupling the price.

In the wake of the war, the PLO attempted to cultivate a more moderate image abroad, and to some degree it succeeded. In October 1974 a majority
of Arab states designated the PLO as "the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." Arafat addressed the UN General Assembly that November, and the UN gave the PLO observer status—just short of outright recognition.

The PLO developed a "state within a state" in Lebanon, including an extensive network of armed camps. In retaliation against PLO raids, Israel invaded southern Lebanon in March 1978; it withdrew two months later following the installation of a UN peacekeeping force. Southern Lebanon, however, continued to be a PLO stronghold. In June 1982, Israel invaded again, supposedly to remove PLO bases within 40 kilometers of its border. A more important goal of this invasion, many believe, was to remove the PLO as a source of influence in the West Bank. Israeli forces pushed on to Beirut, the capital of Lebanon, and eventually forced the PLO out of the country.

PLO after Lebanon

In driving the PLO out of Lebanon, Israel eliminated the Palestinian military threat across the border. But it did not succeed in destroying the PLO or quashing the demand by Palestinians for a state of their own. "The war reinforced a bitter feeling of isolation and betrayal among Palestinians, a feeling that Camp David had already inflamed," according to historian Rashid Khalidi.

Today the PLO is a coalition of six factions, the most important of which is Fatah, based in Tunis, Tunisia's capital. Of the smaller radical factions, three, including the PFLP, are based in Damascus, Syria, and two in Baghdad, Iraq. A few parties that reject Arafat's leadership are based in Syria and Libya.

The PLO has long been plagued by internal divisions, although since the intifada began it has become more unified. It has been held together by its ability to rally Palestinians, particularly in times of crisis. Arafat himself—the "Old Man" to his followers—is a legendary survivor in the maelstrom of Middle Eastern politics.

One reason behind Arafat's power is that he controls a great deal of cash. The Economist (London) magazine reported in 1986 that Arafat is in charge of both the Palestine National Fund and the much larger and more secretive Fatah fund, estimated at $7 billion to $8 billion. The PLO has a 5,000-person bureaucracy that runs its diverse business and charitable interests, which include hospitals in Lebanon, kindergartens in Egypt and plantations in Africa.

Occupied territories

Since the 1967 war, Israel has increasingly integrated the economies of the West Bank and Gaza with its own. By the eve of the uprising in 1987, four out of ten workers in the territories were employed in Israel, mostly as unskilled labor. They accounted for a third of the territories' income, some $700 million. Little industrial development took place in the territories proper, which became dependent on Israeli imports.

To help reduce Israel's vulnerability to attack, after the 1967 war the Labor government encouraged Israelis to establish temporary settlements at strategic points on the West Bank. The Likud bloc, a coalition of conservative parties the most important of which is Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's Herut party, greatly expanded the number of settlements after it took power in 1977. The Likud's rationale for the settlements was different from that of Labor: it wanted to establish a nucleus of Jewish settlers on the land in order to frustrate any attempt to relinquish the territory at a future date. Some settlers came out of ideological commitment, others because of economic incentives such as cheap housing and tax relief. Today there are over 100 settlements with nearly 70,000 settlers—many of whom are determined never to leave.

To support the settlements, Israel has seized almost one third of the territory on the West Bank, including 90% of the cultivable land and 75% of the water resources, according to Meron Benvenisti, who directed the West Bank Data Project, a nonpartisan research institute in Jerusalem, from 1982 to 1989. Israel has spent $3 billion on infrastructure, including housing, roads and electricity. The lesson that Benvenisti draws is that the process has now become irreversible: it is too late
to separate the West Bank from Israel. The Israeli occupation, although it brought a rise in the standard of living of Palestinians, bred hatred and alienation. Israel obstructed the development of local leadership or effective political organizations on the West Bank: Palestinian officials who opposed Israeli policies were removed (some were deported). Under the Iron Fist policy imposed in 1985, Palestinian protesters were subject to search, arrest, interrogation, deportation, house arrest, curfew, and abridged freedom of expression and travel.

Gaza, about 25 miles long and 4 to 9 miles wide, is a densely populated, poverty-stricken "hellhole made to order for terrorism," according to The Jerusalem Post. The local economy, based on citrus production, cannot provide enough jobs, and many Gazans are obliged to seek work in Israel. Three quarters of the population are refugees from the 1948 war who live in camps administered by UNRWA. Unlike West Bank Palestinians, "the residents of Gaza have no historic ties with the Hashemite Kingdom," and few want a union with Jordan, according to Professor Ann Mosely Lesch of Villanova University.

The intifada

Two decades of mounting frustration in the territories, compounded by the Palestinians' sense of abandonment, eventually led to an explosion. At a summit meeting in Amman, Jordan, in November 1987, the Arab states reiterated the Palestinian issue to second place on their agenda—after the Iran-Iraq War. Many Palestinians were shocked and felt deserted. It did not take long for an incident to spark the uprising.

On December 8, 1987, an Israeli tank transport crashed into a van carrying Palestinian workers to the Gaza Strip, killing four of them. Spontaneous demonstrations broke out in Gaza and the West Bank and quickly mushroomed into a general revolt against Israeli rule. There had been protests in the occupied territories before, but never of this scale or duration.

The revolutionary "troops," for the most part, were young boys armed with stones and an occasional Molotov cocktail. This ensured sympathetic media coverage and reflected the fact that Palestinians have few arms.

At first, the objective of the uprising was to get Israel to improve the conditions of occupation, release prisoners, withdraw its army from populated areas and cancel restrictions on political activities. Eventually, the major demand was for a Palestinian state.

PLO challenged

By all accounts the intifada took the PLO by surprise and challenged it to come up with new policies. King Hussein’s decision to relinquish sovereignty over the West Bank in July 1988 added to the pressure on the PLO to act. In November, the Palestine National Council (PNC)—regarded as the PLO’s government-in-exile—in a symbolic act declared the existence of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, with Jerusalem its capital. This declaration was based on the original UN partition resolution of 1947. The PNC also accepted UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, thereby implicitly recognizing Israel.

The PNC’s declarations did not go far enough to convince the U.S. that it had changed its policies, so in December 1988 Arafat explicitly recognized Israel’s right to exist, accepted UN resolutions 242 and 338 and renounced terrorism. In response, the U.S. dropped its long-standing prohibition on negotiating with the PLO. In addition, in May 1989 Arafat referred to the PLO charter, which says that "armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine," as having "lapsed."

The lack of progress toward a solution caused growing divisiveness among Palestinians. Those who ignored strikes and boycotts risked being ostracized or attacked. By November 1989 over 100 Palestinians had been killed by other Palestinians for collaborating with the enemy. Over 550 had been killed by Israeli forces.

The PLO’s leadership of the uprising appears to be eroding. Hard-liners in the PLO have brought increasing pressure on Arafat to produce results. At a Fatah congress in August 1989, 90% of the delegates endorsed Arafat’s diplomatic approach, but made no reference to his recognition of Israel or his renunciation of terrorism. In fact, Fatah voted to intensify armed struggle until the occupation ended. The Islamic fundamentalist organization Hamas (the Movement of Islamic Opposition), which has some support in the West Bank and Gaza, rejects the idea of peaceful coexistence with Israel and advocates an Islamic state with laws based on the Koran.

Elections ahead?

While casualties mounted, the diplomats placed their hope on a nonviolent solution, namely elections. Prime Minister Shamir suggested that elections in the West Bank and Gaza could lead to local autonomy for Palestinians, with the final status of the territories to be worked out later. But Israel’s conditions, including a prohibition on PLO participation in the elections, were unacceptable to Palestinians.

Palestinians believe that if the U.S. pressed hard enough, it could force Israel to grant them a homeland. Their estimation of U.S. influence may be exaggerated; the U.S. has long maintained that it would not force Israel to take action it believed would endanger its security.

The Soviet Union

The Soviet Union, which has helped arm the PLO and given it diplomatic support since 1968, supports the demand for a Palestinian state. Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev has pressed the PLO to moderate its policies to increase the chances for peace.

The Soviet Union regards the Middle East as within its legitimate sphere of interest and believes a comprehensive solution should be worked out at an international conference. However, at present the Soviet Union has no diplomatic ties with Israel, and this limits its role as a broker.

Can the differences between Israelis and Palestinians be bridged with ballots, not bullets? Thomas L. Friedman, who spent six years in Lebanon and Israel as a New York Times correspondent, believes that the legacy of bitterness is such that neither side can ever be fully satisfied. "In the current political environment, focusing on permanent solutions is a prescription for deadlock. ... Neither side can ever sign away its dreams; a final, comprehensive solution for the Palestine problem is today a contradiction in terms...."
The Palestinians between Arabs and Israelis

FOR TWO DECADES after 1948, Palestinian nationalism was eclipsed by the intense ideological struggles sweeping the Arab world. Many Palestinians placed their faith in the pan-Arab movement led by Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser to regain their homeland. But Arab leaders were not eager to see the formation of a Palestinian state that could become a destabilizing influence.

After the 1967 war, the Palestinians increasingly asserted their independence from the Arab governments. Although they still relied on Arab states for financial, military and diplomatic support, they knew that when the chips were down—such as in Jordan in 1970 and in Lebanon in 1982—they could not count on Arab leaders for help.

Arab politics

The Palestinians have been an important factor in inter-Arab politics for four decades. Each country views them from a different perspective.

Egypt has officially been at peace with Israel since 1979, and peace is essential for its economic prospects as well as the continuation of large-scale U.S. aid. For peace to continue, Egypt believes, the Palestinian problem must be solved. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has good relations with Arafat at present, and has tried—so far without success—to act as a middleman in a peace settlement.

Syria has long championed the Palestinian cause, but by backing factions hostile to Arafat it helped to splinter the movement. Syrian President Hafez Assad reportedly is unhappy with the intifada since it has boosted Arafat's stock. Syria keeps its own Palestinian population under strict control.

Although some Palestinian guerrillas have found their way back to Lebanon, the continuing civil war there rules Lebanon out as an important factor in Palestinian politics at present.

Jordan, which controlled the West Bank from 1948 to 1967, has been encouraged by the U.S. and Israel to negotiate on behalf of the Palestinians, but King Hussein has always been ambivalent about playing such a role and many Palestinians do not accept his leadership. A short-lived effort to form a common negotiating front with Arafat collapsed in 1986. Jordan clearly must be a partner in peace, and Israelis hoped that the displaced Arabs would be quietly assimilated into neighboring countries. Israelis feared that acknowledging the right of Palestinians to self-determination would undercut their own claim to the land.

Making peace with Egypt in 1979 provided a major psychological boost to Israelis and demonstrated that their country might eventually be accepted by other Arab states. But none has followed Egypt's example: normalization of relations is only likely to come in the context of a comprehensive settlement.

Continued Israeli occupation of the territories has led to ominous demographic trends in Israel: at the present rate of increase, Arabs may constitute half the population by the year 2000 if the West Bank and Gaza remain under Israeli jurisdiction. Israelis face the agonizing choice of whether they want to live in a Jewish state or as a minority in a nonsectarian state.

The 1982 invasion of Lebanon, which many Israelis came to oppose, undermined confidence in the government and showed the limitations of a military solution to the region's problems. It also polarized Israeli public opinion, which ranges from leftists who do not object to a Palestinian state to rightists who would end the problem by "transferring" the Palestinians to Jordan. But even among most hawks and doves, there is a consensus that Israel should not return to its pre-1967 border, that Jerusalem should remain united, that the government should not agree to a Palestinian state or allow Palestinian refugees the right to return.

The intifada has increased pressure on Israel to find a diplomatic solution. The Labor party, led by Shimon Peres, endorses the idea of trading land for peace, and has become more flexible about negotiating with Palestinians. Peres has favored holding an international peace conference, and believes that failure to reach a compromise settlement would be fatal for Israel. Outside of Israel, Peres's ideas have widespread support.

Prime Minister Shamir represents the hard-liners. He emphasizes the historic right of Jews to live in Judea and Samaria, the Biblical name for the West Bank, and fears that relinquishing the territories would gravely endanger Israel's security. Without the West Bank, Israel is only nine miles wide at its narrowest point. Shamir refuses to negotiate with the PLO. He also opposes an international conference on the grounds that the Soviets and Arab states would gang up against Israel and force it to make too many concessions.

Peres (1984–86) and Shamir (1986–present) have alternated in leading coalition governments. Their differences have paralyzed domestic decision-making, perplexed foreign observers, and left the public, itself divided, frustrated.

The uprising has had serious consequences for Israel's economy. Palestinians in the territories have stopped buying many Israeli products. The construction industry in Israel, which depends heavily on Arab labor, has been hard hit by strikes. By November 1989, Israel was in the 11th month of a deep recession, with unemployment hovering around 10% and inflation running at 23%. The intifada was not wholly to blame, but it had made things considerably worse.
U.S. policy: the search for solutions

American Administrations long regarded the Palestinians as primarily a refugee problem. They have been wary of Palestinian political aspirations and no President has endorsed their demand for a state.

Support for Israel has long been one of the pillars of U.S. policy in the Middle East. Administrations have regarded Israel as a bastion of democracy in the Middle East and a "strategic asset" in fighting terrorism and opposing Soviet inroads. Many Americans believe the U.S. has a moral duty to support it.

An alternative view notes that U.S. support for Israel has angered Arab states whose friendship the U.S. needs to assure a steady flow of oil. Because Israel is assured of U.S. backing, some maintain, it has refused to deal with the Palestinians and this has kept the region in turmoil.

Since the 1967 war, the U.S. has periodically tried to help resolve the Arab-Israeli dispute. The U.S. position is expressed in UN Security Council Resolution 242, which it helped formulate. The resolution emphasizes "the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war" and calls for the "withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict." The resolution did not specify that all occupied land was to be relinquished.

The resolution also acknowledges the right of "every state in the area" (that is, Israel) "to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries."

U.S. diplomacy

The high point of U.S. diplomacy in regard to the Arab-Israeli dispute came during the Carter Administration (1977–81). President Carter persuaded Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin to sign two trailblazing agreements at Camp David: one provided for Israeli withdrawal from Sinai and an Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty; the other was a framework for Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Under this framework, which was never implemented, Egypt and Israel agreed to transitional arrangements for the West Bank and Gaza, which would not exceed five years. Residents would elect representatives who would participate in negotiations to determine the final status of the areas.

In the decade after the Camp David accords, the Arab-Israeli dispute was on the back burner of U.S. diplomacy. The priority of the Reagan Administration (1981–89) was to exclude Soviet influence from the Middle East and build a "strategic consensus" of regional states to oppose Soviet encroachment. Although Reagan himself was considered the most pro-Israeli of American Presidents, he was not prepared to enter into the kind of personal diplomacy that had been crucial at Camp David. Reagan also questioned the legitimacy of the PLO's leadership of Palestinians.

In the aftermath of Israel's invasion of Lebanon in June 1982, the U.S. sent in troops as part of a multinational peacekeeping force to help evacuate the PLO from Beirut. With Israel's position strengthened in the region, the Administration saw a new opportunity for peace. In September 1982 Reagan proposed giving Palestinians in the West Bank and in Gaza self-government in association with Jordan. Reagan said the U.S. would oppose both Israeli annexation and an independent Palestinian state. The plan was rejected by Israel and received without enthusiasm by the Arab states.

Thereafter, Secretary of State George P. Shultz shied away from Middle East diplomacy until his last year in office, when he proposed holding an international conference in which the Palestinians would be represented in a joint delegation with Jordanians. The plan was accepted by neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians.

Enter Bush

President Bush took office at a time when the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had again become a major international issue. His Administration, however, sees limited opportunities for diplomacy and would prefer that the parties directly involved come up with a peace plan.

In a major policy speech in May 1989, Secretary of State James A. Baker 3d stunned many supporters of Israel by urging Israel to abandon "the unrealistic vision of a greater Israel" and to "forebear annexation," both key policies of Shamir. He also urged Palestinians to amend their charter and "translate the dialogue of violence in the intifada into a dialogue of politics and diplomacy."

By late 1989, the Administration was discouraged by the lack of progress in ending the intifada. Procedural wrangling over how to hold elections in the territories and who would represent the
Palestinians in peace talks had consumed much time while the major issues remained unaddressed.

**Policy options**

One decision facing the Bush Administration is how strong a leadership role to play. Many note that in the Middle East, if the peace process does not go forward, it goes backward. According to Rep. Lee H. Hamilton (D-Ind.), "the status quo is a prescription for trouble. U.S. interests simply do not allow us to drift along waiting for a more favorable environment... We ought not shirk our responsibilities."

Clearly, the U.S. cannot solve the problem alone. But those who favor the U.S. asserting stronger leadership argue that the U.S. is the only mediator accepted by all sides, and regional leaders have urged its participation. Other observers note that, with Israel refusing to withdraw from the occupied territories and the Palestinians insisting on statehood, there is nothing to negotiate about.

Then there is the question of Palestinian representation. Israelis and Palestinians are deadlocked over the issue, with Israel fearing that even if an accord can be struck with Arafat, it would be repudiated by other, more hard-line, Palestinians.

How can the U.S. help get negotiations started? According to one school, the main obstacle is Israel; Palestinians have already made significant concessions for peace. Therefore the U.S. should put pressure on Israel to be more forthcoming and stop insisting on veto power over Palestinian negotiators.

The pressure could consist of putting restrictions on or scaling down U.S. aid to Israel.

Those opposed to this course argue that Palestinian "concessions" are only a façade to gain U.S. sympathy. Although Arafat has recognized Israel, the intifada continues, and so do terrorist attacks, as the Israeli government has charged. A majority of Congress is pro-Israel and cannot realistically be expected to approve a significant cut.

A further issue is what kind of settlement to seek: a comprehensive solution (the approach favored by Carter) or limited agreements that lead step-by-step to an overall settlement (the approach favored by former Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger).

It sometimes seems as if all ideas have been tried and all have failed. But new ideas continue to surface. Gidon Gottlieb, director of the Middle East Relations, blames language for impeding a solution. Gottlieb notes, for example, that Israeli governments have always distinguished between the state of Israel and the land of Israel, and that the Palestinians are now coming around to the same concept. Both Israelis and Palestinians might live in their homelands and be accorded special privileges there, he points out, even if they were not within an Israeli or Palestinian state. Given the will to succeed, there might still be a way to finesse the issues diplomatically.

Should the U.S. reconsider its opposition to a Palestinian state? Recent Administrations have accepted the theory that such a state would introduce an element of instability in the Middle East, would pose a security threat to Israel, would be subject to Soviet influence and would not be viable economically. "A new Palestinian state could well become... a solution that brings short-term relief for Western guilt, but only at great long-term cost," according to Steven L. Spiegel, a University of California professor. Some Israelis point out that such a state already exists, namely Jordan, where over half the population is Palestinian, and there is no need for another one.

On the other hand, international support for such a state has grown over the past two years. Arab leaders claim that a Palestinian state would halt the further radicalization of the PLO and deter terrorist acts. Since the destruction of the PLO infrastructure in Lebanon, they assert, the Palestinians have posed no real threat to Israel.

Other possible solutions, such as an exercise of joint sovereignty by Israel and Jordan, have not really been explored. The most difficult problem of all will probably be the status of Jerusalem.

Should the U.S. support Soviet participation in the Middle East peace talks? Some argue that this would give the Soviets leverage in the Middle East at U.S. expense. On the other hand, many argue that until the Soviet Union is allowed a role, there can be no settlement.

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It seems clear that ultimately both sides must compromise to achieve peace, which may take generations to be accepted. What compromises are worth making, and how soon? What role should the U.S. play? Should it act as a catalyst, risking failure, or should it wait until there is a strong enough mandate for peace within the region to resolve the problem that has kept the Middle East in upheaval for some four decades?
FOR DISCUSSION

1. Palestine has been called the "twice-promised land," an area Britain reserved for both Jewish Zionists and Palestinian nationalists. Can you think of any way to reconcile their competing claims to the land?

2. The U.S. has said it favors self-determination for Palestinians, as long as this does not include statehood. Is there anything inconsistent about such a policy?

3. Since the U.S. and the Soviet Union cosponsored an international conference following the 1973 war, the Soviets have been shut out of the Arab-Israeli peace process. Do you think the U.S. should agree to including them in the search for peace?


5. Israelis and Palestinians will both have to make compromises if a peace settlement is to be reached. What steps do you think Israel could take without endangering its security? What steps could the Palestinians take without forgoing their dream of a homeland?

6. How forceful a role should the U.S. play in ending the intifada? Should it threaten to cut back financial assistance to Israel unless it advances the peace process? Or should the U.S. wait for the parties themselves to formulate a viable settlement plan before stepping in?

7. Is it reasonable for the Israelis to insist that the PLO be excluded from peace negotiations? Who should represent the Palestinians? Should they be entitled to choose their own representatives, even if they have connections with the PLO?

SUGGESTED READINGS


Journal of Palestine Studies. The leading scholarly journal devoted to Palestinian affairs, published jointly by The Institute for Palestine Studies and Kuwait University. Available to individuals for $18 annually (4 issues) from I.P.S., Georgetown Station, P.O. Box 25301, Washington, D.C. 20007.


Mattar, Philip, "The Critical Moment for Peace." Foreign Policy, Fall 1989, pp. 141-59. The U.S. must act now as a catalyst for peace and leave all issues, including statehood, open to negotiation.

Miller, Aaron David, "Palestinians and the Intifada: One Year Later." Current History, February 1989, pp. 73-76+. State Department analyst reviews developments during the first year of the intifada.


For further in-depth reading, write for the Great Decisions 1990 Bibliography (see page 4).