



ENVISIONING PEACE



A MUSLIM AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE
ON THE
ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN
CONFLICT



ENVISIONING PEACE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Historical Overview	3
Mutual Recognition & the Two-State Solution	4
Details of the Conflict	5
Occupation	
Settlements	
The Wall	
The Ongoing Failure of Peace Attempts	
Jerusalem	
Resistance	
The Right of Return	
Democracy	
Our Vision for the Future	6
Conclusions & Recommendations	7
Appendices	8
Historical Background	
Why Previous Attempts at Peace Have Failed	
Relevant UN Resolutions	12
Suggested Reading	14

INTRODUCTION

The Israeli-Palestinian issue appears to be one of the most complicated and intractable of our time. The issue can alternatively be viewed as a dispute over land, a religious clash, or the result of two groups of people caught up in the larger institution of imperial powers.

From the perspective of the American Muslim community, composed largely of Diasporas from around the world, the Israeli-Palestinian issue is perhaps most fruitfully understood as a strenuous struggle between the national aspirations of two peoples particularly over land, the same land, Palestine.

This conflict has lasted over 100 years, and to many seems without a solution. The first step toward solving this conflict is genuine understanding and acknowledgement of the historical origins of the conflict and dialogue to arrive at a just solution.

The Muslim Public Affairs Council believes that this dialogue will lead to a strategy to end this conflict that has taken too many lives and has destabilized an entire region of global significance. MPAC believes in the importance of American religious communities including Muslims, Jews, Christians and other people of faith to contribute to establishing peace.

Declaring that MPAC and our friends in the interfaith community hope to work towards peace is deciding to take a difficult, rather than an easy path. It requires a deeper understanding of the details of the conflict as it continues to tragically unfold on a daily basis, as well as a need to study the historical origins of this conflict in order to understand why we find ourselves in the situation we are in today.

It is important that Muslim and Jewish communities understand the history of

Zionism and the significance of the state of Israel. On the same note, it is also imperative to understand the importance of Palestine, Jerusalem, and the collective pain our

community feels at the continued oppression of Palestinian society and people.

Both communities must decide in earnest that mutual understanding and empathy is the path of peace. This will require our communities to undergo the difficult task of changing our minds and hearts to make this vision of peace a reality.

It is certainly difficult for Muslims to get past the pain and the sense of injustice that accompanies not only the details of the conflict, but also the continued denigration of Islam and Muslims by some political partisans of Zionism. But we also recognize that too few Muslims understand the centuries of European/ Christian anti-Semitism that the Jewish people have suffered, which culminated in the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust. This lack of understanding makes it difficult for Muslims to understand why the Jewish community is so passionate about Israel.

Without really understanding the others' culture and history, both communities will continue to use their worst fears to judge one another and gain no insight, which will inevitably lead to more damage. MPAC's position paper is an effort to introduce such complexity in an attempt to move forward in a more honest and developed way.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

There can be no denying that the centuries of anti-Semitism in Europe lay at the heart of the political Zionist movement and the creation of the state of Israel.

The Holocaust certainly confirmed the view of the growing Zionist movement that there was no solution to what the Germans called the “Jewish question” outside of separation from Christian populations in Europe and national statehood for Jews.

As Theodore Herzl, one of the founders of Zionism, stated in his book *Der Judenstaat* (The

Jewish State), “We have sincerely tried everywhere to merge with the national communities in which we live, seeking only to preserve the faith of our fathers. It is not permitted us... In our native lands where we have lived for centuries we are still decried as aliens, often by men whose ancestors had not yet come at a time when Jewish sighs had long been heard in the country.”

Herzl states best the problem that had been confronting Jews for centuries in Europe, namely their perpetual status as second-class citizens unable to gain full acceptance into European societies.

Indeed, history shows us that Jews in Europe tried very hard to assimilate into their native lands. The Jewish Reform movement, which began in Germany in the late 19th century, continuously championed the notion of universal values as the solution to the Jewish question whereby Jews could live in harmony with all peoples, even as a minority.

Before the Holocaust, Zionists were not welcomed by the Reform Movement in Europe, and were repeatedly told by Reform leaders to take their dreams of a national homeland elsewhere.

It is very important for all communities to understand that in the Jewish collective memory, this experiment failed leaving a lasting distrust for any guarantee of Jewish safety outside of sovereignty over a nation-state with a Jewish majority.

The Holocaust was one of the worst crimes against humanity in modern history. Immigration to Palestine was at its highest after the rise of Hitler in 1933, and the subsequent harsh oppression against Jews began in earnest. Although Jewish immigration to Palestine was curtailed after 1939 by Britain, it resumed after

World War II. We believe that the Palestinians should not have been forced to suffer for the crimes committed against the Jews in Europe or elsewhere.

MUTUAL RECOGNITION & THE TWO-STATE SOLUTION

We acknowledge the existence of Israel as a viable, independent and sovereign state whose citizens have the right to live in peace within secure borders. We support the right of Palestinians to live in a viable, independent and sovereign state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip based on U.N. resolution 242, which provides for their peace and security.

The establishment of the State of Israel caused the destruction of Palestinian society, dispossessing an entire people of their land and their livelihood. While Zionism may have saved many Jewish lives, it destroyed many Palestinian ones, and permanently disrupted the equilibrium of the Middle East while denying the inhabitants of Palestine the chance to form their own nation-state in the wake of post-war decolonization.

Hence when members of the Jewish community ask American Muslims to validate the Zionist project, we ask ourselves why they can not see the situation from the Muslim point of view. American Muslims also ask why they not only fail to acknowledge Palestinian suffering, but also why they ask us to blind ourselves to this parallel history.

The American Muslim community not only finds this inequitable, but more importantly, believes that this attitude will hamper successful negotiation. Jews and Muslims will only make peace on the basis of mutual respect. A key aspect of this necessary respect is to first acknowledge that the Palestinians have suffered a historical calamity.

DETAILS OF THE CONFLICT

Occupation

MPAC views that Israel's occupation of all Palestinian territory captured as a result of the June 4, 1967 war is illegal and unacceptable in accordance with U.N. Security Council Resolution 242, which affirmed the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war, and calls for Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in the recent conflict including the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and the Syrian Golan Heights in exchange for peace.

MPAC also supports resolution 1402, which was passed by the Security Council in 2002, confirming the above principles. MPAC reiterates its support for the creation of an independent, sovereign Palestinian state with full access to all resources, as a necessary step towards peace.

Settlements

MPAC calls for the dismantling of all Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Jerusalem, and Golan Heights. These settlements are illegal Jewish colonies that have been established in the West Bank and Golan Heights.

The settlements divide Palestinian land physically through the use of bypass, Jewish-only roads, checkpoints, and military outposts wherever a settlement exists, justifying an intense Israeli military presence in the Occupied Territories under the pretense of "protecting Israeli civilians" (who should not be there in the first place). MPAC believes that the frequent argument that settlements are necessary to

promote Israel's security is demonstrably false.

The Wall

Israel's wall has now cut into Palestinian lands in the West Bank, cutting off Palestinian towns from each other, and in effect creating Palestinian bantustans. While the pretense to erect the wall was to prevent terrorism, the actual route of the wall shows that its real

purpose is to allow Israel to annex large tracts of Palestinian land. This has led to the engulfment of large sections of Palestinian lands and diversion of water, actually fueling more despair among Palestinians; the wall separates people from their land, the route severely breaches their right to freedom of movement, their right to property and their right to gain a livelihood.

Furthermore, the International Court of Justice ruled that the sections of the wall's route that were set with the objective of defending the settlements are illegal. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are designed to protect those under occupation with rights to health, education and family life. The wall clearly breaches these cornerstones of international law. This wall will continue to damage the Middle East peace process as well as devastate the lives of already poverty-stricken Palestinians. We believe it is better for the future of Israel to build bridges rather than walls.

The Ongoing Failure of Peace Attempts

Multiple processes have failed because the United States and the international community have lacked the political will to hold Israel accountable, and failed to acknowledge that the Palestinians have always been the disadvantaged party in the conflict. The Saudi Initiative of 2002, one of the most promising peace agreements proposed, offered full

normalization of diplomatic relations between Israel and all Arab states in exchange for full withdrawal to 1967 borders but was completely ignored by Israel and the international community. (See appendix for more detailed analysis of previous peace attempts.)

Jerusalem

MPAC affirms United Nations Resolutions 181, 242, and 338 and the international consensus that East Jerusalem is occupied territory, and that any claims Israel makes of "annexation" or the so-called "indivisibility" of Jerusalem should not be recognized. MPAC believes that a future Palestinian state should have all of East Jerusalem as its capital. People of all three faiths represented in Jerusalem should have full and equal access to their holy sites, which must be respected, maintained and protected.

Resistance

MPAC recognizes, based on the Geneva Convention, the right of occupied people to resist occupation and applies this same principle to the Palestinians. In short, the Palestinians have the moral and legal right to resist the Israeli occupation and MPAC supports that right.

MPAC recognizes that there are and should be limitations to various forms of resistance and has therefore taken a stance against the targeting of innocent civilians and non-combatants for several years. In particular, we have consistently opposed suicide bombers, because the traditional understanding of Islam prohibits suicide and killing civilians. Realizing the futility of a military solution for the conflict, we believe that nonviolent resistance is the most recommended course of action. Indeed, the majority of Palestinians engage in non-violent resistance on a daily basis.

The Right of Return

MPAC recognizes, in accordance with U.N. resolution 194, the right of return for all

Palestinian refugees to the land from which they were expelled. The principle of the right of return cannot be negotiated – it is not only a moral right, but a practical right. Additionally, it will be the responsibility of the Israeli government to provide adequate compensation to Palestinian refugees who have been dispossessed of their land. Good faith negotiation is the proper method to handle this difficult issue.

Democracy

In 2006, the Palestinians successfully completed the most free, fair and transparent elections in the Middle East. Israel and the U.S. responded to this democratic election by immediately refusing to negotiate with the elected government and shortly thereafter began a policy of punishing the Palestinian people for having elected the people of their choice.

This collective punishment came in the form of cutting off aid and depriving people of wages and desperately needed humanitarian aid. If the United States was able to deal with the Communist regime of the former Soviet Union for over 50 years, then the U.S. should be able to deal with any democratically elected government in the world. Former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was indicted as a war criminal while he was Prime Minister but Palestinians were expected to deal with him.

The Palestinian people should never face collective punishment for voting democratically. Instead, they have been starved and brutally attacked by the Israeli government and its military.

OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE

MPAC first wrote this paper in 2002 declaring support for a two state solution. Today, we still support a two state solution where each state is truly and fully sovereign on an equal basis. This solution

must be reached through peaceful diplomacy. However, the political destruction that has ensued since 2000 has left the diplomatic process at a stand still. This must be reversed, and the United States must use its full powers to restart real final status talks.

Unfortunately, Israel's land colonization, annexation, and settlements in the Occupied Territories has rendered the two-state solution a practical impossibility. Hence, as many American presidents have stated, the expansion of Israeli settlements on Palestinian land has been the largest obstacle to the peace process.

There are no shortcuts in this process and Israel's continuously zero-sum brutal approach to living in the Middle East is not sustainable in the long-term.

Edward Said summed up the situation precisely in the September 1998 edition of *Le Monde Diplomatique*:

Israel is neither South Africa, nor Algeria, nor Vietnam. Whether we like it or not, the Jews are not ordinary colonialists. Yes, they suffered the holocaust, and yes, they are the victims of anti-Semitism. But no, they cannot use those facts to continue, or initiate, the dispossession of another people that bears no responsibility for either of those prior facts.

I have been saying for twenty years that we have no military option, and are not likely to have one anytime soon. And neither does Israel have a real military option. Despite their enormous power, Israelis have not succeeded in achieving either the acceptance or the security they crave. On the other hand, not all Israelis are the same, and whatever happens, we must learn to live with them in some form, preferably justly, rather than unjustly.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

At MPAC's core is an Islamic sensibility that human beings should conduct their lives in accordance with a higher ethical and moral wisdom, tested through the ages and designed to afford maximum dignity and justice to human life. It is these ideals shared by our friends in the interfaith community, that we appeal to as we continue to travel the extremely difficult road of peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

In addition to offering our position as stated above as clearly as possible with the hopes of facilitating fruitful and honest dialogue and strategizing, we conclude by offering principles for the pro-Israel camp to engage with us in the future in a manner that we believe will yield better results enabling us to have a positive influence on the peace process.

Humanize. We need to focus on continuing to educate ourselves about the other, their history, and their motivations. Muslims must understand Jewish history and the Holocaust. Jews must understand how Palestinians have suffered from the crimes perpetrated against them, and how this has impacted the psyche of the Arab and Muslim communities. Both parties must find a stake in ensuring the safety and continuity of the other. This is a tremendous challenge, but we can start within our own communities.

Communicate. We must have a right to talk about this conflict in all of its facets in an environment that is respectful and free of intimidation. Our Jewish friends must be tolerant of our perspective on this conflict, and stop the practice of intimidation and censorship of a real discussion of this issue. Furthermore, our leaders must not be attacked for supporting the Palestinians. We will not back away from our leadership for telling the truth about the Israeli occupation, and our friends in the interfaith community should respect that stance in accordance with our religion's demand in which we must defend justice. We as the American people have the right to discuss issues in

an open debate. This discussion must take place before Congress and the public at large. Legislators and the American people should be able to hear all sides and be able to weigh the merits of all arguments.

Condemn Justly. We in the American Muslim community rarely hear condemnations of egregious acts against Palestinians, such as the shelling of children, collective punishment, starvation and the bombing of infrastructure and the Palestinian state apparatus. Meanwhile, demands are made that Muslim groups condemn every horrific suicide bombing. This double standard is shameful, degrading, and must stop. We will not play this dehumanizing game whereby we are forced into tacitly agreeing that one human life is more valuable than another. We call upon our fellow citizens to condemn the loss of all innocent life and destruction of all infrastructure, whether Palestinian, Israeli or otherwise.

APPENDIX A

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Origins of Israel and the Disaster of 1948

Zionism as a modern political movement began in the late 19th century among European Jews. However, during that time, Palestine was a province of the Ottoman Turkish Empire, and had been for many centuries. A small Jewish community lived there, but the vast majority of inhabitants were Arabic-speaking Muslims and Christians (about 600,000 people in 1900).

In response to the early Zionist efforts, a small number of European Jews moved into Palestine in the late 19th century and in the years before the First World War. Theodore Herzl was uncertain how to proceed in the face of this political reality, and in his writings mused that the Ottoman Sultan could be persuaded to grant Palestine to the Jews in exchange for them helping with the finances of the Ottoman Empire. In fact, Zionism as a movement looked hopeless, as there was no prospect of the Ottomans relinquishing Palestine or allowing large-scale Jewish immigration.

What changed history was the First World War, which began in 1914, and put the Ottoman Turks on the side of Germany against Britain and the other allies. During the war, Britain and France made plans for the postwar division of the Middle East. The secret Sykes-Picot treaty was to grant Palestine, Jordan, and Iraq to Britain while France would claim Lebanon and Syria. Britain also promised the Arabs self-determination and independence if they were to join in the war against the Ottomans, which many did. Finally, for reasons which remain uncertain, the British government promised the Jews that they could establish a “national home” in Palestine, as long as it did not harm the

rights of the Arabs. This last commitment was made in the Balfour Declaration issued in 1917, when the outcome of the war was very uncertain.

In the end the British ended up on the winning side, and they did in fact divide the Middle East along the lines of the Sykes-Picot treaty. They also honored their commitment to the Zionist movement. The Arabs, on the other hand, were made colonial subjects under the fig leaf of League of Nations Mandates.

Palestine thereby became a British Mandate, or colony. Britain then opened up the door to Zionist immigration. By 1922, the time of the first British census, the total population was 757,000, of whom only 84,000 were Jews. The Jews of Europe began to come, financially supported by a network of donors in the West. In order to buy land, they often went to absentee landlords in Beirut and then got the British authorities to enforce title and evict the Palestinian peasants to make room for Jewish farms.

Despite significant inflows, by 1932, the Jews made up only 18% of the population of Palestine. The vast majority were Palestinians, and their wishes on this matter that was fundamental to their future and prospects were never considered by the British or the Zionists. This was immoral and wrong, and shows the inherent injustice in what was happening to the Palestinians.

Their lives, lands, and society were being altered to serve the need of a Jewish European ideology at the point of a British gun. This represents an historical injustice and should be recognized as such.

In 1932, the Jewish community was just too small to be the basis of a state. But in 1933, the Nazis gained power in Germany, and the flow of Jews accelerated. Over the next six years, the Jewish community reached a critical mass.

The Palestinians could see what was happening, and revolted in 1936 against British colonial rule. This revolt for independence was brutally crushed by 1939, and in the process the Palestinians lost many of their best leaders. But in response to the revolt, the British government issued a White Paper that reduced further Jewish immigration to Palestine. This removed one possible haven for the Jews of Europe, who were to be subjected to the Holocaust over the next six years, but far richer, more prosperous, and spacious nations should have borne that burden and not placed it on the Palestinians, who had nothing to do with the politics of Europe.

Despite the flow of Jews, the bulk of the population remained Palestinian. By 1944, Jews made up a majority in only one of Palestine's 18 districts (the area around Tel Aviv). And despite an aggressive program of land purchase, Jews owned less than 10% of the land of Palestine. Some Zionist supporters suggested that the large Palestinian population was a result of recent migrant workers taking jobs in Jewish factories, and were not truly a native population. This is totally false.

The Zionists made a major point of not hiring Palestinians, as new Jewish immigrants needed a livelihood. Secondly, the vast majority of the Palestinians were subsistence farmers, and did not settle in worker housing around Tel Aviv or Haifa. The Palestinian population doubled in size from 1900 to 1940 through natural increase, a process that was occurring in much of the region at the time, and even accelerated in the second half of the 20th century. The Anglo-American survey done in 1936 concluded that immigration was not a significant factor in the increasing size of the Palestinian population.

Once World War II ended, the Jewish community went into revolt itself against the British in a bid for statehood. Terror groups such as those led by future Israeli

Prime Ministers Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir bombed hotels, kidnapped and murdered British soldiers, and tried to force Britain's hand.

By 1947 Britain, debilitated from World War II, had had enough. They declared their intent to leave Palestine, but turned over the disposition of the country to the U.N. At this point, the Jews constituted about 30% of the population, but they were well-armed and organized. The U.N. Special Commission on Palestine, which was heavily lobbied by the Zionists and the Truman Administration, voted for a partition plan in November 1947.

This plan was terribly unfair to the Palestinians, who did not consent to having their country ripped in two by bureaucrats in a building in New York.

The bizarre plan envisaged giving the Jews a state that would have over 50% of the land area of Palestine, and whose own population would be almost 50% Palestinian in what was supposed to be the Jewish state. This plan was rejected by the Palestinians but accepted by the Zionists.

The British deemed the plan totally unworkable, and did nothing to try to enforce it. Instead they retreated to their barracks while civil war erupted in Palestine. The better-armed and led Zionist forces quickly took the offensive and began to seize control of areas not assigned to them by the partition plan. In addition, a wave of ethnic cleansing began punctuated by such acts as the massacre of 100 villagers at Deir Yassin near Jerusalem by Menachem Begin and his men. Over the next five months, over 300,000 Palestinians were made refugees.

Among the most egregious case of ethnic cleansing is documented in Yitzhak Rabin's memoir, where he relates how his men, after receiving direction from David Ben-Gurion, forcibly expelled 50,000 people from the Palestinian towns of Lydda and Ramle.

The British Mandate did not end until May 14, 1948, at which point much of the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians had already occurred, and before the neighboring Arab states had attempted to intervene. Israel declared statehood, while Egypt and Jordan sent small armies to fight in Palestine. Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq were nominally combatants, but had no real military to speak of, except for a few thousand armed irregulars. Jordan's army was actually commanded by British officers, while Egypt's small forces were operating at the end of a very long supply line, and had limited offensive capacity. The fighting continued on and off over the next several months, at the end of which Egypt held onto a narrow strip of land (the Gaza Strip) while Jordan had taken what became known as the West Bank. Israel had taken half of the land that was assigned to the Palestinians and now claimed it for itself.

Meanwhile 700,000 Palestinians ended up in refugee camps, and were barred by force from returning to their homes once the fighting had ended. Israel then passed a series of laws allowing it to confiscate their land and property left behind without any compensation. The UN in 1949 passed Resolution 194, which stated that the refugees have a right to return to their homes, but Israel has remained in defiance of it.

Six Day War

One of the key historical events that created the current parameters of the conflict was the Six Day War of June 1967. In this war, Israel rapidly conquered all of the Gaza Strip and Sinai from Egypt, East Jerusalem and the West Bank from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria.

Israel began the war with a surprise attack on the Egyptian air force. It then attacked Jordan and Syria when they honored their mutual defense pact with Egypt and joined the war. Despite the fact that Israel started the war itself, the conventional wisdom that is presented within the United States

and by Israel is that Israel was acting defensively, and that its conquests were therefore legitimate fruits of a military victory against an aggressor.

The Israeli narrative essentially states the following: President Nasser of Egypt had a longstanding desire to eliminate Israel, especially as revenge for the military defeat in the 1956 Anglo-French-Israeli attack on Egypt. By 1967, he had acquired enough Soviet weapons to give him confidence that he could succeed. He then built a public alliance with Syria and Jordan, followed by the highly aggressive move of transferring Egyptian army units into Sinai near the Israeli border, and followed that up by provoking a diplomatic crisis by closing the Straits of Tiran at the southern tip of Sinai to Israeli ships, thereby cutting off Israel's port on the Red Sea.

This returned the Straits to the status they had before 1956, but Israel considered it a "casus belli" or act of war. He then expelled the U.N. observers in the Sinai desert on the border with Israel in anticipation of an all-out attack.

Israel responded by mobilizing its army, but with so many reservists called out of civilian life, it could not stay mobilized indefinitely without economic collapse. When all diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis had been exhausted, Israel chose to pre-empt Nasser's certain invasion, and attacked first, an attack that they had no choice but to make. Otherwise, Israel was doomed. Despite all odds, Israel won a stunning, just, and deserved victory.

This narrative is almost wholly false. Recently declassified U.S. and Israeli government archives have further confirmed that many elements of this self-serving version of history are totally wrong. The primary military fact of the 1960's in the Middle East was the growing gap between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

By the mid-1960's Israel had created a very capable, modern Air Force and armored

corp that gave it an unmatched offensive capability. Combined with much better command, control, and training, there was no comparison between Israel's military and that of Egypt or any conceivable combination of Arab states. This growing military power created a "war party" within Israel's government that was very much interested in settling accounts with the Arabs by a sweeping military defeat, which the war party would term "teaching the Arabs a lesson".

In 1965 and 1966, Israel conducted air attacks on Syria, particularly to destroy Syrian water systems and dams that Syria was constructing, because they would have resulted in a decrease in flow into Israel's water source of Lake Tiberias on the Syrian-Israeli border. Syrian attacks on Israel were confined to desultory artillery fire. This situation changed in 1967 when the Soviet Union passed intelligence to Nasser that Israel was planning a full-scale assault on Syria.

This intelligence was wrong, but Nasser believed it, and responded by creating a mutual defense pact with Syria. He then moved five divisions into Sinai and embarked on a diplomatic confrontation with Israel. The goal was to force Israel to back off of Syria, and to re-establish Nasser's primacy as the leader of the Arab world. This culminated in his closure of the Straits and the removal of the U.N. force on the border. Many scholars believe that Nasser requested the U.N. troops be removed in full expectation that his request would be denied by the U.N. Secretary General, and was taken by surprise when the U.N. simply left.

At this point Nasser had created a diplomatic crisis that had transfixed the world's attention. But did Nasser ever really intend to turn this into a military conflict and actually attack Israel? He had only moved a few Egyptian divisions into Sinai, and they were deployed in a dug-in defensive posture well back from the border, not positioned to "jump-off" for attack.

In addition, unless he and his generals were completely foolish, he knew his army had no capacity for large-scale offensive armored strikes. It is our view that Nasser never intended to attack Israel, and that his goal was to force a favorable diplomatic settlement that would have increased his stature in the Arab world.

Nasser however did engage in extremely bellicose and threatening rhetoric toward Israel. Based on his words, he did intend to attack and it was his goal to destroy Israel. However, he was bluffing. Although some supporters of Israel suggest that the Israelis did not know this, it was in fact well-understood by both the Israeli government and by Lyndon Johnson and the CIA. Just before Israel attacked, Johnson spoke with the Israeli ambassador, and told him quite clearly that the U.S. knew that Israel would win any war, regardless of who attacked first, and therefore there was no reason to abandon diplomacy.

So why did Israel strike? The primary reason for the war was that the war party in Israel's government argued that a military solution was much better than a diplomatic one for Israel. A diplomatic solution would likely be perceived as an Israeli defeat and an Egyptian victory, while war would give a much more desired outcome. As Menachem Begin, one of the core members of the war party, said after the war, "This was a war of choice."

This history is significant for two reasons. First, Israeli supporters sometimes argue that it is legitimate for Israel to annex some of the territory acquired in 1967, despite the Geneva Convention which forbids the taking of territory by force, because it was territory acquired in a legitimate defensive war. MPAC does not accept this argument.

Secondly, in the aftermath of the 1967 war, the U.N. Security Council passed Resolution 242, which remains the basis of

peace in the Middle East, and was written by and continues to be supported by the United States. In that resolution, the Arab states are to recognize Israel and live in peace with it, in exchange the Israelis are to withdraw from (the) territories occupied in the war.

In fact, the word “the” before territories appears in the French text but not the English. Israelis make much of this, and claim that if using the English version they are not required to fully withdraw from all the territories they occupied. No one else accepts the Israelis self-serving interpretation. Recently declassified memos also show that the British asked for and got official U.S. commitment that in Sinai and on the Golan Heights the United States held the view that 242 required Israel to fully withdraw from all of the occupied territory.

APPENDIX B

WHY PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS AT PEACE HAVE FAILED

Geneva and Camp David 2000

In 2000, the Israelis, Palestinians, and Syrians all came very close to ending the conflict. But at the end of the day, no peace treaties resulted. What were the reasons for the failures, and what insight does that yield for future peace efforts?

On the Syrian front, the effort was unbelievably close to fruition. Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad flew to Geneva to meet Israeli Prime Minister Barak and President Clinton to finalize the deal. But Assad had been lured to coming to the Geneva summit on false pretenses. Assad had made clear that he was willing to make full peace with Israel in exchange for a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

In fact, former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel had promised this in 1994. This was known as the “Rabin Deposit”, and Syria was now saying yes to it. However, when he got to Geneva, Barak tried to offer Assad less than a full withdrawal in exchange for full peace. Assad was angered by the deception and what he thought was a broken promise from Clinton, and left. It remains unclear if Barak was simply negotiating a better deal, but would have finally agreed to Assad's demand, or did Barak have no intention of ever honoring the “Rabin Deposit”.

After Geneva failed Barak and Clinton tried to hurry up the Palestinian track, which had been dormant for a year while Barak chased Syria. This resulted in the hastily arranged and poorly prepared Camp David summit. The summit itself was bizarrely conducted as Barak refused to speak to Arafat at all except for some photo-op phrases. Barak offered the

Palestinians an Israeli protectorate, which would be totally surrounded by Israel, divided into three cantons, and stripped of East Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, the Israelis would retain almost all the settlements on the West Bank and certainly not withdraw any of the large ones. The Palestinians rejected this offer and went home. But Israel (and for reasons that are not well-explained, Clinton supported them in this) spun the story of Camp David as the “generous offer spurned by the intransigent Palestinians who are not truly interested in peace”. Barak would sometimes claim he “unmasked” Arafat at Camp David.

These claims were never backed up with maps of what the Israelis actually offered, because any glance at the map would show all but the most biased how dismally pathetic the offer was. The fault for Camp David goes three-ways.

On the Israeli side was a failure to recognize that their hold on the West Bank would have to end, and that this meant a fully sovereign Palestinian state and major withdrawal of settlers.

On the American side, the failure was the inability to recognize what was the bare minimum the Palestinians would need to accept a deal. Secondly, was the strategic failure to use 242 as the basis for the negotiations. Namely, begin with assuming the 1967 borders to be the final ones, and then negotiate some back and forth from there.

Finally, on the Palestinian side they failed to clearly present an offer of their own. This was a horrendous mistake and derived from Arafat's style of deciding every question for himself. As he had not decided on many of these key questions, it was impossible for the Palestinian delegation to draft a counter-offer. Secondly, the Palestinians did a truly pathetic job of public relations after Camp David. They failed to counter the Israeli

narrative, and this became conventional wisdom.

The lessons of 2000 are clear. U.N. Resolution 242 remains the real basis of peace, and it is important for U.S. policy to be predicated on returning the parties to the 1967 borders. It was the failure to do this that led to the failures at Geneva and Camp David in 2000.

The United States has a national interest in Israel's security. There is no U.S. national interest though in expanding Israel's borders beyond those of 1967. In fact, our complicity with Israel's attempt to do just that through war, settlements, and annexation has been one of the main sources of resentment and anger in the Arab and Muslim world toward the United States. We gain nothing and lose much from this misbegotten policy.

Peacemaking Since Camp David

After the Camp David summit failed in July 2000, the process stumbled on. Although the second Intifida broke out in September 2000 after Ariel Sharon made a highly provocative visit to the Dome of the Rock escorted by a huge phalanx of Israeli police, the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority continued to negotiate.

A final effort took place at Taba, Egypt in January 2001. At that meeting, the two sides came much closer to a settlement. The Taba proposal was substantially better than the one the Palestinians were offered at Camp David in terms of territory and in terms of settlement withdrawal, proving again that Camp David did not in any way involve a "generous" offer. However, Taba did not lead to a peace deal as Barak lost the Israeli election and Sharon suspended further negotiations.

The negotiators involved in Taba did not simply abandon their work. Instead they chose to continue outside of government as members of civil society. Prominent dovish Israelis and Palestinians continued these talks.

This process led to the Geneva Accords, which were signed in 2003. The Geneva Accords represented a model of what a final status agreement between the two sides could look like. It was endorsed by a whole slew of world leaders and civil society organizations to show their support for the possibility of a negotiated peace. MPAC endorsed the Geneva Accords in that capacity. Polls showed substantial support for the Geneva Accords among both Israelis and Palestinians, although neither side felt satisfied by what was negotiated.

Over the last two years the peace process has been totally halted. This is primarily due to an Israeli desire to act unilaterally. This approach will not work and will not lead to peace. Attempts by Israel to unilaterally build a wall and annex West Bank land will likely be met by a unilateral Palestinian declaration of statehood. Most likely the majority of the world's nations will recognize the unilateral borders drawn by the Palestinians if they confine themselves to the West Bank and Gaza as they have insisted on over the last 15 years.

The Saudi Peace Plan

The Saudi Peace Plan offered in 2002 was a striking and truly generous offer of peace from the entire Arab world. Israel, so far, has been unwilling to accept this reasonable offer. The Saudi Plan stated that in exchange for Israel withdrawing from all occupied lands and granting the Palestinians their freedom, every single Arab country would recognize Israel and offer full normal relations.

The Israeli refusal to even see this offer as a basis for negotiation shows that Israel's leader still desire to annex and occupy Palestinian land and deny the Palestinians their freedom. When Israel is willing to accept the Palestinians as their equals, and no longer covets their lands nor desires to control them, then peace is possible. The stumbling blocks and intransigence are in Israel, not Palestine.

states the legal consequences arising from that illegality.”
<http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf/a39191b210be1d6085256da90053dee5/3740e39487a5428a85256ecc005e157a!OpenDocument>

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS

Resolution 242 (November 22, 1967)
<http://domino.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/5ba47a5c6cef541b802563e000493b8c/7d35e1f729df491c85256ee700686136!OpenDocument>

United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine
<http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf>

Resolution 1402 (March 30, 2002)
<http://domino.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/d744b47860e5c97e85256c40005d01d6/a6205d0f6a75f92c85256b8e00542b01!OpenDocument>

Resolution 194 (December 11, 1948)
Palestine -- Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator
<http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf/9a798adb f322aff38525617b006d88d7/c758572b78d1cd0085256bcf0077e51a!OpenDocument>

Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Advisory Opinion (International Court of Justice, July 9, 2004)

Excerpt: “The Court finds that the construction by Israel of a wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and its associated régime are contrary to international law; it

SUGGESTED READING

“Failing the Palestinian State, Punishing its People: the Impact of the Economic Strangulation on Human Rights within the Occupied Palestinian Territory”

A report of the Fact Finding Mission of the International Federation for Human Rights, published in October 2006.

Israelis and Palestinians by Bernard Wasserstein (Yale University Press, 2003).

Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths by Karen Armstrong (Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid by Jimmy Carter (Simon & Schuster, 2006)

The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem by Benny Morris (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine by Ilan Pappé (Oneworld Publications, 2006).

The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood by Rashid Khalidi (Beacon Press, 2006).

The Question of Palestine by Edward Said (Vintage Books, 1992).

The War for Palestine by Eugene Rogan and Avi Shlaim (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

“Under the Guise of Security: Routing the Separation Barrier to Enable the Expansion of Israeli Settlements in the West Bank”

A report by B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, which can be found at www.btselem.org

For other background material, visit www.electronicintifada.org



FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.mpac.org



Washington, D.C.

110 Maryland Ave. N.E. Suite 217
Washington, D.C. 20002

Tel: (202) 547-7701

Fax: (202) 547-7704



Los Angeles

3010 Wilshire Blvd. #217
Los Angeles, CA 90010

Tel: (213) 383-3443

Fax: (213) 383-9674

WHAT IS MPAC?

The Muslim Public Affairs Council is a public service agency working for the civil rights of American Muslims, for the integration of Islam into American pluralism, and for a positive, constructive relationship between American Muslims and their representatives.

Since 1988, MPAC has worked diligently to promote a vibrant American Muslim community and enrich American society through exemplifying the Islamic values of Mercy, Justice, Peace, Human Dignity, Freedom, and Equality for all. Over the years, MPAC has built a reputation as a consistent and reliable resource for government and media, and is trusted by American Muslims as an authentic, experienced voice.