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The evolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict settlement process

The Middle East has been and remains the most conflict-prone region of the world. The Arab Israeli conflict, is the most long-standing major conflict. At the heart of it lies the status of the historical Palestine territory located west of the Jordan River which was under the British Mandate from 1922 to 1948,

On November 29, 1947 the UN General Assembly adopted an apparently reasonable solution, embodied in Resolution 181/II, concerning the partition of Palestine and the establishment of two states on its territory - Arab and Jewish. This resolution was supported by most of the states then represented at the United Nations - 33, with 13 states against and 10 abstaining. However, the very fact that the State of Israel was established in a territory that since the Caliph Omar who conquered Palestine in 638 had been considered Dar-ul-Islam, i. e. a Muslim territory governed by Islamic religious law, caused an extremely hostile reaction in the Arab world. The conflict between Jews and Palestinian Arabs that erupted during the British Mandate in Palestine turned into an international conflict overnight. Immediately after the proclamation of its independence on the night of 14 to 15 May 1948, the State of Israel was confronted by armed forces of seven Arab states.

As a result of the Arab-Israeli armed confrontation, some 750,000 Palestinians were forced to flee their permanent places of residence, thus creating a longstanding problem of Palestinian refugees. The Arab Palestinian state was not established. About 40% of the territory designated by UN resolutions for Palestinians has been occupied by Israeli troops, the remaining 60% has been divided (annexed) between Egypt (the Gaza Strip) and Jordan (West Bank). Jerusalem, which was to become a city with special international status according to the UNGA resolution 181/II), was

divided between Israel (73% of the urban area) and Jordan (the eastern part with 27%).

Subsequently, the conflict acquired new qualities and its scope widened. The 1956 Suez Crisis, when Britain along with France and Israel invaded Egypt, was arguably one of the most significant episodes in post-WWII history. Still, until the mid-1970s, the problem of settling the Arab Israeli conflict was handled primarily by the UN. However, the grim reality is that its many resolutions on the key problems of the Arab Israeli conflict, such as country borders, refugees and displaced persons, the status of Jerusalem, Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian lands, were never fulfilled.

UN efforts to resolve the Arab Israeli conflict and the Palestinian problem

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the UN spent a lot of efforts in attempts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian problem. On May 29, 1948, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 50, which called on the warring parties to end the hostilities. The same resolution also established a special 'United Nations Truce Supervision Organization' (UNTSO).

The first UN military observer team arrived in the conflict zone in June 1948 and has been based permanently on Israel's borders with neighboring Arab states ever since. Between February and July 1949, separate Armistice Agreements were signed between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, thanks to the efforts of the UN Security Council.¹ Subsequently, the UN sent its military forces on several occasions to maintain peace along the ceasefire line. Some of these military contingents still carry out their mission - the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in the Golan Heights and the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) on the Israeli-Lebanese border.

At the third session of the UNGA, Resolution 194/III was adopted, addressing the issue of future borders between Israel and Palestine, the Palestinian refugee problem,

and the status of Jerusalem. The resolution established the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP), comprising France, Turkey, and the United States, in order to 'ensure maximum local autonomy for the various groups, compatible with the special international status of the area of Jerusalem'.² The separate negotiations conducted by the UNCCP between Israel and neighboring Arab states ended to no avail. The UNCCP is still active, but now deals mainly with the issue of property lost by refugees of all faiths during the first Arab-Israeli conflict.

In February 1950, Israel moved its capital from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and extended its sovereignty over the Palestinian territories that had come under its control under the Armistice Agreements. In response, the Hashemite monarchy declared the eastern part of the city its capital and the Jordanian parliament decided to merge Jordan and Palestine - the West Bank - into one state. The situation was exacerbated by the further internationalization of the conflict. In October 1956, Britain, France, and Israel undertook joint military action against AER in reaction to the nationalization of the Suez Canal by the Egyptians. Under UN pressure, the Triple Coalition was forced to stop bombing Egyptian cities and evacuate Israeli troops from the occupied Sinai Peninsula. The Suez Crisis confirmed that the UN can function normally, and most importantly, productively only in conditions of coordinated interaction between the world's leading powers.

After the Six Day War of 5-10 June 1967, Israel occupied 68,000 square kilometers of Arab territory, including all the Palestinian territories and all of Jerusalem. The UN Security Council responded to the new escalation of the conflict by unanimously approving Resolution No. 242 (1967). The resolution demanded 'a withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied during the recent conflict'.³ The resolution emphasized 'the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war'. The peace process in the region was to be based on the 'land for peace' formula. However, the years since the adoption of the resolution have shown that the UN has no effective leverage to apply its resolutions in practice.

In October 1973, Egypt and Syria attempted to regain the territories lost in the 1967 war by military means and even achieved some success at first, but ultimately failed to achieve their objectives. The Resolution No 338 adopted by the UN Security Council, requesting the sides to cease military operations and start implementing the Resolution No 242,⁴ also had no effect.

The UN initiated the establishment of a rather large number of affiliated organizations dealing with various aspects of Arab-Israeli confrontation. In December 1949, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA) was set up.⁵ Today, UNWRA is the main international organization implementing hundreds of programmes and projects within refugee camps in the fields of education, health, economic development and the distribution of social benefits. There are 7.1m Palestinian refugees in the world (70% of the entire Palestinian population worldwide).⁶ The cost to the Agency for each registered refugee is \$70 a year. UNRWA runs and finances some 900 establishments in Palestinian refugee camps, among them 710 primary and secondary schools with almost half a million pupils, 143 health centers.⁷ With an annual budget of \$1.1 billion, UNRWA is the largest UN agency, employing more than 30,000 people.⁸

In 1975, in addition to UNRWA, the UN established the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP). The Committee operates within the framework of a UN programme aimed at enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their rights based on the resolution 3236. That resolution inter alia affirmed ‘the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in Palestine, including the right to self-determination without external interference, the right to national independence and sovereignty, and the inalienable right of the Palestinians to return to their homes and properties from which they have been displaced and expelled ...’.⁹ In addition, the UN recognized the need to inform the international public regarding the implementation of Palestinian rights. To that end, the Assembly decided to establish a special Unit on Palestinian rights within the UN Secretariat to assist the

Committee in its work, conduct research and produce publications on the issue. They were to be publicized as widely as possible. The Unit, subsequently renamed the Division for Palestinian Rights (UNDP), is now structurally part of the Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. Its mandate has been renewed annually, its responsibilities have been expanded several times to include work on programmes for the organization of international meetings worldwide, the establishment of the computerized information system on the question of Palestine (UNISPAL) and the organization of an annual staff training programme for the Palestinian National Authority.

In December 1991, the UNGA decided to establish the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The new structure was given the following remit: ‘to provide humanitarian assistance in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality’.¹⁰ In 1998, in addition to coordinating humanitarian assistance, the Office added the development of humanitarian policy and the protection of rights in the humanitarian sphere to its mandate. The Office is headed by an Emergency Relief Coordinator with the status of Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Office has offices in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The organization’s budget of about \$8 million a year is mainly spent on monitoring activities in the Palestinian occupied territories.¹¹

In May 1994, the Office of the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Settlement (UNSCO), established by the UN GA following the Cairo Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements between the Israeli and Palestinian sides, became operational.¹² UN co-sponsorship authority was transferred to UNSCO in 1999. Since then, the Special Coordinator (currently the post held by **Tor Wennesland of Norway**) acts on behalf of the UN Secretary-General in the negotiations of the Quartet of international mediators for the Middle East peace process.

The UN Special Committee for Investigation of Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of Palestinian People and Other Arabs of Occupied Territories

performs approximately the same functions. The Special Committee is directed by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). It is currently chaired by **Michelle Bachelet of Chile**. Every year since 2007, this Committee has sent a report to the UN Secretary-General on the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Syrian Golan Heights. The most recent report was published in 2021.¹³

Previously, in 1993, the OHCHR also established the post of Special Rapporteur of the UN Commission on Human Rights, a non-UN staff member who leads a working group that produces an annual report on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967.¹⁴ The current Special Rapporteur is Michael Link (Canada).

UN experts also work in the Office of the Special Representative of the Quartet on the Middle East Settlement. Since the time of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair's leadership of the Office, its staff have been primarily engaged in mobilizing international aid for the development of the Palestinian economy. The current head of the Office, John Clark (United States), recently headed the coordinating council in the office of the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

Since 1993, the United Nations Economic and Social Council Office (ECOSOC) has been regularly collecting material and preparing annual analytical reports for the UNGA under the title 'Economic and Social Impact on Palestinians Living under Israeli Occupation in the Palestinian Territories, including Jerusalem, and on the Arab Population in the Syrian Golan'. Experts from the Human Rights Committee and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UN-HABITAT) address similar issues.

Tens of thousands of people are now employed in these UN structures. They have been responsible for spending tens of billions of dollars over seven decades on various UN programmes. Much of this money, however, is spent on the salaries of UN officials numbering in the thousands. The existence of a huge number of organizations, in fact duplicating each other, led to the dispersion of funds and their

ineffective use. Comfortable living for an impressive contingent of well-paid 'UN' functionaries has been created and maintained. However, advancing humanitarian and economic projects in the Palestinian territories makes no sense if there is no movement on resolving the fundamental final status issues. The Palestinians also realize that the fixation of the UN and its units on solving secondary issues is not conducive to normalizing the situation in the West Bank and Gaza, much less to laying the foundations for a future Palestinian state.

The US participation in the Middle East peace process - 1975-1990.

After the October 1973 war, attempts to move the conflict resolution process beyond the UN and to establish a political mechanism to achieve an equitable solution to the Middle East crisis intensified.

In December 1973, the Geneva Peace Conference on the Middle East, co-chaired by the USSR and the US, was convened. The powers succeeded in bringing some of the warring parties to the negotiating table for the first time since the outbreak of the conflict (Syria and the Palestinians were not represented at the conference). During the Geneva Conference, agreements were reached on the disengagement of forces in Sinai and the Golan, under which Israel returned land seized in the 1973 war as well as parts of the territories occupied in 1967. However, the confrontation between the USSR and the US did not allow the conference participants to coordinate their actions. The situation was aggravated by the fact that the Palestine Liberation Organization, established in 1964 and uniting all leading Palestinian parties and armed groups, was considered a terrorist organization in Israel and some Western countries. In contrast, most states at the UN General Assembly on November 25, 1974, supported Resolution 3236/XXIX, which recognized the PLO as 'the sole legitimate representative of the Arab people of Palestine.'¹⁵ The USSR's unilateral severance of diplomatic relations with Israel after the 1967 war largely prevented Moscow from participating in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

In the mid-1970s, the United States took the initiative to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict on a so-called separate basis. After Abdel Nasser's death, Egypt became the most suitable partner for testing the American model of negotiations, that is not between all parties to the conflict, but between individual parties and Israel. In March 1975, the then US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger conducted a series of negotiations to settle disputes between Egypt and Israel according to the formula 'part of the territory for partial peace'. Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy ended with the signing of the interim Sinai Treaty (4 September 1975), which formalized the parties' desire to resolve conflict by peaceful rather than military means.¹⁶

Subsequently, the combination of the land-for-peace formula and the separate efforts of US diplomacy produced certain positive results. Following the Camp David bilateral agreement (September 1978) and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty (March 1979), the border between Israel and Egypt was fully restored to the one that existed before June 4, 1967.

In 1994 Jordan used Egyptian negotiation tactics to settle its border disputes with Israel. However, the question of the Palestinian territory's status (under the control of the Israeli military administration) while separate negotiations were under way, remained unresolved.

Over the years, Israel has created another major problem that has been significantly complicating the peace process to this day. Several Jewish settlements have been built in the Palestinian territories, the largest of which are Ariel, Modi'in, Gush Etzion, Ma'ale Adumim and as well as in East Jerusalem, where no Jews lived before the 1967 war. Some 520,000 Israelis now live in 150 Jewish settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Unlike Egyptian, Lebanese and Jordanian territories occupied in the 1967 war, Israel considers Palestinian and Syrian territory in the Golan 'disputed land'. Referring to the Balfour Declaration (1917), which allowed Jewish settlement west of the Jordan River, Israel has been actively encouraging its citizens to develop these occupied areas.

In 1991, the Madrid peace conference was held. Under persistent US pressure, Israeli and Palestinian representatives met for the first time. Although the conference did not yield direct practical results, it was important because Israel accepted the 'territory for peace' principle when discussing the future status of the Palestinian territories.

After the collapse of the USSR, the Middle East peace process was largely led by the United States. By the early 1990s most of the Muslim world also preferred not to intervene in the conflict. In 1988, Jordan renounced its claim to the West Bank and supported the establishment of a Palestinian state on the territory. Earlier, the League of Arab States had formally recognized the PLO as the exclusive representative of the Palestinian people.

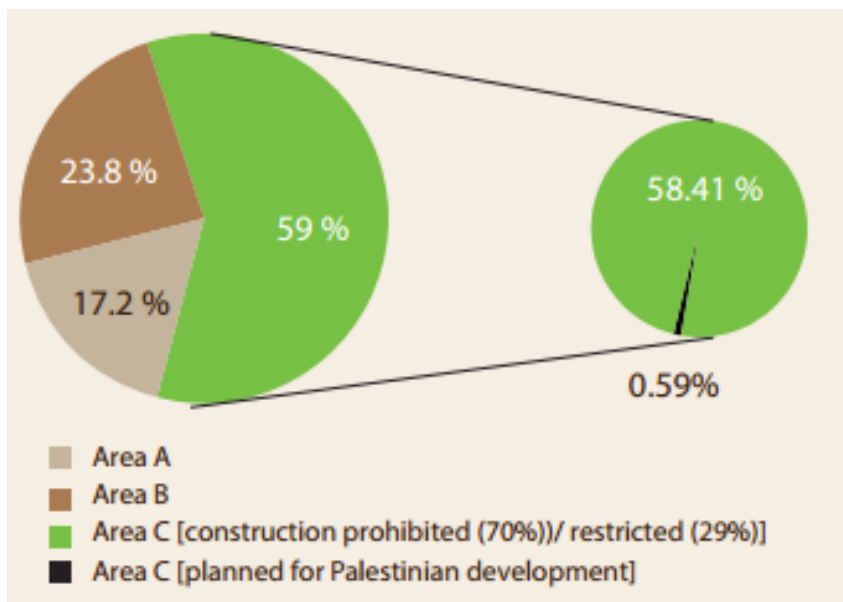
The Oslo processes

On 13 September 1993, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat, chairman of the PLO, signed a joint Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Measures ('Oslo 1') in Washington,¹⁷ which was brokered by the US and Russia.

On September 28, 1995, the Palestinian-Israeli Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza (Oslo II) was signed in Washington¹⁸, ending the first phase of talks between Israel and the PLO. Both agreements were called the 'Oslo Accords' because they were drafted in secret negotiations held in Norway with the assistance of Norwegian Foreign Minister Johan Jørgen Holst. The main achievement of the Oslo Accords was that for the first time both sides to the conflict formally agreed to mutually recognize each other as well as the right of all parties to the conflict, including the State of Israel and the Palestinian state, to live in peace. The parties also accepted the UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 as the basis for the negotiation process. To this end Israel promised to withdraw its troops from the Palestinian territories in a phased manner.

In accordance with the Hebron Protocol (1997) and the Wye River Memorandum (1997), which were concluded between Palestinians and Israelis under US mediation within the Oslo process, Israel withdrew its forces from Area A (zone of full Palestinian National Authority control) and partially from Area B (zone of joint Israeli and PNA control). Area C (the zone of full Israeli control), where virtually all the Jewish settlements are located, has now been almost completely 'depalestinized'. The Norwegian agreements called for the parties to the conflict to reach a final settlement by the year 2000. However, intensive negotiations conducted by the Palestinian and Israeli delegations at Camp David, mediated by the United States, were unsuccessful. Since the Oslo 2 Agreement and the Palestinian-Israeli agreements reached before year 2000, the territory under full PNA control in the West Bank and Gaza Strip has increased from 2% to 17.2%, and partial control has decreased from 26% to 23.8%.

Areas of control 'A', 'B' and 'C' in the West Bank, delineated by the redeployments carried out under the Oslo II Agreement (1995), the Protocol on Hebron (1997) and the Wye River Memorandum (1997).



Source: Area C. The Key to the Two-State Solution. Jerusalem: Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, December 2012, p. 3.

A closed round of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations was scheduled for January 2001 in Taba under the auspices of the United States, the European Union, Egypt and

Jordan. For Israeli Prime Minister Barak, this was the last chance to stay in power. He was well aware that if the negotiations failed, the Likud opposition would waste no time in taking advantage of the political setback with the Palestinians and launching a campaign to remove Barak and his party from power. It was for this reason that the Israeli negotiating team was prepared to make serious territorial concessions to the Palestinians in Taba. One of the main participants in the Israeli delegation, lawyer G. Sher, on the eve of the negotiations, handed the Palestinian side the map depicting the final settlement, according to which 5 per cent of the West Bank remained within Israeli borders. In exchange the Palestinians were offered the desert area of Kholot Halutzah, which under the 1947 UN partition plan for Palestine was to be part of an Arab Palestinian state.

In order to disrupt the negotiations, Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon made a provocative ascent to Haram al-Sharif on September 28, 2000, accompanied by thousands of police officers, which triggered the mass Palestinian protests that became the starting point of the 'al-Aqsa Intifada'. It is noteworthy that this act, which instantly nullified all previous US plans for a Palestinian-Israeli settlement based on peaceful negotiations, provoked a rather harsh reaction from the new administration of US. President George W. Bush. US special envoy Senator G. J. Mitchell was urgently sent to the Middle East to head an international commission (comprising the United States, the European Union and Turkey) charged with fact-finding, ceasefire negotiations and rebuilding trust between the PNA and Israel. Mitchell presented his report in Sharm el-Sheikh on April 30, 2001. The senator declared that the White House might reconsider its position of continued international support for Israel if it did not stop increasing the number of settlements and their size in the Palestinian territories.¹⁹

The recommendations made by Mitchell which called on 'the government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to prepare an agreed schedule for the full redeployment of the Israeli army to the positions held before September 28, 2000, within one week of the security meetings and the resumption of cooperation in that area'²⁰ were not

taken up by the parties to the conflict. Immediately after the US senator's report, Israeli tanks invaded Gaza, in turn Palestinian suicide bombers carried out a series of attacks on Israeli civilians.

The roadmap of the 'quartet' of HLB intermediaries

In June 2001, the US made another attempt to bring the Palestinians and Israelis back to the negotiating table. This time, the mission was entrusted to the CIA director George Tenet. The plan was based on the recommendations of the Mitchell Commission and included a series of measures to achieve a ceasefire between the warring parties based on active security cooperation.²¹ The UN Security Council responded positively to US diplomacy's efforts to address another flare-up of tensions between Israel and the Palestinians and called on 'the Israeli and Palestinian sides and their leaders to cooperate in implementing Tenet's work plan and the recommendations contained in the Mitchell Report in order to resume negotiations toward a political settlement'.²² However, despite acceptance by the Israeli and Palestinian sides (with many reservations), neither the Mitchell Commission's recommendations nor the provisions of the Tenet plan have been implemented.

In the wake of fruitless efforts of the US diplomacy and in the absence of serious deterrents, the Israeli political leadership, led by Sharon, who became prime minister in March 2001, effectively refused to engage in a political dialogue with the Palestinians, or to respect the agreements previously reached. At this difficult juncture, the US again utilized the Madrid Conference principle of collective co-sponsorship of the Middle East peace process. In late 2001 US President G. Bush proposed expanding and strengthening the institution of international mediators to prevent dangerous developments in the zone of Palestinian-Israeli confrontation. The new political structure of co-sponsors of the Middle East Peace Process, comprising Russia, the US, the EU and the UN (the so-called Quartet) was formed during the most difficult and dramatic period in the MEPP history, when the very idea of achieving a comprehensive peace acceptable to all parties to the conflict

seemed unattainable. In the face of the futility of US efforts and the absence of serious deterrents, in the spring of 2002, Israeli troops launched what became known as the military operation 'Defensive Shield'. It was in fact a reoccupation of the West Bank and Gaza. A curfew was imposed in all Palestinian settlements except Jericho. A moat was dug around Jericho, blocking all approaches to the city. The West Bank was divided by the Israelis into 50 isolated districts. The movement from one area to another was totally controlled by the Israeli military. In fact, 700,000 people, or a third of the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were placed under house arrest.²³

In the summer of 2002, the 'Quartet' prepared a Road Map that envisaged a three-stage move towards a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement over a three-year period. The 'Quartet' also expressed its willingness to support the establishment of a Palestinian state with provisional borders in 2003 as an intermediate stage to permanent status. The Road Map was unequivocally supported first by the Palestinians and, in April 2003, by Israel.

On Russia's initiative, the document developed by the 'Quartet' was approved by the UN Security Council. As reflected in its Resolution 1515, it specifically called on 'the parties to fulfil their obligations under the Roadmap in cooperation with the Quartet and to achieve the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security'.²⁴

However, the Roadmap failed to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Siting the strengthening of Hamas and other radical Islamist groups in Gaza, Ariel Sharon's government abandoned the political dialogue with the Palestinians and embarked on a course of unilateral disengagement. In August 2005, Israel withdrew its troops from Gaza and evacuated its settlements there. Sharon and his ministers tried to equate these actions with the implementation of the Road Map.²⁵ The international community unequivocally interpreted Israel's actions as a tactical move that gave it full military and economic control of Gaza and at the same time allowed it to evade its Road Map obligations.²⁶

By 2007 it was clear that the conflict resolution process was at a dead end. Under these rather complicated circumstances, additional actions were required by the Quartet capable of breaking through the thick veil of tension and reanimating the peace process. To this end, the Bush Administration proposed to re-invigorate the Quartet's work by appointing former British Prime Minister Blair, who had extensive experience in settling the long-lasting conflict in Northern Ireland, as its special envoy to the Middle East.

In addition, Washington initiated an international summit on the Middle East in Annapolis in November 2007, at which Israel, under international pressure, pledged not to build new settlements in the West Bank. However, since 2007, intensive construction and expansion of existing Israeli settlements began. In doing so, the Israeli government significantly increased public spending on the maintenance of settlements, as well as subsidies and benefits for settlers, thereby encouraging Israeli citizens to move across the Green Line, which existed before the outbreak of hostilities in June 1967.

In April 2007 Tony Blair's office prepared a detailed programme called 'Towards Palestinian Statehood' that provided for creation of industrial zones in a number of Palestinian cities, construction of water infrastructure facilities, increase of foreign investments in the Palestinian economy as well as reform of the Palestinian law enforcement and security services. Several EU countries (the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Germany, Italy), the World Bank, Australia, Japan and others took part in financing the program.

However, the government of Israel immediately blocked all economic development projects in the Palestinian territories, including a project to develop 14 Palestinian villages in the West Bank. Tony Blair soon recognized the unrealizable nature of his proposed program because it was completely contrary to the basic principles of Israeli policy, which are primarily aimed at 'depalestinizing' and extending Israeli sovereignty to these areas of the West Bank through the intensive expansion of Jewish settlements and the construction of defense barrier along the 'green line'.²⁷

It is clear that the formula ‘security for Israelis in exchange for the socio-economic development of parts of the West Bank is the key to a breakthrough in the negotiations between Israel and the PA’ totally failed. Israel was satisfied with the situation in which it was essentially being approached by the Quartet with trivial requests for the introduction of concessions in the Palestinian territories or a temporary freeze on construction of its settlements. But the Palestinians have begun to realize that Blair's program does not contribute to the Quartet's efforts to normalize the situation in the West Bank and Gaza, much less to exercise their legitimate right to establish a Palestinian state. Because of the blatantly pro-Israeli position of the United States and its departure from the previously developed legal basis for a Middle East settlement, the Quartet was doomed to deal less with settlement issues and more with overcoming its internal divisions. In fact, in its current configuration, the Quartet has exhausted its potential and cannot become an effective instrument for reconciling the Palestinian and Israeli sides. In 2008, Israel carried out a large-scale military operation called ‘Cast Lead’ in Gaza under the pretext of destroying Hamas’s terrorists. This controversial operation, that was criticized even by Israel's partners, pushed the peace process back to the period that preceded the Oslo Accords.

The failure of President Obama’s policies

Many analysts expected a long-awaited breakthrough in the Middle East settlement process to come with the election of Barak Obama as US President. However, when B. Obama came to the White House, he initiated a decisive attack on the Iranian nuclear programme. In August 2009, the US State Department proposed to its major NATO partners to consider implementing the ‘deal’ implying tougher western sanctions capable of undermining the Iranian economy in exchange for a freeze on construction in the Jewish settlements.²⁸ This highly unusual proposal for a Middle East settlement, linking the problems of the Palestinian-Israeli standoff with Iran, provoked a negative reaction and misunderstanding in the international community,

including Israel and the PNA. It was clear from the outset that such an 'initiative' would not be endorsed by UNSC member states. Russia, China, Britain and France are known to strongly oppose the policy of developing the Israeli settlement sector in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Cautious attempts by then-Secretary of State H. Clinton (in office 2009-2013) to persuade Israeli Prime Minister B. Netanyahu to halt settlement activity in the West Bank were not successful. Nor was the attempt by the US State Department, Egypt and Jordan to relaunch the Israeli-Palestinian talks in Washington held September 2010 on the condition that Israel observe a 10-month moratorium on construction in the settlements. Netanyahu's second term in office (2009-201) saw the most intensive phase of Israel's development of the Palestinian territories. During this period, 28 000 new housing units were built, which accommodated about 103 000 settlers.²⁹ Notably, 40 per cent of the new housing units were built in settlements away from the Green Line, with the rest mainly in East Jerusalem and areas adjacent to the city in the West Bank.³⁰ The 'shuttle diplomacy' of George Mitchell did not have any significant results either.

After winning the second presidential election in 2011, the Obama administration decisively revised the attitude towards the negotiation process between Israel and the Palestinians as well as the role of the US in this process. Although the team of advisers on the Middle East was substantially reshuffled, on examination, it almost entirely comprised representatives of the Jewish lobby in the US government. Moreover, most of its members took part in the preparation and conduct of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations which were held in 2000-2001 in Washington, Camp David and Taba under President Clinton's aegis. As noted above, during the brief period when the center-right government of the Labor Party headed by Ehud Barak was in power (06.07.1999 - 07.03.2001), the Israeli side was ready to make serious territorial concessions to the Palestinians.

There was no doubt in anyone's mind that the plan to be prepared for the then Secretary of State John Kerry by Bill Clinton's team of advisers would simply be an

updated version of the so-called swap exchanges.³¹ Thus in the negotiations the Americans in effect abandoned the previously established international legal framework - the Madrid principle of 'land for peace' was replaced by a formula of 'land swaps' or 'swap exchanges'.

The Palestinians and Israelis hold diametrically opposed views on the swap issue. The strategic goal of Palestinian diplomacy is to minimize, or prevent altogether, radical changes to the pre-June 4, 1967, borders. Israeli diplomacy insists that due to the unresolved status of Judea and Samaria, i.e., the West Bank, Jews have the same right as Palestinians to settle there. In this regard, all settlers and settlements established in accordance with Israeli law, excluding 'illegal settlements' established without due legal process should be under Israeli sovereignty and jurisdiction once a final status agreement is signed.

At the Camp David negotiations, for the first time, the Israeli delegation put forward a land swap plan. According to that plan, 111 settlements with a total of 374,327 settlers would remain under Israeli sovereignty and 34 settlements and 18,977 settlers would leave the West Bank. Under the Israeli plan, 733 square kilometers of the West Bank³² would fall under Israeli control and 114 square kilometers under NPA control. Another 507 square kilometers Israel hoped to secure under a long-term lease from the Palestinians.³³ The Palestinian delegation at the talks refused to discuss the swap issue.

At the Taba talks, for the first time, both sides presented maps marking the borders of the two states. Israel recognized the June 4, 1967, borders as the basis for negotiations. Israel's proposal included the following: 6% of the West Bank and 69 settlements with 435,626 settlers remained under Israeli sovereignty. Seventy-one settlements and 65,000 settlers are to be evacuated. Israel offered to lease another 2% of the West Bank from the Palestinians. In exchange, it offered to give the PNA 6% of Israeli territory in the completely uninhabitable Negev desert region, as well as to build a corridor connecting the West Bank with the Gaza Strip under Israeli sovereignty.³⁴ The Palestinians, naturally, rejected the proposal.

John Kerry's plan has never been announced or published. But judging by the results of the talks that US Vice President Joe Biden and Secretary of State John Kerry held with the GCC leaders in April 2013, it is likely to have been a version of the Arab peace initiative of 2002, which assumed a recognition of Israel by the Arab countries on condition of Israeli troops withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories and agreement to the establishment of a Palestinian state under a land swap formula between Israel and the Palestinians.³⁵

The announcement of the American politicians caused an intensely negative reaction in Israel, which clearly rejected the very idea of territorial exchange after the Annapolis summit. John Kerry had to fly to Israel four more times in one month to put pressure on Netanyahu.³⁶ In the end, under pressure from the United States and leading EU countries, Israel agreed to sit down at the negotiating table, on condition that the preconditions complied with prior agreements between the Palestinian and Israeli sides. As a guarantee that it would participate in the negotiations, Israel agreed to release 104 Palestinians from its prisons, 14 of whom were Arabs of Israeli citizenship. This condition was already documented in the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum of September 4, 1999 but was not fully implemented by the Israeli side. The Palestinians, for their part, during the negotiation promised to cease their attempts to enter 15 organizations affiliated to the UN as full members.

Each side was represented by two negotiators. The Israeli side was represented by the then Justice Minister Z. Livni and Adviser to the Prime Minister on the Palestinian question B. Molho. The US side was represented by M. Indyk and F. Lowenstein and the PNA side by a Fatah leader Saeb Erekat, as well as Economy Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh. Direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians began on 29 July 2013 in Washington and were to last 9 months. The deadline was limited to a specific date of 29 April 2014. However, as there was no progress during this deadline, there were discussions about the possibility of extending them until 2015. The Obama administration hoped to achieve a diplomatic breakthrough in early 2014. In January 2014, Kerry was expected to present his plan,

which would propose a solution to all the major problems of the Middle East settlement, based on the 1967 borders and the exchange of territories. The plan was to include the timetable for its implementation. It was also to address regional peace issues, the Arab Peace Initiative and an economic programme for the Palestinian territories. However, John Kerry never ventured to make his programme public.

Before the talks began, Israel released the first batch of 26 Palestinian prisoners as a goodwill gesture. In spite of this, the negotiations ‘stalled’ immediately after the first tripartite meeting. Such outcome was probably inevitable. Hamas (which at the time had the support of 55% of the Palestinians, vs Fatah’s 38%),³⁷ had officially declared before the three-party meeting in Washington that ‘Abbas does not have any right to negotiate on behalf of the Palestinian people’.³⁸ For its part, the new government of Benjamin Netanyahu, following the results of the special elections in January 2013, immediately approved 84 additional settlement construction projects, thus stressing that it intended neither to freeze nor curtail its settlement activities in the Palestinian territories. Furthermore, Palestinian negotiators were convinced from the outset that the American side, when discussing contentious issues, was more inclined to listen to Israeli rather than Palestinian side.

The first four negotiation rounds consisted mainly of mutual recriminations after the Palestinian delegation made a statement that the final resolution should contain a provision that ‘the Palestinian state should have territory completely free of Israeli military and civilians’.³⁹

On 6 November, in another round of negotiations, the Israeli delegation made a clear statement: ‘There will be no Palestinian state within the 1967 borders and the border between the Palestinians and Israel will be demarcated by the fence’.⁴⁰ S. Erekat and M. Shtayyeh responded by accusing Israel of derailing negotiations and ‘escalating construction in the settlements’.⁴¹ Moreover, the negotiations on a two-state solution formula to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict were rendered meaningless as Israeli politicians and lawmakers actually started the procedure of annexing the Jordan Valley into Israel's borders.

The announcement by the Israeli negotiating team was preceded by a speech by Benjamin Netanyahu at a cabinet meeting in which the prime minister unexpectedly recalled the 96th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration and linked it to the need of inclusion of the Jordan Valley (32.9 percent of the West Bank) into Israeli territory, 'The principle that will ensure peace, as well as protect the state of Israel, in the event that the peace agreement is broken, is the principle of security. Security arrangements are fundamental for us, and we insist on them. There will be many elements to these agreements, but at the center of them we insist that the Israeli security border runs along the Jordan River'. Following the prime minister's statement, Likud MPs, led by Miri Regev, began to spin the Knesset's procedure for passing a law on the annexation of the Jordan Valley.⁴²

At another round of talks on 31 January 2014, Indyk raised the issue of swaps, the proposition first offered by the Americans in Taba in 2001. He said that as part of a future peace agreement the US were prepared to recognize the expansion of Israel by adding 6% of the West Bank, where 80% of the settlers now lived. The proposal would also allow for the presence of Israeli troops and security forces on the borders of the West Bank with Jordan. Israel insisted on extending its sovereignty to 10% of Palestinian territory, while Palestinian negotiators agreed to exchange only 3% and hand over control of the border with Jordan to the US and other NATO forces.⁴³ The Israeli delegation also demanded that the Palestinians recognize Israel as a 'Jewish state'. But the Palestinians objected, stating that PLO recognition of Israel as a state already took place in 1993. They also pointed out that when they signed the Oslo Accords, they were not required to define Israel as a 'Jewish state'.

On 28 March, Israel refused to release another group of Palestinian prisoners and held tenders for 708 housing units in East Jerusalem, which the Palestinians qualified as a violation of the prerequisites for continuing negotiations. Abbas rejected a moratorium on relevant procedures for the accreditation of PNA-controlled territories by 15 international organizations. The negotiations were on the verge of collapse again.

For a fortnight, Kerry tried to persuade the leaders of Israel and the PNA to 'save the peace process'. The United States even expressed its willingness to release Israeli agent Jonathan Pollard, who was arrested in 1987 for passing secret documents to Israel and sentenced to life in a US prison. Moreover, the US promised to transfer \$4 billion for the development of the Palestinian economy.⁴⁴ However, in the end, all of Kerry's efforts were in vain. On 23 April 2014, the Palestinian factions Fatah and Hamas agreed to form a national unity government and hold new elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council. PNA officials stated that 'Palestinian unity will only contribute to the peace process'.⁴⁵ Israel's response was immediate and unequivocal - 'no negotiations with a terrorist organization'.⁴⁶ On top of that, harsh economic sanctions were imposed on Palestinians living in the West Bank, including a ban on all construction in the Palestinian sector in Area C. Indyk blamed Israel and Netanyahu personally for the negotiations failure, who, in Indyk's words 'did nothing to move the peace process forward by even a foot'.⁴⁷ However, the US State Department insisted in an official statement that 'both sides have done everything that can ultimately be called a total failure'.⁴⁸ Kerry was forced to admit that his mission had ended inconclusively: 'Unfortunately, the right moment has been missed again, we are right back to where we were from the beginning'.⁴⁹

One cannot but agree with the conclusion of the famous American political observer Ross Dozet, who summed up the Middle East policy of Barak Obama and his advisers in The New York Times editorial: 'It is safe to say that the term 'failure' most accurately describes the essence of US foreign policy in the region'.⁵⁰

At the same time, despite Obama's and Netanyahu's mutual dislike, it was Israel that has benefited most from American Middle East policy. Israel's borders, which were drawn as a result of its occupation of Palestinian territories and the Syrian Golan Heights in the 1967 war, are relatively calm, and have not seen such a state of non-conflict since the creation of Israel in 1948. It is noteworthy that the terrorist formations in Syria, which have terrified the world, avoid anti-Israeli rhetoric even in their propaganda materials. At that, the world media is virtually silent about the

fact that the efforts of the 'Islamic State'⁵¹ dealt a serious blow to the Palestinian Resistance Movement forces and the Palestinian refugee camps in Syria because they were supported by the official Syrian government. Even the leaders of the radical Islamic Hamas movement prudently moved the movement's headquarters from Damascus to Doha for fear that Islamist militants would persecute them for collaborating with representatives of the ruling al-Assad clan.

The main forces hostile to Israel have now been effectively neutralized and, according to leading Israeli experts, considering the current situation 'terrorists will try to avoid a new war with Israel'.⁵² Gaza's border with Egypt, which was once used to move fighters and weapons, is now even more secure than when it was controlled by the Israelis, thanks to efforts made by the current Egyptian authorities. Nor does Hizbullah now pose a serious threat to Israel, since its main forces have been redeployed to Syria to support the Alawites.

The decades-old myth of an Iranian nuclear threat, created largely by Israeli politicians themselves, is rapidly losing its power. Even many representatives of Israel's military leadership no longer believe that Iran can use nuclear weapons against Israel. It should be recalled that a few years ago the former heads of the Israeli foreign intelligence service Mossad and the IDF General Staff - M. Dagan and B. Ganz, - openly stated that Iran would not seek to build its own nuclear bomb in the near future.⁵³

Turkey, which unexpectedly supported Palestinian demands in 2009, is now fully satisfied with compensation for the damage caused by Israeli special forces to the Mavi Marmara. Ankara is now ready to restore Turkish-Israeli relations to the extent that they existed before the failed Peace Flotilla raid on the Gaza Strip.

The US-Israeli relationship, somewhat tarnished by Netanyahu's pre-election populism, has now returned to its previous level of strategic partnership. A month before the next US presidential election, a new Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the two countries. It provided for US military support to Israel to the tune of \$38 billion between 2018 and 2028. Moreover, the US has expressed its

willingness to increase annual military aid to Israel to \$3.7 billion. From 1998 to 2007, this amount was \$2.4 billion a year, and from 2008 to date it has risen to \$2.9 billion.⁵⁴

Active US involvement in the Middle East peace process has gradually reformatted the Arab-Israeli conflict. Egypt and Jordan have signed peace treaties with Israel; and the most hostile Arab countries (Syria, Iraq, Libya, Lebanon) have in actuality been neutralized and are currently unable to influence the situation in the region. The attitude of the influential Arabian monarchies towards Israel has changed largely in its favor. The events of the so-called Arab Spring, which coincided with Obama's presidency, served as an 'acid test' that clearly showed that the Arab-Israeli conflict ceased to be international and, as in the years of the British Mandate rule in Palestine, returned to a bilateral confrontation between Palestinians and Jews.

Donald Trump and His Deal of the Century

The Israeli political leadership made no secret of its delight at President Trump's arrival in the White House. The new US president formulated his position on the Middle East peace process as soon as he took office, the event which coincided with B. Netanyahu's visit to Washington on 15 February 2017. In typical Trump fashion, it was expressed in the extravagant phrase: 'You have a problem, you solve it, and I'll be happy with any solution'.⁵⁵ At the same time, the 45th U.S. president publicly rejected the 'two state solution' formula. Netanyahu was extremely pleased that the US would no longer insist that Israel return to the pre-June 1967 borders or demand to freeze settlement activity in the Palestinian territories. Immediately after Netanyahu's return from Washington, Israeli President Rivlin spoke in favor of annexing all the territories and granting citizenship to the Arabs who populate them, that is, of Israel absorbing the occupied Palestinian territories, as happened to those territories occupied by Israeli forces during the first Arab Israeli conflict in 1948-1949.⁵⁶

On 5 December 2017, D. Trump officially announced that the US recognizes Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and ordered the US embassy to be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem'.⁵⁷ The opening date of the new embassy building (15 May 2018) was timed to coincide with the 70th anniversary of the proclamation of the State of Israel. Prior to the embassy relocation, Washington sanctioned a series of anti-Palestinian actions. First, funding for UNWRA and other international aid agencies was suspended and then completely cut off and the official PLO office in the US was closed. All these actions were accompanied by confrontational rhetoric against Iran and Russia. In May, Trump announced that the US had unilaterally withdrawn from the P5+1 group and refused to participate in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the nuclear programme.

It is noteworthy that Trump's vague Middle East proposals provoked an extremely negative reaction from all US NATO allies, the Arab world countries, Turkey, China, India and Russia. Mahmoud Abbas, head of the Palestinian National Authority, called the president's decision 'an unacceptable crime'.⁵⁸ Ismail Haniyeh, chairman of the Palestinian Hamas politburo in Gaza, has called for a new Palestinian intifada.⁵⁹ Mass Palestinian riots have erupted throughout the relatively calm, until recently, West Bank. Israeli Arabs in the Galilee threw stones at passing buses.

Immediately after Trump's announcement regarding the US embassy move to Jerusalem, the US State Department announced that President Trump had a draft plan for Middle East peace process. At the same time, reports emerged that the content of the plan, which Trump himself repeatedly calls 'the ultimate deal', was kept strictly secret, and the US State Department repeatedly postponed the presentation of the plan. The plan was to be made public once the political crisis in Israel would have been resolved.

Four people were involved in developing Trump's 'plan': Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and top adviser; Jason Greenblatt, the Israeli-born US Special Representative for International Negotiations; David Friedman, the US Ambassador

to Israel; and Dina Powell, the US Deputy National Security Adviser, an Egyptian-born American businesswoman. The latter was likely added to the team in order to avoid accusations of anti-Palestinian bias, since the rest were pro-Israeli Jews.

According to Israeli portal Debka, the US president has discussed the plan with three Arab leaders - Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the Emir of the UAE, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, as well as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. They tried to involve the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the discussion, but he flatly refused.⁶⁰

The reaction of the Palestinian side to the American 'deal of the century' was unequivocal: Abbas, who received Trump's plan through diplomatic channels from Saudi Arabia, did not even open the envelope with the document, thus confirming that the PNA did not intend to participate in the process of promoting the new American initiative.⁶¹ S. Erekat stressed that 'Trump and Netanyahu are plotting to close the Palestinian case by excluding the issue of Jerusalem from any settlement agreement, annexing most of the major settlements and moving our capital to the outskirts of Jerusalem'.⁶² Ali Jarbawi, a professor at Birzeit University (Ramallah), noted that 'the Americans want to solve the Palestinian issue as Trump sees fit, at a regional conference with their allies, but without Palestinian participation'.

In the run-up to the upcoming 2020 US presidential election, the political opposition began accusing Trump of failing to deliver on his key campaign promises. Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden called his opponent's Middle East settlement plan a 'political stunt'. Democrats replicated a joke across the country calling Trump's 'deal' 'the deal of the next century, not of this century'. Realising that removing himself from the issue of resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict could have a negative impact on the future political career of the current US president, he nevertheless decided to release the text of the 'deal of the century' on January 29, 2020.

The 180-page document is titled rather optimistically 'Peace to Prosperity. A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People'.⁶³

In essence, however, Trump's initiative was nothing more than the quintessence of the 'Kerry Plan' or territory swap plan that former President Obama's administration tried unsuccessfully to promote. It also reflects the policy proposals of the Israeli 'Israel Our Home' party on the transfer of the so-called 'Arab Triangle'⁶⁴ to PNA control and the already well-known initiatives of Trump himself.

Studying the new US administration initiative allows one to draw an unequivocal conclusion: there is no allowance for a fully-fledged Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, and the demarcating fence, which since 2004 has been built around Jewish settlements in the West Bank and around Jerusalem, will solidify into the border between the Palestinians and Israel.

A key element of Trump's 'plan' is the 44-page map of a future 'Palestinian state'. In the territory offered to the Palestinians, 15 isolated Israeli enclaves will remain - Hermesh, Mevo Dotan, Elon More, Itamar, Brahā, Itzhar, Ateret, Ma'ale Amos, Asfar, Karmeit Zzur, Telem, Adora, Negohot, Beit Hagai, Otniel (about 6% of the Palestinian territories). The Jordan Valley and the northern part of the Dead Sea coast (32.9% of the West Bank) will remain under Israeli control. All of Jerusalem, including its eastern part where there had been no Jews before the 1967 war, would be recognised as territory belonging to the State of Israel. Palestinians would be allowed to declare Abu Dis, a village isolated from Jerusalem by a reinforced concrete wall, as their capital. At present, the residents of Abu Dis are not allowed to visit Jerusalem without special permits.

Map of the 'Palestine State' presented in the 'Trump Plan'



Thus, according to Trump's 'plan', approximately 38.9% of the West Bank and 69 settlements with 470,000 Jewish settlers would come under Israeli sovereignty, while 71 settlements and 118,000 settlers would be evacuated. In exchange, the Palestinians are offered, as before at the Camp David talks in 2000, part of the Negev desert - the Holot Halutz area, which is completely unfit for human habitation. Joint industrial zones and 'high-tech' enterprises were to be established there. 'The Trump Plan also envisages the transfer of the Arab communities of the Arab Triangle from Kafr Kara, Baqa el Gharbia, Umm el Fahm, Qalansua, Taybeh, Kafr Qasim, Tyre, Kafr Bara and Daljuliya (about 450,000 people) to the West Bank in exchange for Jewish settlements. The rest of the West Bank will remain, according to the 'deal of the century', fragmented into 15 isolated enclaves, to be connected by Israeli-controlled corridors. De facto, this means a US rejection of provisions accepted by all UN Security Council members and enshrined in resolutions 242 and 338, which state that 'implementation of the principles of the Charter requires the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, which must include the application of

both of the following principles: 1) withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied during the recent conflict; 2) cessation of all claims or states of war and respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of each state in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized borders without threats or use of force'.⁶⁵

The document confirms US recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel.⁶⁶ In effect, this means that the US and Israel refuse to discuss the status of Jerusalem - key final status issue with the Palestinian side. US recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel is a flagrant violation of international law, as it disavows UNSC Resolution 478 of 1980, which determines that 'all legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, which have altered or purport to alter the character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem, and in particular the recent 'basic law' on Jerusalem, are null and void and must be rescinded forthwith'.⁶⁷ Trump's 'plan' envisages the establishment of the future capital of the state of Palestine on the edge of East Jerusalem in an area where the barrier fence runs, separating the current municipal borders of the city from the Palestinian refugee camp Shuafat and the small Palestinian villages of Kfar Aqab and Abu Dis. This area is now part of what is known as Area B, which is under the joint control of Israel and the PNA. Thus, according to the U.S proposal the so-called united and indivisible capital of the State of Israel has an area of 48.3 square kilometers with a population of 560,000 Jews and 358,000 Arabs, and 15.5 square kilometers with a population of only 50,900 people is allocated for the capital of the Palestinian state.⁶⁸

While paragraph 4 of the draft version of the 'deal of the century' envisaged the establishment of a Palestinian state, the final version contained the following vague statement: 'A realistic solution would give the Palestinians full authority, but not the power to threaten Israel. It would necessarily entail limiting certain sovereign powers in the Palestinian areas hereinafter referred to as the 'Palestinian state', such

as allowing Israel to maintain security and control of Israeli airspace west of the Jordan River.⁶⁹

Areas proposed for Palestinian use at Israeli ports of Ashdod and Haifa, as well as corridors connecting the West Bank with Gaza and Jordan, would be controlled by Israel and remain under its sovereignty. It is noteworthy that the construction of an airport on the Palestinian territories or the use of special terminals at Israel's international airport is ruled out in principle by the US initiative. This means that the airspace of the proposed 'Palestinian state' will be under Israeli control.

A separate section of the Trump Plan focuses on Palestinian refugees and calls for a just solution to the refugee problem within the State of Palestine. It stresses that the issue of Palestinian refugees must be addressed in the context of Jewish refugees affected by the Arab Israeli wars.⁷⁰ Thus, the problem of millions of Palestinian refugees, most of whom are currently living in Arab countries, is once again sidelined, and viewed as an inner issue of Arab countries themselves.

A large part of the new American initiative is devoted to an economic development plan for the Palestinian territories: 12 industrial zones that will provide jobs for about a million Palestinians through establishing businesses in construction, energy, water, agriculture, tourism as well as modern medical and education facilities. The programme is expected to cost \$50 billion over the next decade.⁷¹ However, the text of the 'Deal of the Century' did not specify how the plan would be funded.

The conduct of negotiations between the Israeli and Palestinian sides has shown that the Palestinians would never agree to sign a permanent status agreement on the conditions outlined above. In fact, all previous settlement programmes based on the socio-economic development in the Israeli-occupied territories have failed proving that no 'economic miracle' can take place without a political solution to the Palestinian problem. It is for this reason that Trump's 'plan' was incapable of bringing about a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The plan is likely to suffer the ignominious fate of the 'Kerry plan'. It is clear that the US one-sided model based on substantial assignments profitable exclusively to Israel works

lopsidedly and fails the Palestinians as it only responds to Israeli political priorities. Such an approach precludes the very possibility of establishing a Palestinian state, thus blocking any initiative to advance the Middle East peace process. The right-wing-dominant representatives of the Knesset are preparing to submit legislation for the Israeli annexation of the West Bank. If this does happen, it will once again raise tensions and further escalate the confrontation between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Russia's position on resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict

The Russian Federation is an active member of the Middle East peace process. Russia's position on the peace process has always remained unchanged. Russia rejects any solution to the Palestinian problem which denies the Madrid formula of the 'two state solution' such as: the fragmentation of Palestinian territories, the establishment of a confederation of Israel, Jordan and the PNA, the preservation of the status quo, the unilateral disengagement from the West Bank and blockade of Palestinian territories by the analogy the disengagement from Gaza in 2005, etc.). Russia firmly insists that a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East can only be achieved on the basis of the two-State solution, the relevant UN resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1515 (2003), the principals of the Madrid Conference, and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. Russia firmly insists on respect for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in accordance with international resolutions, including the right of return for Palestinian refugees, the right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State of Palestine within the pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. Russia also supports Palestine's determination to obtain full membership status in the UN and other international organizations. Russia has consistently demanded that Israel stop all actions that contradict international law and discriminatory legislative policies, as well as practices that violate the human rights

of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territories, including asymmetric military operations targeting civilians.

The Russian Federation strongly condemned the continuation of the policy of building and expanding Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. This policy is in flagrant violation of United Nations Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), which demands the immediate and complete cessation of all Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and serves as the main obstacle to achieving a two-State solution. Russia has called on Israel to stop building the fence, which, just like Israeli settlements in the West Bank, destroys the integrity of the Palestinian territories.⁷²

Russia condemns any measures aimed at undermining the status of Jerusalem as established under international law, including UN Security Council resolutions 476 and 478. Rejects the decision by the US and Guatemala to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and to move their embassies there. Russia also has expressed deep concern at the decision by Hungary and Brazil to open trade missions with diplomatic status in Jerusalem. The Russian Federation calls on all states not to transfer their diplomatic missions to Jerusalem in accordance with the UN Security Council resolution 478 (1980) and to comply with the UN General Assembly resolution 10/19 (2017), which stresses that ‘the question of Jerusalem is a final status issue that must be resolved through negotiations in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions’.⁷³

Russia supports the right of the State of Palestine to sovereignty over East Jerusalem. It urges Israel to respect the legal and historical status quo of Jerusalem and its Christian, Jewish and Islamic holy sites, including the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Qubbat Al-Sakhra in the Holy Haram Al-Sharif area. Russia supports the Jordanian administration's trustee role as the Waqf of Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa Mosque as the only recognized authority for this holy site. It welcomes the joint ‘Appeal for Jerusalem’ signed by His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco and His Holiness Pope Francis on 30 March 2019 in Rabat, on preserving and strengthening

Jerusalem's special status as a multi-faith city, as well as its spirituality and unique identity.

Russia condemns Israeli aggression and the imposition of a blockade on the Gaza Strip, which has led to a sharp deterioration in the economic and humanitarian situation; demands that Israel immediately lift all restrictions imposed on the Gaza Strip, including obstacles to economic development, the provision of basic services and the reconstruction process, and end violations of the rights of the local population; calls on the international community to step up efforts aimed at meeting the urgent humanitarian needs of the Gaza Strip population,

As one of the co-sponsors of the Quartet on the Middle East settlement, the Russian Federation is working to create the conditions for restarting negotiations between Palestine and Israel that will resolve all final status issues and help to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region. In 2016 the Russian President Vladimir Putin put forward the proposal to hold negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli leaders in Moscow, which still stands.

Russia has consistently supported efforts to restore Palestinian unity on the PLO's political platform as well as to hold elections in all the Palestinian territories. Russia insists that the situation of the Palestinian refugees is a final status issue which must be resolved through negotiations between Palestine and Israel in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 194 (1948). Moscow deeply regrets the decision by the United States to discontinue funding for the UNRWA and calls on all States and organizations that do not currently participate in its funding to consider making voluntary contributions to sustain the Agency's activities as soon as possible.

Conclusion

Our analysis proves that the UN, which initially assumed responsibility for the settlement of the Arab Israeli conflict and its core - the Palestinian problem - was

unable to achieve this goal due to the reasons examined in the study. The US interference in the Middle East peace process has led to a gradual reformatting of the conflict. Egypt and Jordan signed peace treaties with Israel, and the most hostile Arab states (Syria, Iraq, Libya and Lebanon) were practically neutralized and currently cannot influence the situation in the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation zone. The Arab-Israeli conflict ceased to have an international character and again entered the phase of confrontation between Israel and the Palestinians.

It was shown above that all American initiatives on the Palestinian-Israeli track, including the 'Trump's plan,' are in the interests of Israel only and infringe on the interests of the Palestinians. Upon careful consideration, all the US plans and initiatives to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are consistent with Israel's political priorities, and these priorities exclude any possibility of creating a sustainable Palestinian state.

Joe Biden's administration has not yet developed a coherent policy on the issue of the Palestinian-Israeli confrontation. But this position of the main mediator in relations between the warring sides fully justifies Israel's expectations. Time is on its side. Israel is using time to annex the West Bank completely, similar to the annexation of the occupied Palestinian territories in the 1948-1949 war, as well as Jerusalem and the Golan Heights.

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