

1 HISTORIES AND FUTURES OF A FAILED PEACE

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The political landscape in Palestine and Israel underwent significant changes at the turn of the twenty-first century. On September 29, 2000, the second Palestinian uprising—the al-Aqsa Intifada—began. In February 2001, veteran hawk Ariel Sharon was elected prime minister of Israel, his return to power enabled by the breakdown of personal security and political stability in both Israel and the Occupied Territories. Since September 2000, over 3,200 Palestinian residents of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and over 950 Israelis have been killed by the political violence of Palestinian militants and the Israeli state’s violent efforts to suppress the uprising.¹ In these years, Israeli society has experienced a dramatic shift to the right, and Jewish-Israeli popular sentiment has provided the government with the political authority to suppress the intifada—and ignore the political demands of the Palestinian people—at virtually any cost. How and why did this uprising erupt? What was its relationship to the so-called “peace process” that began with the Oslo accords of 1993 and collapsed with the Camp David summit of July 2000?² What kinds of cultural and social trends have accompanied the political shifts of this period? And what are the prospects for a comprehensive peace between Israel and the Palestinians in the new political landscape shaped by years of violence and official US endorsement of a Palestinian state in the context of heightened intervention throughout the Middle East?

This book attempts to answer these and other questions through an examination of recent historical, political, social, and cultural processes in Palestine and Israel. Our investigation is framed by two of the most important political events of the last decade: the 1993 Oslo accords, or Declaration of Principles

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(DOP), and the al-Aqsa Intifada. Our central argument is that the Oslo process failed to create the necessary conditions for a just and lasting peace in the region, thus paving the road for political turmoil and continuing conflict in the decade that followed. While political observers, activists, and scholars now commonly concede the failures of Oslo, many view the Camp David summit of July 2000 as the pivotal moment of its dissolution and imagine the years of the Rabin/Peres Labor government (1992–96) as an era of hope brought about by the 1993 DOP.³ The contributors to this volume dispute this claim, arguing that the poverty and incarceration within the West Bank and Gaza Strip that have become more widely evident over the last several years can be traced to the formulations of the 1993 Oslo accords and the vision of economic liberalization and integration into a global marketplace that motivated Oslo's Israeli architects, particularly those close to Shimon Peres. Although not discussed with much depth in this volume, we also situate the Oslo process and its failures within a much longer history: that of the Israeli occupation and the struggle for Palestinian self-determination since 1967, and the long and ongoing history of Zionist colonization and Palestinian dispossession.

The editors and authors of this collection are scholars and journalists whose approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict has been formed by years of residence in the region, knowledge of Arabic and/or Hebrew, and empathic understanding of both the principal communities and their constituent elements. Most of the chapters were originally published as articles in *Middle East Report* and have been revised and updated for this book. Like much of the current scholarship and commentary on Palestine and Israel, the volume focuses on political and economic questions. We are also concerned with the relationships among political-economic, historical, and cultural processes. By departing from standard methodological protocol in the field of Middle East studies and considering the ways in which culture articulates with political economy, we hope to complicate the story of politics and power that we tell about Palestine and Israel over the course of the last decade. The study of “culture,” whether in the form of commodity or of so-called “high” culture, gives us access to some of the more affective forms of the conflict, and suggests ways that everyday political battles are waged through artistic and consumptive processes.⁴ This volume also contests the prevailing understanding of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a conflict between two monolithic peoples and positions by paying attention to internal political fissures and social differences—to voices of dissent, to questions of gender, and to minoritarian

politics—on both sides of the Green Line, the internationally recognized border between Israel and the Occupied Territories. In addition, our choice of accompanying photographs provides alternatives to the images that have long dominated representations of this conflict, which tend to favor scenes of spectacular violence and confrontation. Instead, this volume features snapshots of everyday life under occupation and of protest against it.

With an eye to the centrality of historical processes in the understanding of political formations in the present, we provide the following highly abbreviated history of Palestine, Israel, and the conflict—with an emphasis on developments in Palestine and Israel over the last two decades. We hope that this introduction may serve as a historical primer to which readers of this volume can return in their efforts to situate the preceding essays in their respective contexts.

ROOTS OF CONFLICT (1880–1948)

At the start of the twentieth century, the Ottoman Empire ruled much of the Arab world, including the territory that is now Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. During World War I this area was conquered and occupied by the British, who made contradictory promises to Arab and Zionist leaders about the disposition of Palestine and how it was to be governed. At the time, 90 percent of the population was Arab; the Jewish community included long-time residents and new Zionist immigrants fleeing persecution in Russia and, later, other parts of Europe. Following World War I, the League of Nations granted Great Britain a Mandate over Palestine and endorsed the objective of establishing a national home for the Jewish people there.⁵ A three-year Arab uprising in the late 1930s against British rule and increased Jewish immigration due to Hitler's rise to power in Germany prompted a British proposal to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. A revised version of that plan was approved in 1947 by UN General Assembly Resolution 181. The Arabs rejected the UN partition plan on the grounds that it allotted 55 percent of the land of Palestine to the Jewish minority, which then comprised about one-third of the population, and on the grounds that Jewish immigration to Palestine, facilitated by British rule from 1917 to 1939, was illegitimate. The Zionists accepted the partition plan and proclaimed the State of Israel on May 14, 1948, though they anticipated expanding the borders of their state in the war that was already underway.

During the 1948 war, about half the area designated by the UN for a Pales-

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tinian state was conquered by Israel. Some 750,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from those territories. The Gaza Strip came under the control of Egypt, while Transjordan occupied and later illegally annexed the West Bank. In the June 1967 war, Israel gained control of the rest of the former Mandate of Palestine (the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which Israel annexed in 1980), the Sinai Peninsula (since returned to Egypt), and the Syrian Golan Heights. UN Security Council Resolution 242 of November 22, 1967 affirmed “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war” and called upon Israel to withdraw “from territories occupied in the recent conflict”—an intentionally vague resolution that has not been implemented.⁶

Following the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, Egypt and Israel began negotiations that eventually resulted in a peace treaty. Neutralization of the southern front allowed Israel to invade Lebanon with impunity in 1978 and 1982. The outbreak of the first Palestinian intifada in December 1987 led to the PLO’s recognition of Israel and renunciation of terrorism at the Palestine National Council meeting of November 1988.

“PEACE PROCESSES” (1991–2000)

After the 1991 Gulf War, the United States sought to stabilize its position in the Middle East by promoting a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Despite their turn against the PLO, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia were anxious to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict because of its potential for regional instability. The administration of President George H. W. Bush felt obliged to its Arab allies and pressed a reluctant Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir to open negotiations with the Palestinians and the Arab states at a multilateral conference convened in Madrid in October 1991. Shamir’s conditions, which the United States accepted, were that the PLO be excluded from the talks, that Palestinian desires for independence and statehood be excluded from the formal agenda, and that the Palestinians be represented by a delegation from the Occupied Territories (excluding Jerusalem) subject to Israeli approval.⁷ Although the PLO was formally excluded from these talks, its leaders regularly consulted with the official Palestinian delegation, both at Madrid and in eleven subsequent meetings between the Israeli and Palestinian negotiators in Washington, DC. These talks achieved little. After he left office, Prime Minister Shamir revealed that his strategy had been to drag out the Washington negotiations for ten years, by which time the annexation of the West Bank would be a *fait accompli*.

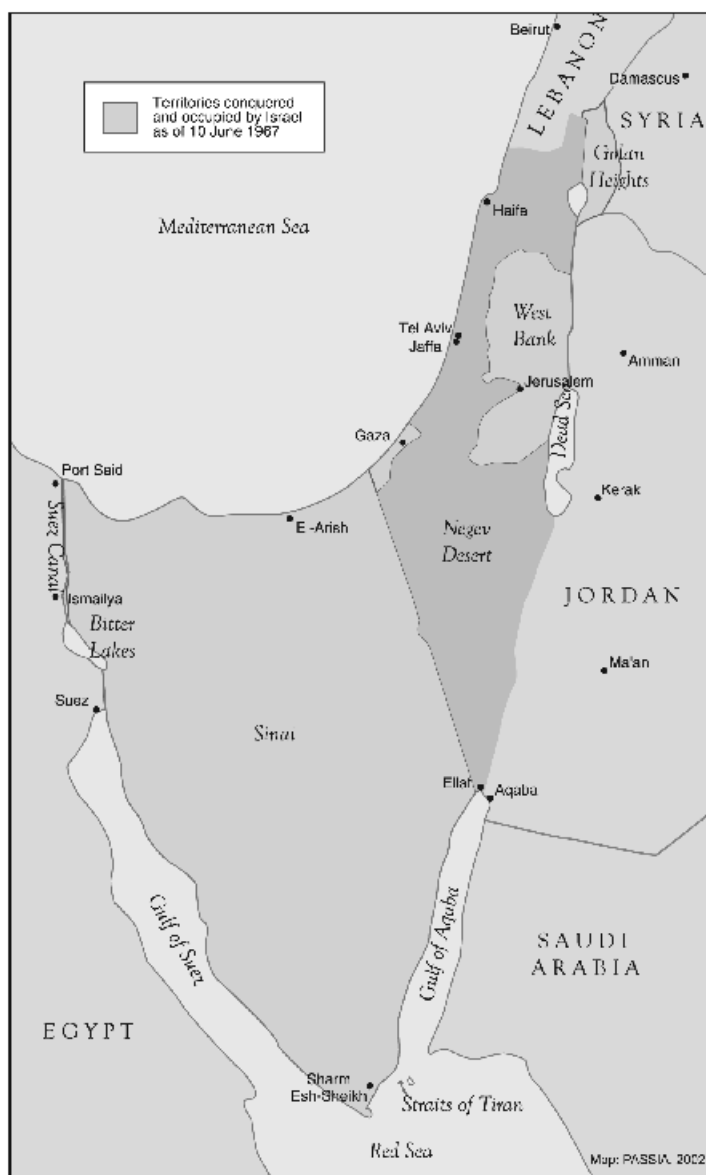


Figure 1. The Middle East after the 1967 war.

In the course of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Israel occupied the West Bank (Jordanian territory), the Gaza Strip (administered by Egypt), the Golan Heights (Syrian territory), and the Sinai Peninsula (Egyptian territory). Sinai was returned to Egypt pursuant to the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. Source: Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA). © Jan de Jong

A new Israeli Labor Party government led by Yitzhak Rabin assumed office in June 1992 and promised rapid conclusion of an Israel-Palestinian agreement. Instead, the Washington negotiations were stalemated after December 1992, when Israel expelled over four hundred Palestinian residents of the Occupied Territories, accused (but not tried or convicted) of being radical Islamist activists. Human rights conditions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip deteriorated dramatically after Rabin assumed office. Such conditions undermined the legitimacy of the Palestinian delegation to the Washington talks and prompted the resignation of several delegates.

The weakness of the PLO after the 1991 Gulf War, the demise of the Soviet Union, which had given diplomatic support to the PLO, the stalemate in the Washington talks, and fear of radical Islam brought the Rabin government to reverse the long-standing Israeli refusal to negotiate with the PLO. In January 1993 Israel initiated secret negotiations in Oslo, Norway, with the very PLO representatives who had been excluded from the Madrid and Washington talks. These negotiations produced the Israeli-PLO Declaration of Principles (DOP), which was signed in Washington in September 1993. The DOP established a five-year interim process with no clearly specified outcome. The most difficult issues were intentionally left unresolved: the status of Jerusalem, the future of the Palestinian refugees, the disposition of Israeli settlements and settlers, the borders and the nature of the Palestinian entity to be established. According to the terms of the DOP, these issues were to be decided in “final status” talks scheduled to begin no later than May 1996.

Under the DOP, Israel transferred day-to-day authority over parts of the Gaza Strip and West Bank to a Palestinian Authority headed by Yasser Arafat, who returned from Tunis in 1994 after decades in political exile. Palestinians insisted that this new governing body be called the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), thereby emphasizing its status as an embryonic sovereign state—or so they hoped. Yet, despite the rhetoric of “withdrawal” and transfer of authority, Israel still retained ultimate power over the Occupied Territories during this five-year transition period. Subsequent agreements in 1995 (the Taba Interim Accords or Oslo II), 1998 (Wye River), and 1999 (Wye River II) dealt only with interim issues and did not alter this structure of power. In July 2000 President Clinton invited Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and President Arafat to Camp David to conclude negotiations on the long-overdue final status agreement. Clinton and Barak were anxious to hold this summit before they left office, but Arafat was reluctant because there had not been adequate



Figure 2. Israel's territorial offer to the Palestinians, July 2000 Camp David summit.

There were no maps presented at Camp David. This map represents an approximation of Israel's territorial offer based on oral statements made during negotiations. The proposed Palestinian state was to occupy some 80 percent of the West Bank and have no independent access to neighboring Arab countries. Source: Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA). © Jan de Jong

preparations and a wide gap remained between parties on key issues. Arafat attended after President Clinton promised him that he would not be blamed in the event of a failure. When the summit did fail after two weeks of intensive negotiations, Clinton and Barak placed the blame on Arafat.

THE SECOND INTIFADA AND ISRAELI POLITICS (2000–2004)

Ariel Sharon, a veteran hawk and architect of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, was a vociferous critic of Ehud Barak's negotiating positions at the July 2000 Camp David summit.⁸ At the time, he was engaged in a struggle with former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over the leadership of the Likud Party. In a bid to outdo Netanyahu's credentials as a militant nationalist, Sharon planned a provocative visit to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount on September 28, 2000, accompanied by hundreds of armed guards. "I came to this place to show that it is ours," he told reporters during his visit.⁹ Seven Palestinians from a crowd that threw stones to protest Sharon's visit were shot dead by Israeli security forces. Palestinian protests following Sharon's visit to the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount led to a full-scale uprising. The al-Aqsa Intifada, as the uprising was named, expressed cumulative popular anger at the continuing Israeli occupation, protracted closures that prevented Palestinians from traveling freely, and the expansion of Jewish settlements despite the ongoing "peace process." It was also a response to the undemocratic and corrupt practices of the PNA, and to Yasser Arafat's apparent willingness to make concessions to Israel on matters such as the establishment of a viable sovereign state with its capital in East Jerusalem and some recognition of the right of return for Palestinian refugees displaced in 1948 and 1967.

Barak had lost his parliamentary majority on the eve of the Camp David summit. He eventually had to resign and call for new prime ministerial elections. Sharon won with 60 percent of the vote. After taking office in February 2001, Sharon increased repression against Palestinians, several times sending Israeli troops and tanks into Palestinian-controlled cities, villages, and refugee camps. Following the September 11 terrorist attacks against the United States, Sharon increasingly identified Yasser Arafat and the PNA with Usama bin Laden and al-Qa'ida. Israeli military action in the occupied territories thus became a part of George W. Bush's "war on terror."

Israel's military response to the uprising escalated in intensity and scale after the January 2002 parliamentary elections, which resulted in the reelection of Ariel Sharon as Israel's prime minister. Operations increasingly

targeted the infrastructure of the PNA and its police and security forces. The Israeli army invaded PNA-controlled areas, bulldozed Palestinian houses and crops, systematically assassinated key Fatah and HAMAS militants, and rocketed Palestinian police stations using Apache helicopters supplied by the United States. The Israeli military assault on areas ostensibly under PNA control entered a new phase in March–April 2002. In response to a series of suicide bombs, Israel invaded Palestinian towns and refugee camps, massively deploying tanks and shelling PNA and civilian buildings in its largest military operation since the invasion of Lebanon in 1982. The cities of Ramallah, Bethlehem, Jenin, Tulkarm, Qalqilya, and Nablus were fully reoccupied. Soldiers imposed tight 24-hour curfews and cut electricity and water supply to the population. Palestinian militias organized by Fatah and other political forces and policemen armed in accordance with Israeli-Palestinian agreements resisted the offensives with force, particularly in Nablus and Jenin. In mid-April 2002 the Red Cross warned of a severe humanitarian crisis in West Bank towns and refugee camps due to the lack of food, water, and electricity, and army restrictions on the movement of residents and rescue workers. Cautious statements by the UN and the World Bank in April 2002 estimated an unemployment rate of some 50 percent across the Palestinian territories. Israeli blockades around Palestinian towns, even those not reoccupied during the invasions, caused severe shortages of flour, sugar, and gasoline.

POWER AND STRUGGLE IN PALESTINE (2000–2004)

In response to Israel's military assault on the intifada, even Palestinians critical of PNA rule rallied behind the leadership of Yasser Arafat.¹⁰ Many Palestinians feared that Israel sought to replace Arafat or to destroy the PNA entirely. Although Arafat had lost much popular support by the late 1990s, his popularity surged during this period—thanks, in part, to an Israeli-imposed “isolation” of Arafat in his Ramallah headquarters from December 2001 until his death three years later and the repeated US demand that Arafat halt all forms of “violence,” not just suicide bombings. Israeli assaults during the period of the reoccupation effectively radicalized much of the Palestinian population, pushing many Palestinian security personnel in the political direction of the militants. Hence, it was both impossible and politically unwise for Arafat to maintain “absolute calm” in the territories, as Israel demanded. This would have positioned the PNA as a proxy police force for the Israeli occupation, undermining Arafat's status as leader of the Palestinian cause. HAMAS and

Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for most of the suicide bombings and other attacks inside Israel during this period. These organizations did not, and do not, recognize the State of Israel, and they rejected the Oslo agreements. Despite Israeli claims to the contrary, there has been no credible evidence that Arafat or the PNA have had prior knowledge of HAMAS and Islamic Jihad operations over the course of the last few years. Indeed, as Palestinian critics have noted, Israeli attacks on PNA police and security forces during this period seriously undermined the PNA's ability to prevent them. Although Arafat and the PNA repeatedly condemned suicide bombings inside Israel, the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade, which is connected to Arafat's Fatah organization, the main wing of the PLO, has engaged in several suicide bombings and attacks on civilians inside Israel.

In the later stages of the intifada, the PNA occasionally answered US-Israeli calls to "crack down" on HAMAS and Islamic Jihad through mass arrests; in some cases, the Islamists and their supporters met PNA police with violent resistance. HAMAS (though not Islamic Jihad) several times suspended attacks on Israeli civilians in deference to the PNA's diplomatic efforts, but these cease-fires collapsed in response to Israeli assassinations of HAMAS leaders—a policy most of the Israeli public supported despite its illegality.

The new Palestinian National Authority head Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) proclaimed the end of armed struggle against Israel on February 8, 2005, shortly after his election as Yasser Arafat's successor on January 9. Nonetheless, both sides continued to employ violence well beyond that date. Israel killed some 170 Palestinians in what was described in the US media as a period of "relative calm" between the suicide bombings of November 1, 2004, and February 26, 2005.¹¹

While Abbas adopted a more conciliatory tone toward Israel and the United States, he upheld the Palestinian national consensus: demanding full Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, and Israeli recognition of the Palestinian refugees' "right to return." After several weeks of implicit Israeli support for Abbas's electoral campaign, including the arrest of the far more democratic candidate, Mustafa Barghouti, Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom declared Abbas's political positions "very extreme" and his insistence on the right of return "unacceptable."¹² Israeli pundits dismissed him as "Arafat in a suit."¹³ Israel suspended political contacts with Abbas before he assumed office on the pretext of a Palestinian attack at the Karni crossing into the Gaza Strip. While contacts were even-

tually resumed, these events suggested an Israeli unwillingness to treat the new Palestinian leadership fundamentally differently than its predecessor, that substantive negotiations were unlikely to proceed with alacrity, and that a mutually satisfactory resolution of the “final status” issues was not on the agenda of the Sharon administration.

THE ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES (2002–2004)

Israel’s diplomatic intransigence and its armed belligerence in this period, as before, were enabled by the United States. The administration of George W. Bush saw Ariel Sharon as its partner in the global “war on terror.” In June 2002, President Bush delivered a speech with the first-ever formal US endorsement of a Palestinian state, just after Israeli tanks rolled into Ramallah for yet another time. A year later, Bush officially unfurled a “Roadmap” sponsored by a Quartet comprised of the US, the UN, the European Union, and Russia, with the stated objective of establishing a Palestinian state by the end of 2005. At the same time, Caterpillar bulldozers supplied to Israel through the Foreign Military Sales program were devastating Palestinian farmland to erect a separation barrier comprised of concrete walls and fencing inside the West Bank.

While Sharon feigned acceptance of the Quartet’s Roadmap, he assiduously avoided negotiations on its substance, which would have required the immediate dismantling of some one hundred settlement “outposts” established since the beginning of his tenure as prime minister. To avoid implementing the Roadmap and diminish international criticism of Israel’s construction of the Separation Barrier in the West Bank, Sharon unveiled his unilateral plan to disengage from the Gaza Strip. Nonetheless, on February 23, 2004, an International Court of Justice hearing began on the legality of the barrier. On July 9, the Court ruled that the barrier was illegal and that Israel should compensate Palestinians for property confiscated during the course of its construction, in addition to other related losses. On June 30, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that 30 kilometers of the barrier’s path had to be redrawn, based on “the proper balance between security and humanitarian considerations.” Activists claimed this as a very partial victory, as the Court effectively upheld the barrier’s rationale.

Although Sharon’s unilateral plan undermined both the form and the substance of the Roadmap, he brazenly demanded a US reward for its announcement, asking the Bush administration to concede Israel’s right to annex large

settlement blocks in the West Bank during the course of any final agreement with the Palestinians and to back Israel's refusal of the Palestinian right of return. Sharon also asked approval to extend the separation barrier around the settlement of Ariel (named after Sharon)—some 20 kilometers into the northern West Bank.

The Bush administration openly accepted the first two demands when Bush and Sharon met in Washington on April 14, 2004—thereby reversing the US's official, even if inoperative, policy on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, in place since 1967.¹⁴ In the course of this meeting, Israel's bottom lines were accepted as the parameters of any possible peace agreement, Palestinian rights, claims, and international legality notwithstanding. The United States effectively endorsed the principal of a unilateral Israeli resolution to the conflict. The Bush administration's response to the separation barrier was more ambiguous. Rhetorically, President Bush rejected Israeli demands for an extension of its trajectory, calling the barrier's route "a problem." Yet when Israel began work on extending the barrier into the heart of the West Bank, in June 2004, Bush did not respond forcefully and construction continued.¹⁵ Even after Dov Weisglass, Sharon's former chief of staff and chief negotiator with the United States on "peace process" issues, declared the Roadmap "dead," the State Department continued to declare "no cause to doubt" Sharon's commitment to the political blueprint.¹⁶

UNILATERAL DISENGAGEMENT: PRELUDE TO PEACE?

In late 2003 Sharon surprised all parties by endorsing an end to the occupation, the establishment of a Palestinian state, and a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from most of the Gaza Strip. Yet his rhetoric was belied by the substance of his political vision. Sharon continued to support Israeli annexation of approximately half of the West Bank—a position he had advocated since the late 1970s. And his vision of a Palestinian state excluded the possibility of Palestinian sovereignty in Jerusalem or discussion of Palestinian return to, or reparations for, homes and lands lost in 1948. In October 2004, in an internal party poll, Likud members rejected Sharon's proposal for a unilateral military redeployment from the Gaza Strip and the evacuation of all of its settlements as well as four small settlements in the northern West Bank. The formation of a Likud–Labor–Ultra-Orthodox government in early 2005 enabled Sharon to proceed with his plan, and implantation began in August.

Israel's disengagement did not "liberate" the Gaza Strip. Rather, it was turned into what many have likened to an open-air prison. Israeli forces retained control of the seacoast, and the territory remained surrounded on its three landward sides by an electronic fence. Control of the border-crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt remains unresolved as of this writing. Only a month after its redeployment, Israel launched military actions against the Gaza Strip claiming that the Palestinian administration was not upholding its security obligations; and it threatened even harsher measures in the future.

In the months preceding the redeployment, Gaza settlers and their supporters organized dozens of demonstrations and prayer vigils, adorning themselves and their vehicles with orange ribbons, a symbol of the 2004 Ukrainian "Orange Revolution" for democracy. At the same time, the majority of Israelis who support redeployment rarely spoke out forcefully against the agitation of the settlers or in favor of ending the occupation.¹⁷ Thus, the Israeli print media repeatedly wrote that disengagement from Gaza was a national trauma, enabling Sharon to argue that further withdrawals from the West Bank would risk igniting a Jewish civil war.

Israel's refusal to coordinate its disengagement with Palestinian National Authority officials further undermined the stature of Mahmoud Abbas and other secular Palestinian nationalists, already weakened in the Gaza Strip, thereby enhancing the authority of the Islamist groups HAMAS and Islamic Jihad. This lack of coordination or negotiation with the PNA lent credence to the claim that Israel's withdrawal was a victory for the Palestinian armed struggle.¹⁸ Islamists took credit for this accomplishment, arguing quite credibly that Israel was withdrawing under fire, not as a consequence of negotiations, just as was the case when Hizballah forced Israel out of Lebanon in June 2000.

Undermining any future political resolution of the conflict was the express purpose of Israeli policy. Dov Weisglass stated the matter clearly: the Gaza disengagement plan "supplies the amount of formaldehyde . . . necessary so that there will not be a political process with the Palestinians."¹⁹

Despite this avowed rationale and its grim political perspective, the Gaza disengagement constituted the first Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian territory occupied in 1967 (or 1948). A historic precedent has been established. Both the limitations and likely effects of the Gaza disengagement are comparable to the irrevocable Israeli recognition of Palestinian peoplehood in the 1993 Oslo accords.

THE POLITICS OF PUBLIC OPINION

Although support for unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip declined among Israeli voters as the date for disengagement approached, a majority still favored the measure. Opinion polls conducted in mid-2005 suggested that over 60 percent of Israelis were prepared to evacuate most of the 150 Jewish settlements and 410,000 settlers in the West Bank in the context of a peace agreement. However, few were willing to negotiate over settlements in “Greater Jerusalem,” long embraced by most Israeli parties as an indivisible part of the Land of Israel.²⁰ A majority of the Israeli public also supported the army’s increasingly devastating assaults on Palestinians, with the hope that brute force would crush the Palestinian will to resist. Given Israeli popular intransigence on the question of “Greater Jerusalem” and the fate of Palestinian refugees, a peace settlement with even the most moderate Palestinian leadership remained a near impossibility.

The attitudes of Israeli Jews toward Israel’s Palestinian Arab citizens, who comprised approximately 19 percent of the population in 2005, were equally uncompromising. A public opinion poll conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute in April 2003 found that more than half the Jewish population of Israel, 53 percent, opposed equal rights for Palestinian Arab citizens.²¹ A poll conducted in May 2004 indicated that nearly half of the Jewish population, some 48.6 percent, felt that the Sharon government was overly sympathetic to Arab citizens.²² A majority of Jewish respondents, 55.3 percent, believed that Arab citizens endangered national security; 45.3 percent supported revoking their right to vote and hold political office; and approximately 25 percent indicated that they would consider voting for an overtly racist (“extreme nationalist,” in the language of the poll) party, like Meir Kahane’s outlawed Kach, if one were to run in the next elections. These figures indicate a significant rise in Jewish political extremism during the last few years and entrenchment of the notion that only Jews have a right to the juridical and symbolic fruits of Israeli citizenship.

Polls conducted among the Palestinian public in 2004 suggested far more willingness for political concessions than among their Israeli neighbors. A majority stated that they were prepared to accept a state of Israel alongside a sovereign Palestinian state in almost all of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital, provided that a political settlement of this kind included some recognition of the rights of refugees to return. A controversial poll conducted among refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, and the northern

West Bank in May 2003 indicated that while over 95 percent upheld their right to return in principle, the majority would not choose to return.³⁵ This information has not been seriously considered in Israel, confirming the belief of most Palestinians that neither the Labor nor Likud Parties will support such a resolution to the conflict.

POLITICAL FUTURES

In light of the continuing expansion of the settlements, the immiseration of Palestinian society, and the construction of a separation barrier that could ultimately annex some 50 percent of the West Bank to Israel, and in light of the existing balance of regional and international forces, it is reasonable to ask whether a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a viable one. The two-state solution was embraced by an international consensus in the 1980s, the only significant opponents being Israel and the United States. This solution remained the political rallying cry among the great majority of progressives in Israel and abroad throughout the course of the Oslo process. At the same time, most two-state proponents seemed oblivious: both to the ways in which Israeli “facts on the ground” in the West Bank and Gaza Strip were progressively undermining the possibility of a viable Palestinian state; and to the role of the Oslo process, which most two-staters supported, in actively obstructing this political future, both through its cantonization of the West Bank and through its disenfranchisement of Palestinian refugees and denial of their right of return. The Israeli Labor Party endorsed the two-state solution, belatedly, in 1996—three years after the signing of the Oslo DOP. By 2002, a Palestinian state was embraced by both the Sharon and Bush administrations. But neither the state imagined by the Labor Party in the 1990s, nor that endorsed by the Sharon and Bush administrations, bore much resemblance to the political and territorial entity envisioned by the PLO or the international consensus that has prevailed since the 1980s. For Bush and Sharon (as for the Labor administrations in the 1990s, albeit within different parameters), this so-called “state” was to be little more than a handful of cantons, surrounded by Israel and enjoying only limited sovereignty—a political solution imposed upon the Palestinians, not one achieved through negotiated settlement. Today, a two-state solution is being marketed to Israelis and American Jews by the Israeli center and right through an appeal to the growing Palestinian “demographic danger”—the concern that in the absence of such a settlement Israel will lose its Jewish majority between the Jordan River

and the Mediterranean, and that henceforth the future of Israel as a Jewish state would be radically compromised.

The editors of this volume acknowledge the political limits of the two-state solution and the ways that the language of two states has been co-opted by the Israeli and US right. It is nearly impossible to speak of separate political entities when more than 410,000 Israeli settlers currently inhabit the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, most of whom will remain in these territories according to even the most expansive evacuation scenarios discussed by successive Israeli governments. Moreover, the two-state solution tends to perpetuate the undemocratic fiction of Israel as a Jewish state, ignoring both the presence of more than 1,000,000 Palestinians inside the state and of some 200,000 non-Jewish workers from Eastern Europe, Africa, and South and Southeast Asia who reside in Israel's working-class, urban peripheries on what is becoming a permanent basis. Nevertheless, we believe that the emergence of an independent, viable, contiguous, and sovereign Palestinian state alongside Israel remains the precondition for progress toward peace and coexistence in the region. If land confiscation and settlement construction continue at their current pace, and if the Israeli left remains unwilling to mount a forceful opposition to state policy, this perspective will require revision.

No matter how many states may eventually be established in Palestine and Israel, we believe that the futures of both peoples are inextricably intertwined. There can be no just solution based on "separation" or on one-sided Israeli military domination of the Palestinians in the name of a self-defeating concept of security. At the same time, there can be no security for either people without justice. The UN resolutions calling for an Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967 have a relevance that transcends their usual association with a particular kind of two-state solution. Only after Israel withdraws will it be possible to seriously reopen the debate over the political future in Palestine and Israel on something approaching an equal footing.

Ideologically motivated attacks on Middle East scholarship have flourished in the United States and Israel since September 11, 2001. Their primary objectives have been to discredit and silence critics of Israeli and US state policies and to constrain the scope of possible political futures. In opposition to such attacks, which seek to mask their political agendas in the call for apolitical

scholarship, we believe that the highest standards of scholarship and journalism require a critical analysis of US and Israeli policies in the Middle East. This volume joins scholars and activists working to create a political blueprint for a just and lasting peace, those seeking to imagine a future beyond occupation and hegemony in the region.