BOUND BY A FRAME OF
REFERENCE, PART II: U.S. POLICY
AND THE PALESTINIANS, 1948–88

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Following Israel’s creation in 1948, the Palestinians disappeared from United States policy considerations and did not reemerge until the late 1960s, when they forced themselves on the world’s consciousness with a series of terrorist actions and a determined assertion of national aims. With the exception of the Carter administration, the history of the two decades of American policy-making that followed is one of a concerted effort to suppress the Palestinian question as a political issue and to undermine the Palestine Liberation Organization. This article, the second in a three-part series, examines the frame of reference that molded policymaker thinking on Palestinian-Israeli issues—one centered on the Israeli perspective and basically ignorant of the Palestinian viewpoint—from the Eisenhower administration through the Reagan years.

After the fighting ceased in Palestine in 1948, John Foster Dulles, then at the United Nations and later to become President Dwight Eisenhower’s secretary of state, summed up the United States’ view of the Palestine situation. The United States regarded Israel’s establishment as a “historical necessity” that it was committed to uphold, Dulles said. “We realized,” he acknowledged, that this

involved certain injustices to the Arab States. The situation was not one where there was any solution that was totally just to all concerned. . . . Nevertheless, there had to be a solution and, we believed, a peaceful solution. . . . Therefore, our [policy] could be looked upon . . . as completing one phase of a historical development which, when completed, would permit of better relations than ever before with the Arab States.1

Clearly, the Palestinian people had ceased to be a part of the picture for American policymakers, to the point of already having been forgotten as the


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object of the "certain injustices" involved in Israel's creation. The U.S. interest, Dulles made clear, was in the Arab states, not in the stateless Palestinians.

BUILDING PUBLIC OPINION

Palestinians remained off the American radar screen throughout the 1950s and most of the 1960s. Known in U.S. documents and policy pronouncements on the issue as "Arab refugees," they had no distinctive name or national status. No one in the State Department or at higher levels of government thought of them in a political context, with national aspirations or political grievances. Nor did the American public know them. Palestinians who came to the United States in these early years tell of having to give elaborate explanations of who they were and where they had come from before Americans could place them in any geographic context or even link them with the Arab-Israeli conflict.

At the same time, Israel's hold on the hearts and minds of the American public intensified as it was portrayed repeatedly in books, movies, and the press as a small pioneering nation embodying Western values and besieged by huge armies of implacably hostile Arabs. The 1960s saw at least ten movies in which Israelis and/or Arabs figured, the former always favorably, the latter always unfavorably. ² Leon Uris's 1958 novel Exodus and the 1960 movie based on it had a particularly strong influence on public opinion. The book, originally commissioned by a public relations consultant who thought America was apathetic about Israel's struggle for survival,³ has sold more than twenty million copies over the years. The movie has reached literally hundreds of millions more.⁴ Together, book and movie educated an entire generation of Americans in the Israeli version of the Palestine story.

Arabs were portrayed in both versions of Exodus as fanatics preying on Israelis, virtually direct successors to the Nazis. This theme also emerged during the 1961 trial in Israel of Adolf Eichmann, one of the Nazi officials most directly involved in the deportation and extermination of Jews. In the course of the trial, the Israeli prosecutor attempted to establish the existence of close links between Eichmann and Hajj Amin al-Husayni, the Palestinian leader of the 1930s and 1940s. Despite a paucity of evidence consisting of little more than pro-Nazi broadcasts by Hajj Amin, the connection between Palestinians and Nazis was effectively conveyed.⁵

The supposed continuity between Nazis and Arabs found full expression at the time of the 1967 war. Israel's swift victory—in which the beleaguered nation was perceived as having escaped a second Holocaust at the hands of Arab persecutors—captivated the American public. Israeli journalist and writer Tom Segev noted that before the war, all over Israel "one heard and read about the danger that the Arabs were about to 'exterminate Israel,'" and that Israeli newspapers continually identified Egypt's Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir with Hitler.⁶ Polls in the United States showed that sympathy for Israel surged to the 55-percent level in this period, while sympathy for the Arabs,
never high, fell to near zero. The Eichmann trial and the 1967 war also brought forth from Jewish thinkers what became known as a “Holocaust theology,” whose principal spokesmen were intellectuals like Elie Wiesel. Underpinning “Holocaust theology,” which became central to Jewish thinking, was the notion that Jews must have a strong Israel as insurance against another Holocaust and that, as Jews had been innocent victims in Europe, so they were still innocent as they tried to forestall another catastrophe inflicted by other predators, this time Arabs.

With the political disappearance and demonization of the Palestinians in the 1950s and 1960s, an entire generation of American policymakers came of age not knowing and not thinking it necessary to learn the Palestinian story.

**The Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson Administrations**

President Eisenhower had none of the emotional identification with Israel or the biblical appreciation for the concept of a Jewish state in the Holy Land that had at least partially motivated his predecessor, Harry Truman. In fact, he is the only U.S. president to have exerted heavy pressure on Israel: in 1953 he used economic pressure to force Israel to halt its diversion of the headwaters of the Jordan River, and in 1956 he forced its withdrawal from Sinai after the Suez War.

But Eisenhower had no interest in or real awareness of the Palestinians’ situation either; it is probably no exaggeration to say that he never gave the Palestinians any thought except as “Arab refugees.” He believed that to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict the United States had to take a neutral stand, befriending each side and respecting Arab interests. Consonant with the views expressed by Dulles in 1948, however, the American effort focused on the Arab states. The administration encouraged resettlement schemes for the refugees, including particularly the unsuccessful Eric Johnston plan in the mid-1950s—an economic development and water distribution plan for the Jordan River valley whose ultimate purpose was to make resettlement economically feasible for the Arab states. But, while many in the State Department recognized the need to resolve the future status of the Palestinians if the Arab-Israeli conflict were to be resolved and U.S. influence maintained vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, there was little sense at any level of the administration that an attempt to solve the Arab states’ conflict with Israel should address Palestinian political or national aspirations.

President John Kennedy had some sympathy for local nationalisms throughout the world and, believing that the United States should capitalize on this rising phenomenon rather than try to suppress it, he made efforts to win the friendship of nationalist Arab leaders. In letters to the major Arab heads of state shortly after he took office in 1961, he pledged to help resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict and promised moral and economic support for newly emergent states. Kennedy also discussed various resettlement schemes for the “Arab refugees,” particularly a resettlement/repatriation initi-
ative formulated under United Nations auspices and led by Carnegie Endowment President Joseph Johnson. But Kennedy's heart was not in the effort, and he soon lost interest when the initiative became mired in Arab-Israeli politics. Indeed, throughout Kennedy's discussion of resolving the conflict, the Palestinians themselves were absent.¹²

Israel was a greater priority for Kennedy than any Arab party, and the warm and enduring nature of the U.S.-Israeli tie essentially began with him. He was the first president to sell military equipment to Israel, agreeing in 1963, after a fifteen-year embargo of military aid to both Arabs and Israel, to Israel's request to purchase Hawk antiaircraft missiles.¹³ He was also the first of a succession of presidents who winked at Israel's growing nuclear capability,¹⁴ the first to speak of a "special relationship," and the first to appoint a full-time aide to maintain contact with the American Jewish community, something that gave supporters of Israel immediate access to the White House, which Eisenhower had never permitted.¹⁵

President Lyndon Johnson advanced the relationship with Israel to a still higher level. Johnson acquiesced in Israel's diversion of Jordan River water in 1964 and moved far beyond Kennedy's agreement to sell defensive equipment to Israel, agreeing to the sale of tanks and fighter aircraft. His support of the Israeli position during and after the 1967 war was such that he did not even protest when Israel attacked an American communications intercept ship, the U.S.S. Liberty, killing thirty-four American naval personnel, in circumstances that clearly indicated the attack was not a mistake.¹⁶

Johnson counted a large number of Israelis and influential supporters of Israel among his friends and advisers. The number-two man at the Israeli embassy in Washington during the 1960s, Ephraim Evron, became a close personal friend. Abe Fortas, whom Johnson appointed to the Supreme Court; Arthur Goldberg, a Supreme Court justice whom Johnson named ambassador to the UN; Walt Rostow, Johnson's national security adviser; his brother Eugene Rostow, undersecretary for political affairs at the State Department; Johnson speech writers John Roche and Ben Wattenberg; Harry McPherson, a special counsel given the "Jewish portfolio" midway through Johnson's term; banker Abraham Feinberg; and Universal Artists president Arthur Krim and his wife Mathilde, a noted cancer researcher who was an Israeli citizen and former Irgun member—all were ardent supporters of Israel and close enough to Johnson to have his ear on Arab-Israeli issues.¹⁷

These people, who spent time with Johnson at the White House, at Camp David, and at the LBJ Ranch in Texas, had easy access to him even during crises such as the 1967 war. They discussed with him arms sales to Israel and other policy issues and in general played an important role in shaping the Israel-centered frame of reference through which he viewed the Arab-Israeli conflict. They were particularly influential in establishing Arab-Israeli policy following the 1967 war. The tack taken by these advisers (particularly Mathilde Krim) and fully accepted by Johnson was that Israel should not be forced to withdraw from any of the territory it had captured in the war ex-
cept in exchange for a guaranteed and permanent peace.\textsuperscript{18} This concept became the underpinning for UN Resolution 242 in November 1967, which has stood ever since as the basis for the American approach to peace negotiations. Arthur Goldberg, who shaped the United States’ position on the resolution, worked closely with Israel in formulating it; the ambiguity of its terms favored Israel insofar as it essentially left final resolution of the conflict to be determined by the balance of power. Palestinians were mentioned in the resolution only as “refugees.”

Johnson had little or no understanding of the Arab world, which he once described in a toast to Jordan’s King Hussein as “that ancient land of the camel, the date, and the palm.” He quickly developed an intense dislike for Egypt’s Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasir, whose insulting speeches contrasted sharply with Israel’s friendliness and loyalty. Johnson rejected his predecessors’ attempts to win the friendship of nationalist Arab regimes,\textsuperscript{19} and anti-Arab—particularly anti-Nasir—sentiment pervaded Washington during his presidency. As the United States had become more deeply enmeshed in the cold war and then in Vietnam in the 1950s and 1960s, the concern increasingly became to ensure stability in other potentially volatile areas. In the Middle East, policymakers looked to Israel for stability and opposed any hint of the kind of revolutionary ideology espoused by Nasir.

Palestinians suffered as a consequence. During the Eisenhower administration, Dulles had spoken of the refugees as a dissatisfied group with a potential for upsetting the status quo,\textsuperscript{20} but as each year passed and they did not stir up revolution, the perceived need for resolving their plight receded, until no one felt it necessary to expend any energy even in trying to resettle them. No policy initiatives on the refugee issue were undertaken at any point in the Johnson era. The Palestinians had begun by the late 1960s to be defined by their hostility to Israel, but they were never seen as serious political actors. The United States—including even the State Department—had by mutual agreement with Egypt consigned the Palestinian issue to the “icebox” and regarded the newly formed PLO as little more than a bureaucratic organization formed to serve the interests of its Arab patron, Egypt.\textsuperscript{21}

In the aftermath of the 1967 war, the Palestinian resistance movement became a significant factor in Middle East politics; the PLO, by now taken over by Yasir Arafat, had fundamentally altered the dynamics of the Arab-Israeli conflict by articulating a political agenda for the Palestinians. But the United States failed to see this coming. Even after the 1967 war, the United States still regarded the Palestinians only as “Arab refugees,” as is evident from UN Resolution 242 and U.S. policy pronouncements. At the very time that the Palestinians were becoming more politically active, the United States was moving closer to Israel, increasing the tendency to ignore the Palestinians. It would take another decade and another major war for the United States to recog-
nize that the central issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict was the Palestinians, not Arab state hostility toward Israel.

THE NIXON ERA: IGNORING THE "HEART OF THE CONFLICT"

The late scholar Malcolm Kerr observed that even for many informed Americans, the origins of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict were so quickly forgotten that the Palestinians' dispossession in 1948 had become "an unrecognizable episode."22 This was certainly the case during the Nixon and Ford administrations, from 1969 to 1977. Although Nixon's first secretary of state, William Rogers, did attempt to promote a peace settlement in his "Rogers Plan" of 1969, the cold-war globalism of Henry Kissinger, originally the national security adviser, prevailed throughout Nixon's tenure. The Nixon-Kissinger policy-making frame of reference, centered on the Soviet Union, had little room for the Arab-Israeli conflict. In this unnuanced approach, Israel was seen as the ally against Soviet encroachment and the Arabs as pro-Soviet radicals. Kissinger specifically promoted stalemate in the Arab-Israeli conflict in the belief that this would frustrate radical Arabs and the Soviets;23 every local crisis was seen as a test of strength between Washington and Moscow, even if the Soviets were not involved. The Jordan civil war in September 1970, a struggle for power between King Hussein and the Palestinian guerrilla organizations, is a case in point. This was actually the administration's first encounter with the Palestinians, but because Nixon and Kissinger focused on the Soviets, neither man recognized the regional causes of the crisis or the political significance of the Palestinians' role.

In fact, the Jordan crisis became a watershed in U.S.-Israeli relations, establishing Israel as a strategic asset by virtue of its readiness to intervene at U.S. request. Those in the State Department who had argued that the Arab-Israeli conflict had local causes and should be addressed at its source lost influence. Aid to Israel skyrocketed. In fiscal years 1971–73 following the crisis, military credits to Israel increased by a multiple of almost ten, reaching the $300-million to $500-million level. Military aid during the October 1973 war increased exponentially again to $2.2 billion.24

Because Nixon's overriding interest was in frustrating Soviet advances, he had little interest in the origins of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and accepted unquestioningly the conventional wisdom about it. In describing in his memoirs the 1970 Jordan crisis, in which Israel faced no danger, Nixon unthinkingly repeated the standard rhetoric, observing that he had feared being drawn in because the United States "could not stand idly by and watch Israel being driven into the sea."25 Nixon remained so unaware of the Palestinians that he mentioned them only twice in his 1,100-page memoirs, published in 1978, and then only as guerrillas or extremists.

Although Nixon had no particular attachment to Israel, the same cannot be said of his secretary of state; associates have described Kissinger as dealing with Israel less as a statesman than as a friend and adviser.26 For all his
mastery of international affairs, Kissinger came to office not knowing the issues of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and he never improved his knowledge of the Palestinians. The description in his memoirs of the origins of the Arab-Israeli conflict, for instance, omits any mention of Palestinians or their dispossession.27 During the years of Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy following the 1973 war, the United States devoted considerable effort to finding ways to skirt the Palestinian issue and, in assurances made to Israel, bound itself to restrictions that limited its own diplomatic flexibility on the issue. As part of Sinai II, the 1975 disengagement agreement between Israel and Egypt, the United States pledged not to “recognize or negotiate with” the PLO unless the PLO accepted UN Resolution 242 and recognized Israel’s “right to exist”—a commitment that would tie American hands for the next decade and a half.

By the mid-1970s, some policymakers came to recognize the centrality of the Palestinian issue to resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In congressional testimony in November 1975, for example, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Harold Saunders defined the Palestinian problem as the “heart” of the Arab-Israeli conflict, signaling the first public American acknowledgment that the Palestinian issue had a political aspect. But Saunders’s testimony had no impact on policy at the time. Although there was greater press interest in the Middle East following the 1973 war, and Egyptian president Anwar Sadat’s popularity had brought a slightly better public understanding of the Arabs, for the most part Palestinians remained pariahs. Public opinion polls continued to show overwhelming public sympathy for Israel,28 and increased activity by pro-Israeli groups kept Israel’s interests prominently before policymakers.

The Palestinian image evolving in this period was double-edged. Terrorism finally brought the name “Palestinian” to the world’s consciousness, and despite the negative connotations, some concept of the Palestinians as something more complex than refugees or terrorists filtered out. Had terrorism not brought the Palestinians a measure of international notoriety, the diplomatic gains they made during this period would probably not have occurred, and the United States would not have begun to recognize the centrality of the Palestinian issue. At the same time, however, terrorism provided the policy-making establishment with a reason for continuing to avoid the real political issues.

Given the deep suspicions of the Palestinians, the United States dismissed suggestions of a Palestinian willingness to come to terms with Israel. Kissinger himself acknowledges rebuffing four overtures from PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat shortly before and during the 1973 war indicating acceptance of Israel and a desire to participate in peace negotiations. Kissinger’s reasoning was that the PLO was incapable of real flexibility; in his words, “even should it change its professed aims, it would not likely remain moderate for long,” and any PLO-led entity was “certain to be irredentist.”29 Similarly, the United States rejected the conciliatory aspects of Arafat’s speech to the UN in No-
vember 1974 and rebuffed overtures Arafat made—accepting Israel within its 1967 borders and disavowing any Palestinian intention to destroy Israel—in separate conversations with two U.S. senators in 1975.30

By the mid-1970s, the United States had come to concentrate its anti-Palestinian viewpoint specifically on the PLO, which became the new American blind spot. Israel’s supporters sought to delegitimize the PLO as the Palestinians’ political representative, and the organization came to be viewed, in popular perceptions and in policy-making circles, solely as a terrorist organization. The reasons now put forward for avoiding the Palestinian issue—that an unalterably radical PLO was bent uncompromisingly on Israel’s destruction and that any indication of moderation was designed to deceive—came to constitute a new set of assumptions and a new mind-set.

**JIMMY CARTER: MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

President Jimmy Carter tried to ignore the constraints of this conventional wisdom. To a great extent he did overturn decades-old misconceptions about the Palestinians’ marginality, but he was ultimately defeated by the persistence of the old frame of reference.

Carter knew little about the Middle East when he took office in 1977, and nothing during his electoral campaign hinted that he would deviate in any way from the Israel-centered line of the past.31 From the beginning, however, he wanted to explore new ideas, examining the Middle East from a “broader perspective”32 that encompassed the Arab and Palestinian as well as the Israeli viewpoints. As Harold Saunders, assistant secretary of state in Carter’s administration, has noted, Carter was unique among presidents because he came to office knowing there were two sides to the conflict.33

Multiple factors account for Carter’s new approach to the Palestinians. Some of his principal aides say he regarded the Palestinians as another disenfranchised people like the Blacks he had struggled for in desegregation battles in the South. An idealist with what has been described as a missionary zeal in trying to “make a difference” in the world, he took the attitude with regard to Middle East negotiations in the 1970s—as he would in the 1990s with other diplomatic initiatives—that a solution to any problem can be found only by negotiating with all those concerned, however unfavorably regarded. Oblivious to the dismay he caused Israel and its American supporters, he inconsistently broke diplomatic conventions by using the terms “Palestinians” and “PLO” interchangeably and by speaking openly of the Palestinian need for a “homeland.” He never shared the widespread American abhorrence for negotiating with the PLO; rather, he believed that, because Palestinians had to be involved in negotiations, the PLO, as their representative, also had to be involved.34

Carter’s interest in the Middle East was intellectual, and he felt no particular affection toward either Israelis or Palestinians. He never actually met a Palestinian until after he had left office and had no real understanding of
Palestinian grievances until he made a trip to the Middle East as a private citizen in 1983. After that trip, he told Harold Saunders that while in office he had always dismissed as “experts’ views” what Saunders and National Security Council staffer William Quandt told him about Palestinian concerns, but that now he felt he finally understood their grievances. He also acknowledged having been surprised to learn during this trip the strength of the Palestinians’ national aspirations—an indication of how little he had known while in office about the Palestinians despite his advocacy of their rights.

Carter’s foreign policy team was also a factor in his administration’s approach. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance shared his commitment to human rights, and before coming to office National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski had supported inclusion of the Palestinians in the peace process and even establishment of a Palestinian state. On Middle East issues, Carter’s policy team included not only top-level policymakers but senior experts in the bureaucracy such as Saunders and Quandt and career ambassadors, all of whom had real input in policy-making.

But Carter and his team met a stone wall when they went against the conventions of the frame of reference on the Palestinian issue. In fact, the sound defeat of all Carter’s efforts for the Palestinians, from the vision of a homeland enunciated in 1977 to the autonomy plans framed by the 1978 Camp David accords, provides striking evidence of the extent to which old mind-sets can dictate policy. Guardians of the old conventions began to press Carter intensively almost immediately. The election only months after Carter took office of Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin, a man totally at odds with Israel’s benign image among most Americans, initially sent shock waves through the Jewish community, uneasy with his vision of a Greater Israel. But Israeli supporters quickly rallied, and public opinion polls showed no significant change of sympathy for Israel among the population at large: support levels, even after Begin’s election, continued to hover at or above the 40-percent level. Thus, while Carter initially had tentative support in his attempt to face Begin down and press ahead on the Palestinian issue, this support quickly vanished, proving no match for the intensive lobbying campaign launched against him. There was ultimately no way to accommodate both Begin and the Palestinians in the American frame of reference.

Carter made an effort nonetheless during the first year of his administration, trying through intermediaries to secure Palestinian acceptance of UN Resolution 242 and at least implicit recognition of Israel’s right to exist, in accordance with the stipulations of Sinai II. But the PLO leadership would not pronounce the exact formula demanded by the United States without obtaining reciprocal Israeli concessions, which Israel refused to give. Unable to communicate directly because of the Kissinger commitments, the Amer-
icans could not effectively probe for areas of Palestinian flexibility or resolve the misunderstandings that inevitably arose.

Under intense domestic pressure to abandon his efforts and hampered by his own insufficient knowledge of Palestinian thinking on this issue, Carter lost patience with their failure to comply. As early as the fall of 1977, tiring of "the role of public advocate of controversial ideas," Carter began to pull back. By the time of the Camp David summit a year later, he had been so reined in that he aimed only for the "attainable, not necessarily the preferred"—that is, for the Israeli-Egyptian accord and autonomy for the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza, not for a broader agreement linked on a meaningful resolution of the Palestinian issue.43

Meanwhile, Israel's right-wing government was taking concrete steps on the ground in the occupied territories—confiscating more land and more than doubling the numbers of settlements and settlers—to foreclose Palestinian negotiating options. Carter had always strongly opposed Israeli settlements, and it was during his tenure that the State Department's legal department unambiguously pronounced them illegal, but Begin openly defied him on this issue. U.S. negotiators understood Begin to have agreed at Camp David to freeze settlement construction through the end of an autonomy period that could last up to five years, but Begin later insisted that he had agreed only to a three-month freeze. Carter never pressed the point, and Begin proceeded almost immediately to "thicken" the settlements.44

Whatever the failures of Carter's Middle East policy, he did alter the frame of reference by introducing the Palestinian issue as a legitimate one. Nonetheless, by the end of his term, U.S. opinion molders were still so accepting of Begin's policies that only a strong effort and heavy pressure on Israel, could have halted the trend toward the Israeliization of the occupied territories. Carter was unable to exert such pressure, and Reagan, unconcerned by settlements or land seizures, would exert no pressure at all.

**RONALD REAGAN: MISSED OPPORTUNITIES**

The attention paid to the Palestinians by Carter caused some alarm among Israeli supporters. As a consequence, the Reagan years were characterized by a new upsurge in pro-Israeli "public relations" efforts and a concerted campaign to put the Palestinian genie back in the bottle by denying the legitimacy and even the separate existence of the Palestinians. The grass-roots support of the pro-Israel lobby, AIPAC, exploded, its membership and its budget quadrupling between 1980 and 1987.45 Other supporters of Israel among media commentators launched an intensive information campaign in the mid-1980s, dubbed the *Hasbara* (propaganda) Project, designed to "sell" Israel to the American media in an effort to counter the unfavorable image it had begun to project after the 1982 Lebanon invasion.46 The effort to feature Israel more prominently and favorably in news coverage was accompanied by a major attempt to delegitimize Palestinian nationalism. One instrument in
this campaign was Joan Peters’s 1984 book *From Time Immemorial*, which purported to demonstrate that most of the Palestinians dispossessed by Israel had actually immigrated to Palestine from other Arab countries and had no legitimate claim to Palestine. Although discredited by Israeli scholars, the book received broad circulation in the United States, where it was widely hailed as undermining Palestinian nationalist claims.

Reagan came to office in 1981 a strong admirer and emotional supporter of Israel. He had no sympathy whatsoever for the Palestinians and was disinclined from the beginning to take an even-handed approach to Middle East policy-making. Not only did Israel supporters fill virtually every portfolio in Reagan’s foreign policy team, but committed activists from various pro-Israeli organizations dotted his administration at key lower levels as well, particularly on the National Security Council staff. Regional experts at the State Department had virtually no influence on Reagan policy; both Reagan and his first secretary of state, Alexander Haig, were highly suspicious of the Department’s Middle East officials.

When George Shultz replaced Haig as secretary of state a year and a half into Reagan’s first term, pro-Israel circles mounted a campaign against him because of the business connections with the Arab world he developed during his years at Bechtel. Not long after he came to office, he put forward the September 1982 Reagan Plan recognizing the Palestinians’ “legitimate rights” and the need for a solution to the Palestinian problem. But Shultz allowed the plan to die on the vine when Israel objected to it, and he never again seriously attempted to resolve the Palestinian issue. From the beginning he strove to undermine the PLO. Almost pathologically opposed to the organization, he had hinted to the Israelis in the midst of the 1982 Lebanon war that it should be destroyed.

Short-lived though his involvement was, Shultz was the only member of Reagan’s administration to show any interest in the Palestine issue. The advisers and cabinet officials with whom Reagan surrounded himself were largely “neoconservatives”—former liberals who had turned to the Right out of concern about the ascendancy of the left wing in the Democratic Party. Fervent supporters of Israel, they tended to view the Jewish state as a critical element in the struggle against the Soviet Union and anyone opposed to it as an agent of the Soviets. All other Middle East issues, according to this thinking, constituted a distraction from central East-West issues.

Key neoconservatives included Ambassador to the UN Jeane Kirkpatrick; Richard Allen, Reagan’s first national security adviser; CIA Director William Casey; Richard Perle, an assistant secretary of defense and former aide to Henry Jackson, one of the Senate’s staunchest supporters of Israel; Max Kampelman, a founder of the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA), which had been formed in the 1970s to bring Israel’s security concerns to the attention of Defense Department officials, who became Reagan’s arms control director; Kenneth Adelman, who later replaced Kampelman; Richard Schifter, another cofounder of JINSA who was appointed assistant
secretary of state for human rights in late 1985; and Richard Pipes, a Soviet affairs expert who joined the National Security Council staff.

The thinking espoused by Reagan's advisers was sustained by an intimate connection with neconervative opinion journals such as \textit{Commentary} and the \textit{New Republic}. The interchange of ideas was apparently frequent; Jeane Kirkpatrick, in fact, came to the administration's attention because she had written for \textit{Commentary}, as did Richard Pipes. Kirkpatrick also wrote for the \textit{New Republic} while at the UN.\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Commentary} editor Norman Podhoretz, a leading neoconservative and an unapologetic propagandist for Israel, observed in the mid-1980s that, although the circulation of periodicals like his was small, it was from precisely these small journals of opinion that the ideas originated which, in his words, "run government or are a part of public debate."\textsuperscript{52} Other neoconservative thinkers who remained outside government also played a role in shaping administration views on the Middle East. This was particularly true of Eugene Rostow, a Johnson administration official who wrote frequent legal justifications of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, including in \textit{Commentary}. Rostow is believed to have had an influence on Reagan's thinking on the critical issue of Israeli settlements, which Reagan refused ever to deem "illegal" and occasionally even pronounced to be within Israel's "right" to construct.\textsuperscript{53}

Thus, although no American negotiating effort could ever totally ignore the Palestinian role after Carter's efforts, the Reagan administration tried hard—attempting to shut the PLO out of the peace process and essentially denying the validity of Palestinian nationalism. Reagan and most of his political compatriots had the mind-set of a decade earlier; they took policy back to the thinking of the early 1970s, recreating a reality in which the Palestinian issue did not exist, in which the cold war was the United States' first priority and Israel was regarded as a necessary ally, no matter what its West Bank policies or its Lebanon policy or its human rights record.

In keeping with this framework, the administration had a closed mind on the PLO and discouraged every PLO opening. Reagan himself indicated from the beginning that he did not believe the organization was representative of the Palestinians and that he would probably not talk to it even if it accepted Resolution 242.\textsuperscript{54} Administration officials rejected out of hand a conciliatory Arab and PLO response to the Reagan Plan issued at the Arab summit in Fez, Morocco, in mid-September 1982. The Fez Plan, implicitly accepting coexistence with Israel, signaled a significant change in Arab attitudes and might have constituted a serious basis for discussion with Washington. Similarly, in 1985 Shultz failed to encourage an initiative put forth by Jordan and the PLO that proposed to open a dialogue between the United States and a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation intended to lead to peace talks with Israel. He also discouraged a 1986 effort by Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres to pursue with Jordan the possible opening of an international peace conference. Throughout these years, the administration never probed the PLO for
signs of flexibility and, because it was determined not to talk to the organization, never seriously debated the possibility of including it in negotiations.

Meanwhile, without U.S. restraints, Israel's grip on the occupied territories tightened and the settler population quadrupled during Reagan's first six years in office. The Palestinians, frustrated to the point of despair at seeing the territories being steadily absorbed into Israel and with little prospect of gaining relief from Israeli occupation, launched the intifada in late 1987.

The profound irony of the Reagan years was that the administration most deeply and emotionally opposed to negotiating with the PLO was the very administration that in the end was forced to authorize a dialogue with the organization. The intifada and the international support and sympathy this brought the Palestinians spurred the PLO to launch a major peace initiative in late 1988, accepting coexistence with Israel in a two-state division of Palestine. As part of this initiative the PLO agreed precisely to the formula the United States had demanded—recognizing Israel's right to exist, accepting Resolution 242, and renouncing terrorism—and thus the Reagan administration had no choice but to begin a dialogue. But the tragedy of the Reagan years was that the same progress toward peace might have been made years earlier and the bloodshed of the intifada avoided if Reagan policymakers had been more willing to look past their singular focus on Israel's point of view to take account as well of the Palestinian perspective. Had Reagan policymakers earlier broken out of the old mental fetters that kept them from recognizing the reality of Palestinian nationalism and from accepting the Palestinians' readiness for peace and coexistence, they might have responded to and encouraged Palestinian moderation rather than allow repeated opportunities to pursue a peace process to slip by.

Notes


2. Laurence Michalek, “The Arab in American Cinema: A Century of Otherness,” in Arab Image in American Film and Television, a supplement to Cinestage 17, no. 1, copublished with the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, no date, p. 5.


6. Ibid., 389–90, 392.


11. It should be mentioned, however, that during this period, when Arab nationalism was at its height, the Palestinians were not focused on a specifically Palestinian national identity but on their right to return to their homes and recover their lands within a pan-Arab framework.


14. For a description of Kennedy’s attitude and actions with regard to Israel’s development of a nuclear capability, see Melman and Raviv, *Friends in Deed*, pp. 95–104.


16. Clark Clifford, then chairman of the President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board and a staunch supporter of Israel, chaired an investigation of the incident but was asked by Johnson not to make a more extensive independent inquiry. From his investigation, Clifford concluded that there had been no justification for the attack, which he felt had been deliberate and had been covered up in Israel. Clark Clifford with Richard Holbrooke, *Counsel to the President: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 1991), pp. 446–47.


28. Suleiman, “American Public Support of Middle East Countries,” p. 15, cites a 1975 poll in which respondents were asked to indicate whether various value-laden words—peaceful, honest, backward, greedy—applied more to Israelis or to Arabs. Overwhelmingly, the favorable terms were applied to Israelis and the unfavorable to Arabs. Fifty percent of all respondents assigned the term “like Americans” to Israelis; only 5 percent assign the term to Arabs.


31. See Naseer Aruri, *Obstruction of Peace: The U.S., Israel, and the Palestini-
34. Suleiman, “American Public Support of Middle Eastern Countries,” p. 18.
36. Because Sinai II prohibited “negotiations” with the PLO but not all talks, the United States had conducted behind-thescenes contacts with the PLO concerning the evacuation of Americans from Beirut in 1976, protection of the U.S. embassy and ambassador in Beirut through the 1970s, and mediation efforts to secure the release of the American hostages in Iran.
37. Quandt, *Camp David*, pp. 95, 204.
38. Ibid., 247–51.
46. Friedman, “Selling Israel to America,” p. 25, emphasis added.