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One-State Solution, Two-State Solution or No Solution?

The Realpolitik Paradigm of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

**Rozwiązanie jednopanstwowe, rozwiązanie dwupanstwowe
czy brak rozwiązania?**

Realistyczny paradygmat konfliktu izraelsko-palestyńskiego

Keywords: Israeli-Palestinian conflict, The Middle East, one-state solution, two-state solution

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Abstract

The conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians reflects a long-standing struggle in the region which traces back to the late 19th century when Zionists sought to establish a homeland for the Jewish people in Ottoman-controlled Palestine, leading to the creation of Israel in 1948. The Arab-Israeli wars that raged throughout the region were followed by negotiations that did bring a certain solution at a bilateral level between Israel and different Arab countries, but never between Israel and Palestine. This conflict is unresolved until today, even with Israel further normalizing relations with other Arab states through the Abraham Accords. The Palestinian question

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is still not addressed. In the meantime, the tension between the direct actors of the conflict is growing without a clear and possible solution. Third actors such as the United States, the UN or the EU have long been discussing possible solutions. The two visions of the future of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict assume the creation of two states (Two-state solution) or one state (One-state solution).

In this paper I will compare and analyze these two concepts and also provide historical context for better understanding. The paper confronts two and one-state solutions ongoing in the region, the immediate interest of the directly involved actors and confront this analysis with a *realpolitik* approach—that is, the goals of the actors, the place of the conflict on the geographical map and, finally, the feasibility of both discussed solutions.

Yet it must be underlined at this point that the analysis is purely theoretical, since Israel, with strong US support, is pursuing a *facts-on-the-ground* strategy. As of today, Israeli decision makers do not have incentives to negotiate peace with the Palestinians in order to find a solution to the conflict. Unquestioned American endorsement of Israel, along with other factors discussed in the text, promotes asymmetry of the conflicted sides which hinder finding a solution to the conflict.

Streszczenie

Konflikt izraelsko-palestyński ma swoje źródła w działaniach ruchu syjonistycznego z końca XIX w., kiedy to jego celem było utworzenie państwa żydowskiego na Bliskim Wschodzie, w sercu Imperium Osmańskiego. Rezultatem tych wysiłków było powstanie państwa Izrael w 1948 r. W konsekwencji jego utworzenia – na terenach zamieszkiwanych przez Arabów – następnego dnia wybuchła pierwsza wojna arabsko-izraelska.

Do dziś relacje Izraela z sąsiadującymi państwami arabskimi pozostają napięte, naznaczone licznymi wojnami, powstaniem i zamachami, przerywanymi okresami względnego spokoju, zawieszeniami broni, bilateralnymi negocjacjami pokojowymi oraz serią formalnych porozumień. Na tle tych wydarzeń relacje izraelsko-palestyńskie wydają się szczególnie trudne. Konflikt między tymi stronami pozostaje nierozwiązany, a mimo szeregu udanych porozumień Izraela z innymi państwami arabskimi regionu, kwestia przyszłości Autonomii Palestyńskiej oraz jej relacji z Izraelem nadal pozostaje nieuregulowana.

Trzej aktorzy, jak Stany Zjednoczone, Unia Europejska czy ONZ, pośrednio angażujący się w liczne próby mediacji między zwaśnionymi stronami, rozważali (i wciąż rozważają) różne scenariusze zakończenia tego konfliktu oraz modele przyszłego funkcjonowania bezpośrednio zaangażowanych stron – przede wszystkim rozwiązanie dwupaństwowe oraz jednopaństwowe.

Poniższa praca analizuje oba rozwiązania w kontekście wydarzeń historycznych związanych z bezpośrednimi stronami konfliktu. Zostaną w niej omówione zalety i wady obu koncepcji, zarówno z perspektywy Izraela, jak i Autonomii Palestyńskiej oraz całego regionu. Na końcu te teoretyczne rozważania zostaną skonfrontowane z najnowszymi wydarzeniami w regionie, co umożliwi sformułowanie wniosków dotyczących możliwych przyszłych relacji między stronami konfliktu – poprzez zestawienie modeli rozwiązania dwupaństwowego i jednopaństwowego z realiami politycznymi (realpolitik) Bliskiego Wschodu.

Należy jednak pamiętać, że poniższy artykuł ma charakter teoretyczny, gdyż dominującą pozycją Izrael w regionie umożliwia mu prowadzenie polityki opartej na strategii faktów dokonanych. Na dzień dzisiejszy izraelscy decydenci nie mają motywacji aby negocjować z Palestyńczykami i szukać rozwiązań konfliktu w oparciu o obustronne ustępstwa. Niekwestionowane poparcie Izrael przez Stany Zjednoczone promują asymetrię pomiędzy skonfliktowanymi stronami, co retarda izraelskie działania na rzecz znalezienia rozwiązania omawianego konfliktu.

Land and Identity

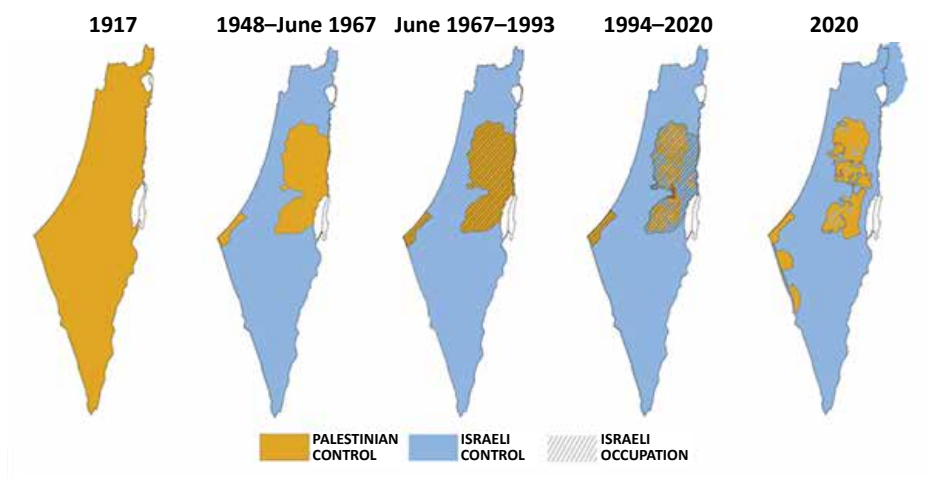
The end of WWII marked changes of borders, neighbors and geopolitical reality in many places all over the world including the Middle East. Since the establishment of Israel in May, 1948, it has been at war with either one, or more Arab neighbors at the same time. The Arab states of the Middle East perceived Israel as an aggressor who forcefully, without regard for the long existing organization in the region, carved itself from the Arab land. Progressively, with extended assistance of third parties such as the USA, Israel has been able to establish positive relations with most of the Arab countries with which it shares borders (and not only), starting with Egypt in 1978 and most recently, through the 2020 Abraham Accords, with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. Israel failed to establish such a relationship with the Palestinians. Today, and for most of the previous decades, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is centered around two interrelated core issues: identity and land¹. Identity and land are inseparable in this context, and equally vital in different ways.

The basic definition of a state stresses occupation of a territory that is sovereign. Therefore, land, and the possession of land is crucial for both sides of the conflict. The Palestinians accuse international organizations of establishing the

¹ K. Rami, *The Core Issues for Israelis and Palestinians*, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/core-issues-israelis-and-palestinians> [access: 13.09.2024].

State of Israel on their land, and as the map² below shows, with Israel continuously building settlements on their land, thus rooting them out from their homes, fields and olive gardens which Palestinians rely on for their survival. As a consequence, without territory, there is no formal state, hence the Palestinian loss of land equals existential threat.

Figure 1: Palestine Land loss since 1917



Source: <https://praxisucc.ie/student-case-studies/student-projects/class-of-2022/human-rights-campaign-focus-on-palestine/>.

The loss of land for the Palestinians is central to their identity issue. Since the creation of Israel (and because of wars and Israeli settlement building), the increase in the number of Palestinian refugees is alarming. According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), today there are about 6 million Palestinian refugees who are eligible to receive UNRWA services³. Together with Israel's expansion, the UNRWA estimate is growing. Denied of their identity and basic rights, living in refugee camps scattered in the neighboring Arab countries, psychologically and emotionally crippled, many generations of Palestinians have become hopeless and perceive the Israelis as omnipotent occupants.

² F. Abullah et al., *Human Rights Campaign: Focus on Palestine*, <https://praxisucc.ie/student-case-studies/student-projects/class-of-2022/human-rights-campaign-focus-on-palestine/> [access: 13.09.2024].

³ *Palestine Refugees*, <https://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees> [access: 13.09.2024].

Land and identity issues overlap in the city of Jerusalem, creating a milestone of the conflict. Jerusalem, one of the oldest cities in the world, is considered a holy city for the three major monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. And while it should be celebrated universally, today it remains a core issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The uniqueness of Jerusalem will be covered and explained in more depth in subsequent sections of the text. For now, it must be emphasized that a shared Jerusalem with all its holy sites by both Israel and Palestine is an approach that is most welcomed and appreciated by third parties, the UN included. Yet, today, the city is under Israeli rule, which only under certain regulations grants access to members of all religions to their holy sites. At times, this access might be limited or even denied. Israel's Jerusalem policy makes the city an exemplification of both the land and identity deprivation experienced by the Palestinians.

The two conflicted actors

Yet, the conflict has two participants, two standpoints, and two narratives of the situation. The Israelis claim that they have established their state with accordance to the international law—the UN General Assembly Resolution 181. As the consequence of Israel's victorious 1967 Six-Day War over Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, Israel seized considerable territories—the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the Golan Heights, claiming, that these new territories provide a security barrier for Israel but also undisturbed access to the holiest site in the Jewish faith—the Western Wall in Jerusalem⁴. Until 1967, Eastern Jerusalem, including this holy site for Jews, had been under Jordanian control. The Jordanians expelled them from the Old City, effectively limiting Jewish access to the Western Wall. Therefore, what has been seen by Arabs as an Israeli hostile action that created massive numbers of refugees, in the eyes of Israel, was self-protection. As for today, debating who has the prevailing right to this territory, including reaching back to Biblical times, or who has forcefully established themselves just a few decades ago, is irrelevant. The reality is that both, the Israelis and the Palestinians are settled in the Middle East, they have been conflicted for the above-mentioned reason since 1948, and this hostility narrative is harmful for both, crippling development and prosperity of both.

⁴ D. Ross, *The Missing Peace. The Inside Story of the Fight for Middle East Peace*, New York 1993, p. 21–24.

Yet, there is a very clear disparity on many levels between Israel and Palestine. This disproportion is hindering the Palestinians in their everyday life, negotiating peace or their hostilities, which at the same time gives Israel a serious competitive edge, making relations between the sides asymmetric. The prolonged character of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be explained by two factors which overlap and make it challenging to resolve. The two most important factors are the balance (or imbalance) of hard power between the conflicted sides and this balance of their soft power. Whereas hard power can be characterized by military strength and the willingness to use it, soft power in this context is understood as the ability to attract other countries to one's actions and arguments, and to foster identification with such actions and reasoning⁵. Therefore, not only is military power important, but so is the ability to gain international support for its use. The Gulf War of 1990–1991 can serve as an example of the above. While Saddam Hussein had the military power to invade Kuwait, his action was internationally criticized and sparked an international intervention under U.S. command, which had both overwhelming hard power but also soft power, the international support to free Kuwait.

Assessing the conflicted parties through such criteria results in arriving at a disproportion in both hard and soft power as well. The Israeli army (Israeli hard power) is among the mightiest in the world, currently ranked 15th out of 133 countries analyzed⁶. The more in-depth comparative analysis of Israel and Palestine, in a hard power context, proves overwhelming Israeli domination since Palestine does not possess an air force, a navy, tanks, or weapons of mass destruction (nuclear, biological, nor chemical) and it does not possess space technology nor ballistic missiles. In contrast, Israel is a regional power in all of the aforementioned categories. To a great extent, which will be further explained in the text, the above Israeli domination was achieved owing to generous U.S. military aid: \$2 billion annual Israeli aid versus slightly over \$160 million Palestinian non-military aid⁷.

While overwhelming hard power is an Israeli asset that allows the country to defend itself from any attack, including a hypothetical one from Iran, its readiness to use this power against the poorly armed Palestinians at any occasion in-

⁵ J.N. Nye, *Soft Power. The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York 2002, p. 5–7.

⁶ 2024 Israel Military Strength, https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=israel [accessed: 26.09.2024].

⁷ *Comparison of Military Strength of Israel and the Palestinians*, <https://imeu.org/article/comparison-of-military-strength-of-israel-and-the-palestinians> [accessed: 26.09.2024].

creases Israel's security but significantly undermines its soft power. Thanks to its hard power, Israel is capable of imposing facts-on-the-ground solutions on the Palestinians, mainly through new settlement building in the occupied territories. Such actions are perceived by international public opinion as illegal and inhumane. Therefore, Israel does not enjoy this international support, and its soft power is suffering due to the overuse of its hard power. In contrast, Palestinians are often seen as victims because of their lack of hard power and their inability to defy Israel. Since their actions are perceived as a struggle to maintain their households and land, they enjoy increasing international moral support. The majority of countries surveyed, according to the Pew Research Center, show greater sympathy towards Palestine in the conflict⁸.

Main violence escalations in the immediate region

The day after Israel declared independence, in an attempt to prevent the establishment of an Israeli state, four Arab countries (Egypt, Transjordan, Syria, and Iraq) started The Arab-Israeli War of 1948. In this war the newly born State of Israel proved itself against the Arab armies, winning control over vast Partition Plan territory, by acquiring 60% the land proposed to the Palestinian Arabs. At the Second Palestine Arab conference held at Jericho—the Jericho Conference in late 1948, the rest of Palestine was annexed by Egypt and Jordan. Therefore, no state was created for the Palestinian Arabs, who named the outcome of the war as Nakba—the catastrophe.

The first Arab-Israeli war was followed years later by two others which were just as critical for the region in their consequences. The first came in 1967 and is known as The Six Day War and the second, known as either The Yom Kippur War or The Ramadan War, came in 1973. The Six Day War was possibly the most significant event concerning Israeli-Arab relations since, as mentioned earlier, it reshaped the Middle Eastern states and proved to the Arabs that Israel was strong and determined to maintain its state. The war lasted only six days and, as a result of a preemptive Israeli strike against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, Israel seized the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. These land grabs caused massive waves of refugees and became one the vocal points of the conflict till today. The Yom Kippur War, to a point, was a con-

⁸ *Views of the Middle East Conflict, 2007*, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2007/06/27/chapter-5-views-of-the-middle-east-conflict/> [accessed: 26.09.2024].

sequence of The Six Day War. The Arab countries had hoped to regain territories lost in the previous war, therefore, on the holiest day in Judaism, they launched a coordinated, surprise attack on Israel. After the initial shock and the Arab successes, Israel, heavily resupplied by the USA, managed to organize its forces and stage a counterattack. The UN efforts resulted in a ceasefire. This war was another humiliating blow to the Arab states, making them realize that Israel, with US support, had become part of the Middle East. And Israel had to recognize that there is no guarantee that it will always dominate its neighbors. While the immediate results of The Yom Kippur War were visible in the number of victims, wounded, and refugees, the long-term effects were more positive, since both sides (on the state level) realized that negotiation must start. Such negotiations, sponsored by the USA, were possible on the Egypt-Israel line, but they did not pertain to the Palestinians who were neglected in the process. For the Palestinians, the aftermath of The Yom Kippur War has proven that both Egypt and Syria went into the war more to regain earlier lost territories than to help the Palestinian cause.

The non-war events of great importance to the Middle East and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were the two Palestinian Intifadas (uprisings) in 1987–1993 and 2000–2005. The two Intifadas differ in many aspects with respect to the intensity or means employed, but both are similar for two vital things. First, the Intifadas were bottom-up civil movements (it is also claimed that they were inspired by political leaders) of the Palestinians who felt hopeless and mistreated under Israeli occupation. Second, the Intifadas were a declaration of the Palestinians of the desire to have their own sovereign state. This declaration was not only for the Israelis but also heard globally. Both Intifadas succeeded by winning international attention, understanding, and support. While the failure of these uprisings was their outcome, neither intifada accomplished the initial goal: to force Israel to negotiate the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state.

The most recent developments in the region—the October 7th 2023 Hamas attack on Israel and Israel's retaliation which continues until today is proof that both nations have not been bridged. As of today, Israel is militarily engaged both in the South fighting Hamas and in the North combating Hezbollah. Israeli hostages kidnapped by Hamas on October 7th 2023 are still in captivity without any guarantee if ever being freed. The Israeli forces are continuously raging an offensive in Gaza in search of the kidnapped, in an attempt of eliminating Hamas terrorists and by that producing new waves of Palestinian refugees.

Negotiating Peace

Because the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is complex (and for a long time it was part of a broader Israeli-Arab conflict, involving many actors), negotiating a peace treaty has been historically difficult. Because of this complexity, third party actors and non-regional actors, have had to act as intermediaries. The country that, historically, has had the resources and most potential to foster Middle East peace has been the USA. There are a few factors that make the United States possibly the most effective and potent broker of the Middle East peace process. For a long time, the United States had the strongest soft power which attracted other actors. Because of a strong economy, the USA could be a sponsor of peace deals. And also, among other reasons, it had (and still has) leverage over Israel.

These factors proved to be effective in 1978, when President Carter managed to build a negotiation framework that was attractive to both Egypt and Israel, leading to the first Arab-Israeli peace treaty⁹. History repeated itself in 1994 when, again, U.S. President Bill Clinton, using economic incentives, managed to secure a peace treaty between Israel and Jordan. In the case of Israeli-Palestinian talks however, the USA did not prove effective. The USA did employ vast resources, engagement, impressive human capital in negotiations but failed to act as an honest and impartial broker, appearing as a backer of Israel.

The Israeli-Palestinian talks, aimed at ending the First Intifada, were held in Madrid in 1991. The Madrid Conference of 1991 was an effort by the international community to revive the peace talks between the conflicted parties. They were hosted by Spain and co-sponsored by the USA and the Soviet Union. After a successful campaign in the First Gulf War, the USA believed it had the necessary argument to lead such talks, and the Soviet Union co-sponsored the talks as a symbol of rejoining the international community after the Cold War (the USSR collapsed later in the same year). Both bilateral and multilateral talks were continued after the conference itself. The impact of the Madrid talks (and the following talks as well), were more of a symbolic significance than having achieved specific solutions. The process itself dominated any specific agreement or concession. In such terms the Madrid Conference was successful (since Israel and Palestine did engage in bilateral talks), and even led to an exchange of letters and the subsequent signing of the Oslo I Accord, on the lawn of the White House in 1993¹⁰.

⁹ J. Carter, *Palestine, Peace not Apartheid*, New York 2006, p. 231–234.

¹⁰ M. Huczko, *Uwarunkowania polityki USA wobec konfliktu izraelsko-palestyńskiego w okresie intifad (1987–2005)*, Warszawa 2019, p. 225–226.

Yet, no final solution to the conflict was found and the exchanged letters did not result in further engagement of peace talks.

The continuing and growing Palestinian frustration about their situation, as mentioned earlier, resulted in the Second Intifada (2000–2005) when the Palestinians decided to voice their disapproval of their situation on the streets in a violent manner. The Second Intifada was much more violent compared to the first one. In the First Intifada about 200 Israelis were killed compared to 1.100 Palestinians, while in the Second Intifada, 1.100 Israelis and nearly 5.000 Palestinians were killed¹¹. This was caused by different, more violent and deadly, fighting methods employed by both sides. The starting point of the Second Intifada can be precisely determined (the visit of the opposition leader Ariel Sharon to Temple Mount in September 2000) but the end date is debatable. There was no clear event that marked the end of the Second Intifada. The death of Yasser Arafat, the iconic and charismatic Palestinian leader, marked the beginning of a new era in the Israeli-Palestinian relations. President Mahmoud Abbas, the new Palestinian leader, negotiated cease-fire conditions with Ariel Sharon resulting in the Israeli withdrawal from the West bank Palestinian cities, and the release of Palestinian prisoners. Abbas managed to persuade different Palestinian organizations to commit to the truce. The final results of the Second Intifada, in terms of a final peace agreement between the conflicted sides, cannot be assessed as successful. While the violent fighting ended, no final solution was found. Certain concessions were made but the Palestinian state was not established, and Israel did not guarantee that there would be no further attacks on the Palestinian side. The Quartet promoted development of Palestine to become a sovereign state in the future and simultaneously discourage both sides of the conflict from violence.

Further attempts to bridge the conflicted actors were attempted by the Middle East Quartet. The Middle East Quartet, an international body comprised of the UN, the EU, the United States and Russia, was established in 2002 with a primary goal of mediating the peace process between Israel and Palestine. Later in 2002, the Quartet embraced George W. Bush's Road Map—a plan proposing series of steps to be made by Israel and Palestine to normalize relations¹². Despite engaging prominent officials to serve as Special Envoys such as James Wolfensohn (former president of the World Bank) and Tony Blair (former PM of

¹¹ *Total Casualties, Arab-Israeli Conflict (1860 – Present)*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/total-casualties-arab-israeli-conflict> [accessed: 17.09.2024].

¹² K. Bojko, *Izrael a aspiracje Palestyńczyków 1987–2006*, Warszawa 2006, p. 190–193.

the United Kingdom) to promote peace efforts and oversee the Quartet's mission, no significant changes in policy by either of the conflicted sides occurred as a result of the Quartet's mission. By today, the Quartet has failed to secure the Palestinians' UN membership and put Israeli settlement building to a halt. The current mechanism of this body is outdated, especially with Russia becoming a *persona non gratae* in any international initiatives for invading Ukraine, the United States under Donald Trump heavily promoting Israel (to be discussed in the following paragraphs) and the vicious fighting ongoing in Gaza since 7th October 2023.

Donald Trump, before, during and after his term in office has on many occasions stated that he would be, and was, the most pro-Israel president ever. In social media, he posted that that no president has done more for Israel than him¹³. Undoubtedly, Trump's policies, decisions and actions have been supportive of Israel. Trump, when entering the White House, had a vision for peace, prosperity and a brighter future for the Israelis and Palestinians. In his early months as president, Trump met with both Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and, on a separate occasion, with the Palestinian leader Abbas, and declared America's commitment to helping both parties in reaching peace and reassured the latter one: 'We will get it done'¹⁴. Trump believed that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not as difficult to solve as it has been thought and that he by nature is an optimist and is optimistic about a solution. The solution to the Israeli Palestinian conflict lies in finding a satisfactory (and acceptable for both parties) compromise on land and identity issues. Yet, his action and decisions towards the actors of the conflict were both *the land and the identity principles* causing the conflict to be fierce and difficult to solve. Trump, on December 6, 2017, officially recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and declared readiness to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, he took an unprecedented stance on the Golan Heights problem, and in March 2019 recognized Israel's sovereignty over this territory allowing further settlement constructions in this area (Netanyahu named this construction *Trump Heights*) and he also cuts more than \$200 million in U.S. aid to Palestinians¹⁵. Under Trump's presidency the two conflicted sides drifted away from any viable and satisfactory for both deals.

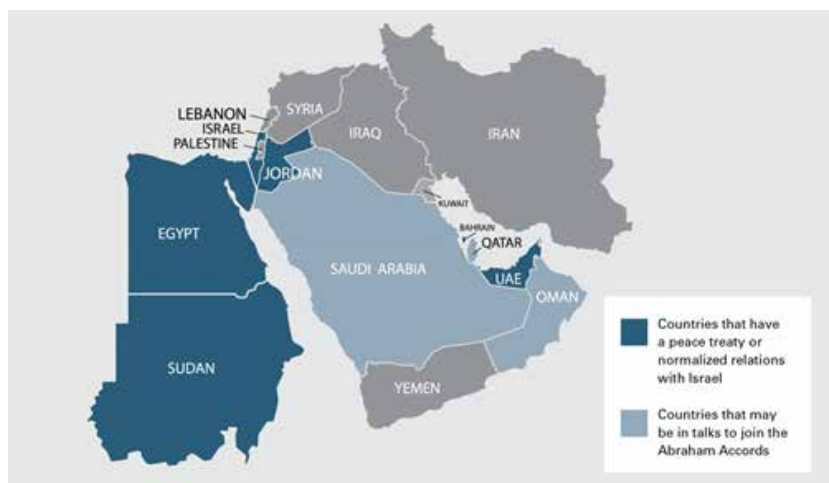
¹³ D.A. Miller, *Trump Was Far From the Most Pro-Israel U.S. President Ever*, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/10/19/trump-pro-israel-truth-social-netanyahu-abraham-accords/> [accessed: 19.09.2024].

¹⁴ E.C. Lee, R. Jones, *Trump Meets Abbas, Says of Peace: 'We Will Get It Done'*, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-meets-abbas-says-of-peace-well-get-it-done-1493831761> [accessed: 19.09.2024].

¹⁵ M. Huczko, *Solving or Stagnating a Decades Long Problem? U.S. policy towards the Israeli – Palestinian conflict under President Biden*, „International Scientific Journal – Science, Business, Society” 2024, p. 30–35.

More recent and original approaches to find a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were initiated under Donald Trump and continued by Joe Biden and are known under the name of the *Abraham Accords*. This initiative aimed at integrating Israel with the Arab states of the region through building economic and cultural ties, in order to consolidate a wider spectrum of actors around shaping a new, peaceful and harmonious Middle East¹⁶. As seen on the map below, the number of Arab countries in the Middle East that have established normalized relations with Israel is continuously growing, with Saudi Arabia also a possible candidate¹⁷. With all the shortcomings and imperfections of this initiative, it is worth mentioning, that multilateral cooperation and building wealth in the region could have provided a new, strong platform for finding peace in the region. Yet, this speculation was halted (or at the least to say, postponed) by the events of 7th October 2023. On this day Hamas militia carried out a surprise attack of Israel killing over 1.100 Israelis and kidnapping over 250 Israelis and foreigners.

Figure 2: States in the Middle East that have Diplomatic Relations with Israel



Source: <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2021-06/features/there-new-chance-arms-control-middle-east>.

¹⁶ M. Huczko, *The Abraham Accords and Their Legacy. A Fresh Approach to a Solution for the Middle East Conflict – from Trump to Biden*, „Cywilizacja i Polityka” 2023, p. 100–102.

¹⁷ M. Finaud, T. Robinson, M. Salah, *Is There a New Chance for Arms Control in the Middle East?*, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2021-06/features/there-new-chance-arms-control-middle-east> [accessed: 20.09.2024].

Two-state solution

Bridging the two conflicted nations has been an international challenge for decades. While the main areas of dispute are well defined, the ideas for a solution have been subtly changing, both in Israel and Palestine and among third actors. The prevailing concept is assuming creation of two sovereign states on the territory of the former Mandatory Palestine, capable of self-determination and self-reliance. This concept is known as the two-state solution—the State of Israel and the State of Palestine existing in peace alongside each other.

In the initial plan for the creation of the State of Israel in the Middle East was the establishing of two states—for Jews and for Arabs, and this solution is known as the two-state solution. The United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine was a proposal dating back to 1947 to partition a Mandatory Palestine. As seen on the map below, the resolution recommended the creation of an independent but economically linked Arab and Jewish States and a special extraterritorial, shared by both, the City of Jerusalem¹⁸.

Figure 3: Partition Plan 1947 (UN Resolution 181)



Source: <https://embassies.gov.il/MFA/AboutIsrael/Pages/Partition-Plan-65-years-later.aspx>.

¹⁸ *The Partition Plan – 65 years later*; <https://embassies.gov.il/MFA/AboutIsrael/Pages/Partition-Plan-65-years-later.aspx> [accessed: 24.09.2024].

The underlying assumption was, that both nations will be capable of shaping positive relations, establish cooperation and share Jerusalem as a special and holy city for both. Yet, this underlying assumption was wrong, since from the start the Arab states of the region disapproved the creation of Israel and for a long time perceived this state as unlawful, hostile, or even evil. In later years, partially due to the ongoing changes in relations among the Middle East states, the two-state solution and initiative had been formalized in following peace process negotiations, which were established by the Oslo Accords in 1993 and 1995. The peace process created the semiautonomous Palestinian Authority (PA) and set a tangible foundation for separate states.

While the two-state solution seemed to be the most plausible for the immediate actors and the international community, the level of animosity and distrust has successfully blocked any solutions to be implemented. Possibly this solution, stressed by the sponsors of peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians (mostly the US), the closest to being successful was negotiated at the Camp David Summit in the year 2000. The proposals were, for the most part, verbal. As no agreement was reached and there were no official written records. The two proposals, Israeli and Palestinian differed, but the offered concessions on both sides were promising, also the American negotiators put forth ideas regarding borders, Jerusalem, and land transfers. President Clinton, who was personally engaged during the process, and Dennis Ross (special Middle East coordinator under President Bill Clinton) over the two week summit, arrived at an offer outlining the parameters for a final status agreement. Clinton's plan would have given the Palestinians 97% of the West Bank (the 3% loss would be compensated) and full control of the Gaza Strip, with a land-link between the two; Israel would have withdrawn from 63 settlements as a result; Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem would become the capital of the new state, and the refugees would have the right of return to the Palestinian state and would receive reparations from a \$30 billion international fund collected to compensate them and also the Palestinians would maintain control over their holy places with Israeli sovereignty over the Western Wall and few early warning stations in the Jordan Valley to strengthen Israeli security¹⁹. The Camp David peace offer, the two-state solution, addressed land and identity challenges not excluding the refugee problem. The Summit itself did not provide a final solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict nor did it create two sovereign states. Both parties at a certain stage of the

¹⁹ D. Ross, *op.cit.*, p. 650–711.

negotiations showed distrust towards their counterpart and their intentions. The United States, as a host, was also distrusted and accused of being biased and supportive of Israel. Yet, the Camp David initiative had a continuation where Israel and Palestine had additional chances to find a solution to the conflict.

The two-state solution format also formed the basis of the later peace initiatives from the Arabs, Israelis and the international community. While this initiative, on a declarative and descriptive level, if discussed on different occasions, the *on the ground policies* of both actors do not seem work in favor of negotiations with such a clear goal, when short term objectives as a ceasefire, ending terrorist attacks, and halting settlement building are the priorities. This is visible in today's escalation of violence in the region—Israel fighting Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Also, long-serving hawkish Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu rejected a Palestinian state. Currently, there is no two-state solution proposal being negotiated between Israel and Palestinians since the level of violence and hostility is at its highest. The two-state solution's popularity is declining among Palestinians to just above 30% but, under the condition that the future Palestinian state is independent and secure, that number increases to 50%, which is a similar result among the Israelis, but also provided that Palestine would be demilitarized²⁰. And while the direct actors are at odds with these solutions, the third actors are not and still perceive the two-state outcome as most beneficial for Israel. Palestine, the region and the international community. On 14 September 2024, the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation with European states like Norway, Slovenia, and Spain met in Madrid to promote a joint commitment to the implementation of the two-State solution, as the only way to establish lasting peace and security between Israel and Palestine²¹. Such initiatives have been undertaken before, and without any clear results. Yet, this path seems to be universally supported by the UN, the United States, and the Arab states and (at times) the immediate actors including.

²⁰ K. Gebert, *Potop i miecze*, „Polityka. Pomocnik Historyczny” 2024, No. 5, p. 19.

²¹ *Madrid joint statement on the implementation of the two-state solution*, <https://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/195807/Madrid-joint-statement-on-the-implementation-of-the-two-state-solution?lang=en-us> [accessed: 24.10.2024].

One-state solution

As the name suggests, this initiative aims at a creation of one, bi-national state encompassing Israel, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza, with equal rights for all inhabitants, irrespective of culture, ethnicity, background or religion. Thus a homeland for Israelis, Jews and Palestinians in accordance with a model based on equality and democratic rights for all—a Israeli-Palestinian state. The idea was coined by Edward Said, a Palestinian American academic in 1999. In *The New York Times Magazine* he published a text, *The One-State Solution*, he argued: “It is time to question whether the entire process begun in Oslo in 1993 is the right instrument for bringing peace between Palestinians and Israelis. It is my view that (...) real peace can come only with a binational Israeli-Palestinian state”²². Therefore, even before Camp David Summit negotiations in 2000, he identified that aiming at creating two states is not feasible and that efforts should be made to bridge Israeli and Palestinian by creating a new state shared by both entities. The main reason behind this idea is the *facts on the ground* realpolitik analysis, that Israeli both military and civilian activity (settlement building) has parted Palestinian land beyond the possibility of creating a Palestinian state.

A one-state solution (as presented on Figure 4), creating an Israeli-Palestinian state is analyzed with accordance to different organizational models addressing key aspects both for Israeli and Palestinian alike—a *Unitary State*, a *State with a Palestinian Autonomy* and a *Federal State*²³. All the above proposals have their advantages but also flaws. The *Unitary State* model envisions a creation of one state, with one governmental body, comprising today’s Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, therefore avoiding any territorial divisions, relocating controversial settlements. All the citizens would enjoy equal rights including political participation and voting rights. Consolidating the two nations into a unitary body will (in a long term) lead to greater interaction and full integration and benefits resulting from Israel’s economic development and Palestinian younger population. The feasibility of such a solution would require a consent of both actors, who will have to resign from individual goals that were crucial for many years. Since Israel is the stronger state, more affluent and potent, there is a threat that

²² E. Said, *The One-State Solution*, <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/01/10/magazine/the-one-state-solution.html> [accessed: 10.10.2024].

²³ P.S. Baruch, *Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: The Viability of One-State Models*, <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/one-state-models/> [accessed: 10.10.2024].

the Palestinian side of the equation would see it as annexation, and due to poorer education and greater poverty, would not be equal citizens. A *State with a Palestinian Autonomy* model assumes a single state on the entire territory of Israel and the West Bank and Gaza Strip that includes within an autonomous Palestinian area within. Such solutions allow avoidance of land division, identity preservation and self-rule for the Palestinians by an autonomous Palestinian government. This model requires certain moving of settlements to determine acceptable new boundaries and difficult negotiations over the future of Jerusalem with its holy sites. The above will require far-reaching consent on both sides. Yet the most challenging, if not impossible, aspect of this model is that it requires the Palestinians to give up their national aspirations for establishing their own state in exchange for gaining full citizen rights. Palestinian own state has been a driving force for a generation of Palestinians and this desire is deeply rooted in their identity. The next model, the *Federal State* model, postulates creation of one state with a central federal government composed of federal districts—Jewish character districts and Arab ones. Such an organization would avoid further land division, Israel's identity and democracy would remain untouched, Palestinian would be created while broad powers would be transferred to the district level, creating self-rule for the Palestinians and the Jews in a variety of domains. Under such a model the issue of Jerusalem's sensitivity should be addressed separately, possibly giving it a special status with division of authority. The weakness of this model lies, as in the previously discussed ideas, in the fact that the new federal state would to a great extent rely on economic and civic solutions replicated from the existing ones in Israel—the broadly understood democratic ones, often foreign to the Palestinians. The deep cultural and religious differences, the many years of hostility between the two nations, and the potential for violence will pose a major challenge in this model where an extensive level of cooperation among the federations is necessary.

The three models are pictured below, with the Gaza Strip excluded, since it is doubted if Mahmud Abbas, the president of the State of Palestine and the Palestinian National Authority, is in power to speak in the name of and decide about the Gaza Strip which is governed by Hamas. Hamas, despite being elected in democratic elections, is recognized by Israel and most of the international community as a terrorist organization. The above analysis of different models of the one-state solution are theoretical solutions which could be implemented with or without the Gaza Strip.

Figure 4: Three one-state solution models

Source: <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/one-state-models/>.

Conclusion

The discourse on the future of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict stands at a crucial point. There is the long existing and original UN plan dating back to 1947—the partition plan of the Mandatory Palestine. And, while this plan was operative, logical and desired, the events in the Greater Middle East and between Israel and Palestine have snarled this solution. Growing grievances, Palestinian frustrations and aspirations, Israeli security needs and ambitions of a growing nation, all add up to a souring especially with the present hostility picture on the ground.

Possibly one of the biggest weaknesses in the one or two-state solutions is that these derive from third actors. The UN, the Middle East Quartet, the USA, the EU and also the Arab states or different analysts and experts have been engaged in the peace process and negotiation since the very beginning of the conflict and have offered assistance, solutions and even plans for sponsoring peace. There have never been any serious declarations nor action from either direct actor supporting a realistic solution to the conflict. As argued before the Madrid talks and later, the 2000 Camp David Summit did manage to bridge Israel and Palestine with solution offers but failed to provide a stable and plausible context. The level of bilateral distrust and some level of Palestinian distrust towards the US (Washington has been always seen as Israel backer) prevented implementations of a final solution.

As for today, neither side of the conflict is actively seeking establishment of a negotiation platform that might lead to a one or two-state solution. On the Israeli side, the hawkish Prime Minister Netanyahu is raging a retaliation war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip, fighting Hezbollah in Lebanon and carrying out preemptive air strikes in Syria in order to pacify future Syrian attacks. For Israel's disproportionate actions in Gaza, the UN has issued a warrant of arrest for Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu²⁴. On numerous occasions Netanyahu has declared that the time for a final solution to Hamas and the threats this organization is posing has come, and despite international criticism of the scale of this operation, and domestic criticism for failure to save kidnapped Israelis by Hamas, he persists on his actions. The Palestinian side is represented by Hamas in Gaza and the West Bank-based president Mahmoud Abbas, who is also chair of the Fatah party and the Palestine Liberation Organization. By now, after 20 years in office, Abbas is seen as a weak leader who is incapable of effective negotiations with Israel and, what is more, is incapable of securing himself Hamas's support in the negotiations. Hamas is engaged in deadly confrontations with Israel and, as for today, an on the ground results from the confrontations are a blur just like the Israel-Hamas negotiations. With today's ongoing military conflict, and the actors engaged, finding a solution not likely. While this Israeli stance is awaited, in practice, Israel acts with accordance to facts on the ground policy—building new settlements, the demolition of Palestinian housing, the closure of Palestinian institutions, and, among others, restricting movement permit regime. The further all Israel's moves and decisions go, the more difficult it will be to redress the situation. While Israel is continuing its operations in Gaza, the Golan Heights, and also building settlements in the West Bank, following generations of Palestinian are born and raised with a deep sense of injustice and hostility towards Israel.

While the direction of negotiations, the final goal, is debated with unclear favorite the international, geopolitical situation in changing. The Middle east conflict has seen many such changes, and as we witnessed, these changes do not necessary accelerate Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Yet, this time the situation must be much different. Donald Trump during his second term might continue his earlier policies, the Abraham Accords. Promoting the Abraham Accords,

²⁴ *International Criminal Court issues arrest warrants: Pre-Trial Chamber I rejects Israel's challenges to jurisdiction and issues warrants of arrest for Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant (Non-UN Document)*, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/icc-arrest-warrant-netanyahu-21nov24/> [accessed: 01.12.2024].

mainly bridging Israel and Saudi Arabia, together with putting greater pressure on Iran, especially the Iranian nuclear program, might result in further weakening of the Palestinian position. Normalization of Israeli-Saudi relations and greater attention to the Iranian challenge will take the focus off the Palestinian case, further hindering searching for any solution. And, while shorter or more long-lasting peace is plausible there is no consensus on the end solution. There is only an internationally agreed framework towards the conditions without a clear final lawful solution. This international framework to a certain extent has existed for a number of years and it assumes: self-determination, sovereignty and equal rights for both peoples, mutual security based on co-operative security arrangements, recognition of the unified, sovereign and independent State of Palestine and full UN membership, an end to hostilities, strengthening democratic process in both Israel and Palestine, and full international financial and political support through the process and later on. The above listed condition are agreed upon but still difficult to implement. Despite the challenging nature of these conditions for both Israel and the Palestinians, there is no consensus to the end result of these efforts. The two-state solution, as for today, seem to be unrealistic and the one-state solutions in different forms, while on paper might be convincing, in practice and realpolitik terms are unobtainable. As for today, with both the direct actors of the conflict, the third players and the place of the conflict on the international interest plans, it seems that Israelis and Palestinians will need to secure themselves with patience on the long-lasting path towards a solution to their conflict.

The Middle East chessboard is complex with different actors having different interests and having different tools and leverages to secure these interests. Among these actors the Palestinians do not enjoy a strong position and do not enjoy sufficient arguments to incline Israel to negotiate and possibly support one or two-state solution. With American support, Iranian threats and possible deal with the Saudi Arabia, one again, securing peace with the Palestinians and finding a solution to the conflict seems to be secondary.

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