

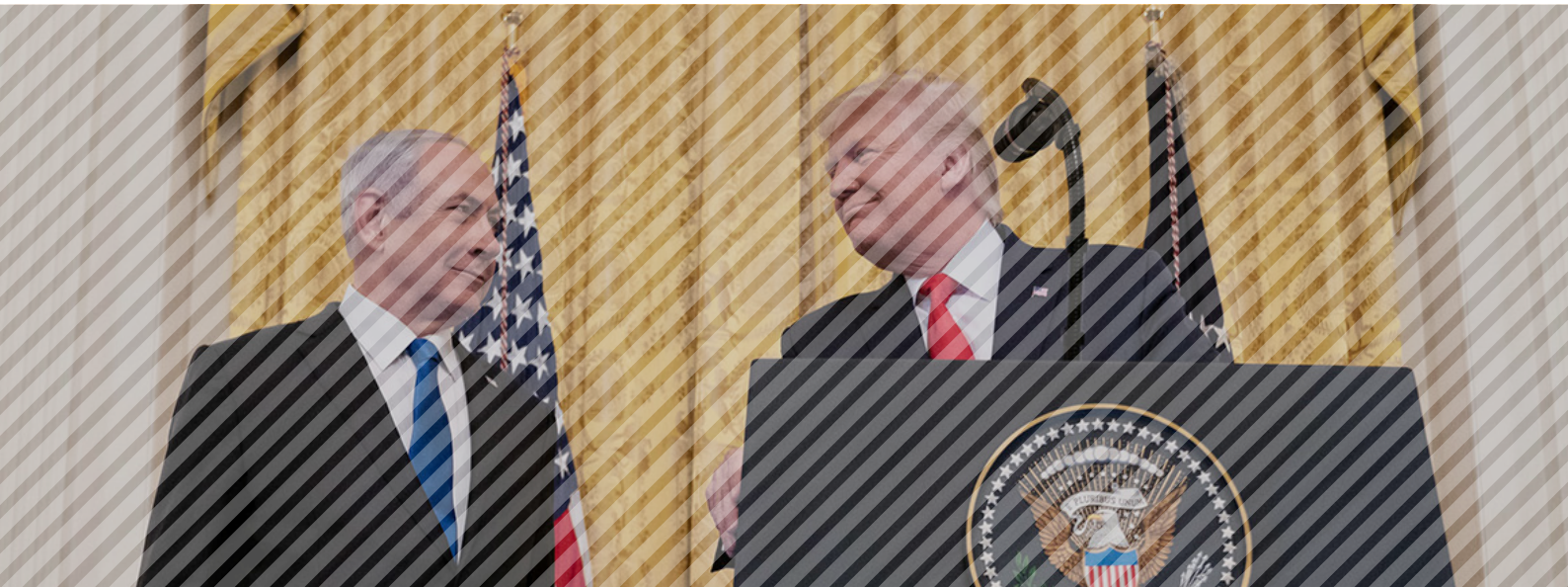
# AN ANALYTICAL READING OF AMERICAN INITIATIVES TO RESOLVE THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE: FROM SUPPORTING BALFOUR'S PROMISE TO THE DEAL OF THE CENTURY (1917 – 2020)

ANALYSIS



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper provides an analytical reading of the twenty American initiatives undertaken to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. The paper begins by reviewing these projects, followed by a study of their most important characteristics. Next, the paper provides an analytical reading of the key characteristics of the Deal of the Century.

■ Results of the study indicate that US projects towards Palestine are characterized by a gradual negative change towards Palestinians' rights, while revealing that the most important determinants behind the various projects are the de-facto policies imposed by Israel as well as pressure exerted by the Zionist lobby in the United States.

■ The study's results further indicate that there are no fundamental differences between the Republican and Democratic Party in terms of the content of the projects submitted. Instead, the true differences arise between varying presidential agendas. The paper also discusses how these projects morphed from being what were initially strategies for conflict resolution into strategies addressing immediate tactical objectives.

■ Analysing Arab and Palestinian behaviour towards these projects reveals the appearance of an initial stage of rejection, followed by acceptance after the imposition of new realities. This is followed by the rejection of new realities, and demands for a return to the previous status quo. It is also clear that the act of rejection of settlement projects yields loss, but that acceptance in and of itself generates a greater loss, as with the results of the Oslo accords.

■ A reading of the Palestinian Liberation Organization's (PLO) determinants on accepting or rejecting various projects indicates the prime determinant being the recognition of the Palestinians' right to self-determination in order to realize the existence of a Palestinian entity. Other outstanding issues, such as refugees, as well as the land and the status of Jerusalem are less defined given that there is more openness to negotiation on those fronts.

■ Historical inductive reasoning further confirms that the success of any project will not be achieved without consent of the direct parties, namely the Palestinians and Israelis, which has not been achieved in any of the initiatives to date except Oslo.

■ With regards to the Deal of the Century, the study shows that one of its most important characteristics is its transgression against Palestinians. The study shows that the deal has two flaws, the first regarding the legitimacy of the status quo, which is unaffected by the Palestinian rejection, and the other related to future realities which are difficult to achieve without the consent of both sides. The paper concludes that the state of Israel will continue to impose new alternative realities based on what has been achieved so far.

### **Reviewing American Initiatives**

This section reviews American projects that were advanced to settle the Palestinian issue from 1917 up until just before the beginning of the American Trump administration in 2016. The number of these projects is 20. It is noteworthy that the first two projects, Balfour Declaration and the decision to partition Palestine, were not purely American, however American support was a fundamental factor in their launching and implementation. The remaining projects were solely American initiatives.



## **American Initiatives Prior to Palestine's 1948 Occupation**

### **1. Supporting Balfour's Promise - 1917**

It is possible to document the beginning of US projects pertaining to the Palestinian cause back to American support for the adoption of the Balfour Declaration in 1917. Then US President Woodrow Wilson sent his representative, Colonel House to attend a British cabinet session where he endorsed the Balfour promise to establish a national homeland for Jews in Palestine. On 22/9/1922, the United States conclusively ratified the Balfour Declaration, premised on Balfour's promise. Acceptance of the promise was met with celebration by the Zionist movement and scathing Arab denunciation. The promise subsequently would become the basis of the 1948 decision to occupy and partition Palestine.

### **2. Supporting the Palestine Partition Plan - 1947**

The Partition Plan for Palestine was adopted by UN General Assembly Resolution 181 in November 1947, which stipulated the partition of Palestine into two states. The first was Israel, and controlled 56% of the land, while the second was Palestine, with control of 44% of the land. Jerusalem was established as an 'Special International Regime'. Although the majority of the members voted in favour of Palestine's partition, the vote did not reach a two-thirds quorum, and therefore the resolution was not passed. The United States pressured several

small countries like Haiti and Liberia in various ways to re-vote for the resolution, which succeeded when the UN passed the partition resolution with a two-vote majority. Despite this result, the resolution was rejected by the Arabs and was not enacted. As a result, the US Administration announced a new draft resolution in March 1948, in which the US retracted its support of Resolution 181 because it believed that the Palestinian partition required military force to implement, something the US administration did not wish at that time to preserve its oil interests.

### **3. The American Project to put Palestine under international mandate - 1948**

After the Americans were convinced that the partition resolution could not be implemented peacefully, American ambassador Warren Austin presented a draft resolution to the Security Council in April 1948 imposing an international mandate on Palestine until a political solution was reached. The initiative surprised the Zionist leadership, who rejected the imposition of international supervision and called for facilitating the establishment of a state for the Jews. While the American delegate was defending the international supervision project, the Zionist movement announced the establishment of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948. Despite the US opposition to the project, it was the first country to recognize Israel, just minutes after it was established by the then US President Harry Truman.

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#### **American Projects between 1948-1967**

##### **4. McGhee's project for economic development – 1949**

This project was presented by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State George McGhee and was primarily aimed at finding a solution to the refugee problem through two tracks. The first would see the extensive settlement of Palestinians in Arab countries in return for financial assistance to these countries. The second would see 100,000 of 750,000 Palestinian refugees return to Palestine in a manner that did not harm Jewish interests. Arab countries rejected the draft because it violated Resolution 194, which stipulates the Palestinian refugees' right of return to Palestine. Israel also refused to return part of the refugees, which caused the project to fail.

##### **5. Johnston's Project - 1953**

In the beginning of US President Dwight Eisenhower's terms in 1953, his envoy Eric Johnston was sent to the Middle East in an effort to resolve the water crisis between the Arabs and Israelis. The Johnston project, dubbed the "Jordan Valley Unified Water Plan", which would redistribute Jordan, Syria and Lebanon's waters to Israel as part of a regional solution. It also attempted to resolve the refugee issue by settling a large number of people in Jordan, and using the Jordan river for irrigation projects and the generation of electricity. The project also did not abolish the idea of the former «McGhee initiative» for the return of refugees to their homes, but preferred to keep them in neighbouring Arab countries. The Arabs rejected the draft, followed by Palestinian rejection at the 1955 Palestine Refugee Conference in Jerusalem. Like others before the project ended up failing and was not implemented.

### **6. Gamal Abdel Nasser's Initiative - 1955**

The parties to this proposed project were Israeli and Egyptian, and as the American Administration had sent three specialists in the Middle East to resolve the Egyptian-Israeli conflict, the late Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser emphasized that any peace with Israel is conditioned by the implementation of UN resolutions on the return of Palestinian refugees as well as the partition of land in accordance with the 1947 partition resolution. This was rejected by Israel at the time, which led to the failure of this project, especially after the Israeli occupation carried out an attack on Egyptian forces in Gaza.

### **7. The Dulles Project - 1955**

This project was introduced by US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and aimed to end the Arab-Israeli conflict by resolving the refugee problem by addressing it as a humanitarian issue. This would be done by reclaiming land in Arab countries and resettling refugees there. It also called for overcoming the rampant fear between the region's countries and Israel, and resolving its border disputes with Arab countries. All

of this would be a prelude to resolving other issues, including the status of Jerusalem. The Arab League maintained the importance of any solution based on previously adopted United Nations resolutions, which was not included in the Dulles project. Israel had expressed its readiness to make the Dulles proposals a starting point for the solution, while stressing that it would not make any concessions regarding land, alongside its unwillingness to amend armistice lines. However, the project ended in failure after Arab-Israeli disagreement over the project.

### **American Projects after the 1967 Occupation and before the 1993 Oslo Agreement**

#### **8. US President Kennedy's Initiative – 1961**

After taking office, President John F. Kennedy expressed his desire to resolve the refugee issue, the water issue of the Jordan River, and the Arab-Israeli conflict in a fair and just manner guaranteeing the return of refugees to their lands, with compensation for those who did not. Arab countries welcomed this and welcomed the initiative, but it was rejected by Israel and the Zionist lobby, as well as the American House of

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Representatives and Senate, which was biased towards Israel. Therefore, the American president's initiative failed. President Kennedy then commissioned Joseph Johnson, president of the Carnegie Endowment for World Peace, to prepare a new project to resolve the refugee problem. Among the points called for in the new project was the choice of return for refugees or the alternative of compensation. The project was welcomed by Arabs, but was once again rejected by Israel, thus reaching a dead end.

#### **9. Scranton's Project - 1968**

US President Richard Nixon sent his envoy William Scranton to the Middle East in search of a political settlement to the conflict. Scranton presented a project that called for the annexation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip to Jordan, the establishment of a land route running from Hebron, Jerusalem, Beersheba and all the way to Gaza, the demilitarization of Gaza, and further maintaining Israeli security posts in the Nablus, Jenin and Qalqilya triangle. He also called for Israel to restore Arab Jerusalem to Jordan, and place holy sites under international control. Israel and American Jews rejected this project, which caused President Nixon to backtrack on it.

#### **10. Roger's Project - 1970**

After Egypt's war of attrition and the actions of the Palestinian resistance to strike against the Israeli occupation from the Jordanian Front during the 1967 war, US Secretary of State William Rogers decided to intervene during the President Richard Nixon administration. On June 25, 1970 he presented a draft resolution aiming for a 90-day ceasefire between Egypt and Jordan on the one hand and Israel on the other, calling on the three parties to accept the implementation of Resolution 242 in its entirety. His proposal also called for mutual recognition among the three parties, and emphasized the sovereignty of each party, the integrity of its territory and its political independence. Egypt, Jordan and Israel

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agreed to the project, but the Palestinians rejected it. The United States abandoned the Rogers project as soon as the Egyptian war of attrition calmed, and the Palestinian resistance was struck. Israel also rejected the proposal under the pretext that Egypt did not abide by the terms of the ceasefire. Although the project failed to implement resolution 242, it managed to calm the war of attrition and weaken the Palestinian resistance in Jordan.

#### **11. Brzezinski's Project – 1977**

After Jimmy Carter took office in 1977, he surprised and angered the Jewish community in the United States in his first speech in January in which he emphasized the importance of a national homeland for the Palestinians and the need for Palestinians to accept Israel's legitimacy. The Jewish community's reaction caused him to retreat from his earlier adopted tone, and to later assert that he meant a Palestinian entity belonging to Jordan or Syria. Months after this speech, he announced Zbigniew Brzezinski's project, who served as national security advisor. The project aimed to bring the West Bank and Gaza to Jordan, and grant it demilitarized autonomy, to give Jordan the right to use a private sector port in Haifa, to keep Jerusalem as the unified capital of Israel,

and to have a religious council overseeing the holy sites. The project also called on the Palestinians to give up their demands for full independence in exchange for Israel abandoning its claims to sovereignty in the West Bank and Gaza, and to allow the Arab population in the West Bank and Gaza to move freely in Israel and to give the Israeli's freedom of movement in the West Bank and Gaza. The PLO rejected the bill because it did not give the Palestinians the right to determine their own destiny, establish an independent state or allow for the refugees' return. The Arab position also rejected the project.

#### **12. Carter's Second Project – 1977**

Following Carter's first speech in January 1977 and the Palestinians' rejection of the Brzezinski project, Jimmy Carter returned and announced his second project, calling for Israel to recognize the legitimate rights of Palestinians in exchange for Arab recognition of secure borders for Israel. The PLO welcomed the project, but Israel and the Jewish lobby rejected it due to Carter's emphasis on Palestinian rights; thus the project failed.

#### **13. The Camp David Project - 1978**

After the Egyptian President's visit to Jerusalem and the Israeli parliament, and

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following Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin's visit to Ismailia in Egypt, the two sides were not able to reach a political settlement agreement. In this context, the American administration, headed by Carter, intervened and called on both parties to hold talks at Camp David. The two parties attended the 12-day talks, culminating in the signing of the Camp David Accord on 9/17/1978. This agreement resulted in two documents: a framework for peace between Israel and Egypt, and a framework for peace in the Middle East. One of the most important elements of the accord called in the second framework for the election of a self-governing authority in the West Bank and Gaza Strip while defining its responsibilities in negotiations. Palestinians would be called, on the basis of resolutions 242 and 338. While the agreement did not explicitly mention subordination of the local government to Jordan, it nonetheless called for the presence of Jordanian citizens in the new entity's police force. The PLO rejected the agreement because it did not recognize the Palestinians' right to self-determination, and given that it had crossed important issues such as the status of refugees and Jerusalem. The Camp David framework on the Palestinian issue thus failed to reach a solution.

#### **14. Reagan's Project - 1982**

US President Ronald Reagan announced his project for a peace process in the region in September 1982, while stressing the importance of the Camp David Agreement as a key platform to any solution. One of the most significant items of his project was his denial of the Palestinians' right to establish a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Instead, he called for self-rule in the West Bank and Gaza under the auspices of Jordan's government. On the other hand, he also stressed that Israel was not entitled to annexation in the occupied territories or to building settlements, while calling for the non-division of the city of Jerusalem, and to decide its future through negotiations in addition to his emphasis of the United States's commitment to Israel's security. The Palestinians supported Reagan's assertion of the importance of halting settlements and annexation, but refused to give up the right of the

Palestinians to self-determination and to establishing their independent state. Israel rejected the project and confirmed that it would continue building settlements. Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin at the time said that Reagan had exceeded the stage of friendship, while his Minister Ariel Sharon declared that he would solve the issue through the use of tank tracks. Although the Egyptian and European position supported the Reagan project, it ultimately failed due to rejection by the Palestinians and Israelis.

#### **15. George Schultz's Project - 1988**

After the outbreak of the first Palestinian Intifada, an American initiative was launched by its Foreign Minister George Schultz, who was authorized by President Reagan in the first half of 1988 to achieve peace in the region. One of the most significant points of his project was the establishment of Palestinian self-rule after the withdrawal of Israeli civil and military administrations from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, provided that it would be part of a larger confederation under Jordan. This would serve as a transitional stage where negotiations could begin between Israel and neighbouring countries on the

basis of all resolutions 242 and 338 and all their clauses. Furthermore, it stipulated that Palestinian representation would be part of a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation that would discuss the final status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The draft further called for postponing the issue of Jerusalem's status until a later stage, with continued Israeli control, and Washington's commitment to the principle of safe borders. The PLO rejected the initiative to ignore the Palestinians' right to self-determination and Israel did not show any enthusiasm for it. In December 1988, after the failure of the Schultz project, the late Palestinian President Yasser Arafat announced to the UN General Assembly that the PLO had renounced terrorism and recognized Israel's right to exist, and agreed to resolutions 242 and 338.

#### **16. James Baker's Project - 1989**

After President George Bush Sr. took office, his administration asked Israel to present an initiative for a settlement. Consequently, a plan known as the Shamir Plan was submitted, named for the reigning occupation's Prime Minister at the time. The plan called for elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to select Palestinians

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unaffiliated with the PLO for negotiations on an interim autonomy agreement, in accordance with the Camp David framework. US Secretary of State James Baker welcomed the initiative, while former Egyptian President Mubarak sent Yitzhak Shamir ten points in response to his proposal. His most significant requests were to cease all settlement activities in the occupied territories, and to begin practical steps to settle the conflict based on the principle of territorial concessions in exchange for peace. To reconcile Shamir and Mubarak, James Baker also introduced a five-point initiative, also known as the 'five points', which primarily sought to start Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. The Likud announced partial approval of Baker's initiative on the condition that Palestinians from East Jerusalem were not part of the dialogue, and that the PLO was kept from interfering. Meanwhile, Shimon Peres announced his approval of the initiative only to officially announce Israel's rejection of the initiative following the Likud's pressure. The PLO also announced its rejection of Baker's points, which were subject to Israeli conditions, and thus the project failed.

#### **17. Madrid Conference for Peace - 1991**

In a speech to Congress in March 1991, President Bush H.W. Bush Sr. declared his vision for settlement, affirming that peace must be based on resolutions 242 and 338, on the principle of territorial concessions in exchange for peace. After the PLO agreed to send a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation that did include representatives from the organization, Israel agreed to sit at the negotiating table in Madrid. But the negotiations were not successful because Shamir did not agree to cease settlement activity. Meanwhile, while Bill Clinton assumed power and Rabin was successful in leading a new government, secret negotiations in Oslo between the PLO and Israel succeeded in reaching the Oslo Agreement.

### **American Projects after the Oslo Agreement**

#### **18. Clinton's Plan - 2000**

US President Bill Clinton announced his plan for resolving the conflict following the failure of the second Camp David talks in July 2000 between the Occupation's Prime Minister Barak and the late President Yasser Arafat due to Israel's crippling positions which included refusals to accept the right of return or abandon East Jerusalem. This also came after the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada months after the Camp David talks failed, and would come to be known as the 'Clinton Parameters'. Its key take-away was that 94-96% of a Palestinian state would consist of the West Bank, with the exception of Jerusalem, provided that Israel includes settlement blocs. With regards to Jerusalem, he



proposed that Arab areas would become Palestinian, and Israeli areas would be Jewish areas, including Jerusalem's Old Quarter. He also proposed that the Al-Ghawwar area falls under international and Israeli auspices, and that refugees would return to Palestinian-controlled areas. While the Clinton plan was vague, both Palestinian and Israeli sides agreed to the initiative with reservations about the details. After the end of Clinton and Ehud Baraks' mandate in the following year, the Clinton plan talks were unable to reach a clear agreement between the two parties, and thus failed to reach a solution.

#### **19. The Roadmap - 2003**

After George W. Bush took office in 2002, and under the auspices of escalating Palestinian resistance operations and a failed Clinton plan, the US State Department issued a document called the Middle East Peace Roadmap on April 30, 2003. One of the most significant points it called for was the end of "violence", and the normalization of life for Palestinians by rebuilding Palestinian institutions, especially the security services, as well as the withdrawal of Israel from areas it occupied since September 28 2000, and the dismantling of settlements built after March 2001 in accordance with

the recommendations of the Mitchell Committee Report. The roadmap also called for normalized relations between Arab states and Israel. As for the core issues, they were chiefly border disputes, the status of Jerusalem, refugees and settlements. The road map proposed a third phase, beginning in 2004-2005, after achieving the above objectives. Despite the Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas's forced acceptance of the plan by the occupation's prime minister at the time expressed reservations about a number of its provisions, bringing the roadmap to a dead end.

#### **20. George Mitchell, Peace Envoy - 2009**

After Barack Obama came to power, his envoy George Mitchell was sent to the Middle East in 2009 in an attempt to search for a political settlement. Despite his success in bringing President Abbas and Netanyahu together in several talks, it did not lead to any agreement between the two parties given that the occupation was intransigent on not freezing settlement construction, and the Palestinian Authority had submitted a request to obtain an international resolution condemning the settlements, which served as one of the reasons for the failure of these talks.

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### Summary of the American Projects

No.	Project Name	Salient Points	Focal Point	US Ruling Party	Ruling Israeli party	Party stances	Outcome
1	Supporting Balfour's Promise	A Jewish homeland	Political	Woodrow Wilson Democrat	-	Zionist acceptance Arab rejection	Palestine's Occupation
2	Supporting the Partition Decision 1947	Territory	Political	Harry Truman Democrat	-	Arab rejection Israeli acceptance	Failed Project
3	Palestine under International Custody 1948	Territory	Political	Harry Truman Democrat	-	Israeli rejection	Failed Project
4	"McGhee" for Economic Development 1949	Refugees	Economic Humanitarian	Harry Truman Democrat	Ben Gurion Labour - Left	Arab rejection Israeli rejection	Failed Project
5	Johnston 1953	Water Refugees	Economic Humanitarian	Dwight Eisenhower Republican	Ben Gurion Labour - Left	Arab rejection Israeli acceptance	Failed Project
6	Gamal Abdelnasser 1954	Territory Refugees	Political	Dwight Eisenhower Republican	Ben Gurion Labour - Left	Arab interest for solution Israeli rejection	Failed Negotations
7	Dulles 1955	Refugees Territory Normalization	Humanitarian Economic	Dwight Eisenhower Republican	Moshe Sharett Labour - Left	Arab league rejection Israeli enthusiasm	Failed Project
8	John F. Kennedy 1961	Refugees Water	Political Humanitarian	John F. Kennedy Democrat	Ben Gurion Labour - Left	Arab interest to begin Israeli rejection	Failed Initiative
9	Scranton 1968	Rejection of roadmap Jerusalem Self-rule	Political	Richard Nixon Democrat	Levi Eshkol Labour - Left	Israeli rejection and pressure on Nixon	Failed Project

10	Roger's Project 1970	Resolution 242	Political	Richard Nixon Republican	Golda Meir Labour - Left	All parties accepted, followed by Israeli and US rejection	Failed Project
11	Zbigniew Brzezinski 1977	Rejection of self- determination Self-rule Jerusalem	Political Economic	Jimmy Carter Democrat	Menachem Begin Likud - Right	Arab and Palestinian rejection Unclear Israeli response	Failed Project
12	Carter II 1977	Self- determination	Political	Jimmy Carter Democrat	Menachem Begin Likud - Right	Palestinian acceptance Israeli rejection	Failed Project
13	Camp David Project/ Palestinian Schism 1978	Rejection of Self- determination Self-rule	Political	Jimmy Carter Democrat	Menachem Begin Likud - Right	Israeli acceptance Palestinian rejection/ Egyptian acceptance	Failed Project
14	Reagan 1982	Rejection of self- determination Self-rule  Settlements  Jerusalem	Political	Ronald Reagan Republican	Menachem Begin Likud - Right	Palestinian and Arab rejection, with the exception of Egypt Israeli rejection	Failed Project
15	George Schultz 1988	Rejection of self- determination Self-rule	Political	Ronald Reagan Republican	Yitzhak Shamir Coalition	Palestinian rejection  Lack of Israeli interest	Failed Project
16	James Parker 1989 (Five points)	Rejection of self- determination Self-rule Beginning negotiations	Political	George W. Bush Sr. Republican	Yitzhak Shamir Coalition	Israeli hesitation followed by rejection  Palestinian reservations, followed by rejection	Failed Project
17	Madrid 1991	Full negotiations	Political	George W. Bush Sr. Republican	Yitzhak Shamir Coalition	Palestinian and Israeli acceptance to negotiate, followed by failure to yield results	Success and Failure

18	Clinton 2000	Territory Jerusalem Refugees Self- determination	Political	Bill Clinton Democrat	Ehud Barak Labour - Left	Palestinian and Israeli conditional acceptance	Initial acceptance followed by failure
19	Roadmap 2003	Resumed negotiations  Palestinian institutions  Security	Political Economic	George Bush Republican	Ariel Sharon Likud - Right	Palestinian acceptance Israeli rejection	Failed Plan
20	Mitchell Talks 2009	Resumed negotiations	Political	Barack Obama Democrat	Benjamin Netanyahu Likud - Right	Acceptance of both parties to hold talks, with disagreement over details	Failed Talks

### An Analytical Reading of American Projects

In an attempt to historically deduce from the most important American projects in the resolution of the Palestinian question, we can identify the most salient and significant features of these projects and trace their historical development in line with the following points.

#### Progressively negative changes in American projects

Prior to Palestine's occupation in 1948, the American position was supportive of the partition resolution, which stipulated granting 44% of the land to Palestinians and 56% to the Jews. The nature of the conflict presented itself as a land problem, where the Jews competed with the original inhabitants to build a nation for themselves, and thus was a political problem between two parties. This outlook changed after the occupation of 1948, as all American projects announced from 1948 to 1967 began to see the nature of the conflict as an issue of 750,000 Palestinian refugees who had been displaced from their land, necessitating a solution be found for them. Most of the solutions oscillated between two courses: settlement in Arab countries in return for compensation and finding economic solutions for them (aid and projects) or the return of a small percentage of refugees not exceeding 13%. To this end, the Palestinian issue was basically regarded as humanitarian rather than political. Other significant issues such as the Palestinians' right to self-determination were not noted in any American projects during that period.

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After the occupation of 1967, the nature of the struggle itself changed for the US according to what the analyst found in the characteristics of American projects, which he believes mostly revolved around establishing self-rule for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which would fall under Jordan and the refusal to establish an independent Palestinian state. Other issues of significant import were Jerusalem and its settlements. The refugee portfolio, which was a central issue prior to 1967, was diminished in importance throughout American projects at the time. American projects in this period were characterized by their refusal to give Palestinians the right to self-determination and establishing their state. US President Jimmy Carter was likely the only one to express his conviction on the importance of having a Palestinian state.

After Jordan disassociated itself from the West Bank in 1988, and after President Arafat announced his recognition of Israel and renounced violence before the General Assembly in 1988, American projects towards the conflict took another turn. They moved from offering detailed solutions for each project, as

with cases of self-rule, Jerusalem and settlements, to presenting new general frameworks, which materialize in Palestinian and Israeli sides sitting at the negotiation table under American auspices. This method was clearly present in the Baker Initiative and the Madrid Peace Conference. Consequently, the idea of bringing parties to negotiations has become a project in itself that the American Administration seeks to achieve. This track was further reinforced by the Oslo Agreement, where the parties have not reached a solution to outstanding issues known as final status issues, and which was postponed for five years without resolution.

After the failure of the Camp David talks between Ehud Barak and Yasser Arafat in 2000, American projects retreated to their old track of proposing detailed solutions to each of the projects, but these solutions came with a lower ceiling than before. For example, the Clinton Project in 2000 proposed that Israel include Israeli settlements, which it rejected in previous projects. The 2003 road map came with a much lower ceiling, focusing on issues of stopping “violence” and returning the situation to



the pre- 2000 status quo as a requirement to begin negotiations. Obama's policy also sought a return to dialog to resume negotiations. This indicates that a return to negotiations has become a target in itself

When reading the nature of the files presented in the American projects, it is noteworthy that over time some American concerns and points have been deprioritized as with the return of refugees. It is also noteworthy that the American role has transformed into one of sponsoring dialog and negotiations especially after the PLO joined negotiations in the early nineties. In the end, however, the change in the behaviour of American projects did not contribute to reaching a political settlement between the Palestinians and Israelis. On the contrary, Israel's control of the land increased while other dossiers became more complicated. Ultimately, Israel's behaviour reflects a strategy of keeping the conflict in the American and Israeli mind on the Palestinian issue. American projects soon became interested in solving the land issue, with an end to projects before the Century Deal that called for the resumption of negotiations on various files. The following table shows the extent to which the substance of US projects has changed since 1947.

Time Period	Key Focus of US Project	Other Dossiers
Pre-1947 Occupation	Territory	Water
1948- 1967	Solving the refugee issue	Normalization, borders
1967 – 1988	Self-rule under Jordan	Jerusalem, rejecting self-determination
1988 - 2000	Negotiations	Negotiations on all dossiers
Clinton 2000	Territory, Settlements, Jerusalem, Self-determination	-
2003 – 2016 – Obama policy	Creating dialogue	Negotiations on all dossiers

### Determinants of US Project Content

The content of US projects are shaped by two main characteristics: the first being the new frameworks imposed by the Israeli occupation's policy of fait accompli, and the second being the refusal and acceptance of the project by the Zionist lobby.

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### **The Fait Accompli Policy**

It would seem that the ceiling of demands the American projects call for is limited by the actual policy imposed by the Israeli occupation. For instance, while the American position called for supporting the partition decision which meant giving Palestinians 44% of the land, it retracted its position after Israel's occupation of 78% of the land in 1948. Its new projects have morphed into an attempt to deal with the new reality. Furthermore, after the occupation of 1967, a number of American projects called for self-rule on the basis of Resolution 242, which calls for the withdrawal of the occupation from the lands it occupied in 1967. But the roadmap in 2003, for instance, called for the withdrawal of the occupation from areas occupied after the Al-Aqsa Intifada, and defined areas (A) according to Oslo's division, while calling on Israel to dismantle all settlements built after March 2001, and not since its occupation in 1967. The above-mentioned policy of fait accompli does not necessarily mean that the content of the American projects meets Israeli wishes. In fact, many American projects were rejected by Israel prior to being rejected by an Arab or Palestinian.

### **Zionist Lobby's Pressure**

When comparing the content of projects across different American administrations, the reader finds a difference between one presidential tenure to another. However, in all cases, the Zionist lobby plays a

significant role through its support or rejection, whether it is content to keep the American project as it is or to modify it. Ultimately, it determines the Israeli position in rejection or acceptance. It can also be seen that the Zionist pressure exerted onto these American projects have been harmful two points: the recognition of the Palestinian's right to self-determination, and the call for the return of refugees to their land. For example, in 1961 when President Kennedy's project called for refugees to be entitled to either return or to financial compensation, he was met with outrage from the Zionist lobby and Israel. This also occurred in 1977 when President Jimmy Carter declared his conviction on the importance of a national Palestinian homeland, which angered the Zionist lobby forcing him to retract his stance. Ronald Reagan, in sharp contrast, denied Palestinians' rights to a state, which was welcomed by the Zionist lobby.

### **Projects as tactics more than strategy**

Those following the history of American projects find that a pressing question poses itself about the extent to which Americans are serious in reaching a political settlement that would give the Palestinians their right to self-determination, at least on the 1967 lands. Although it is difficult to determine the nature of American goals in presenting different projects, the timing of some of these projects shows that they were often a tactical step that aided Israel in emerging from a crisis or confrontation

*Reviewing all these projects leads to the conclusion that many of the proposed American projects came at important stages in time to help tactically aid the occupation, or relieve it from crises of confrontation*

with different parties. For instance, the Rogers Project came after the Egyptian war of attrition, while the Palestinian resistance had launched several strikes against Jordanian occupation. Thus, the most important item of the proposed project was a ceasefire and a call to implement Resolution 242. Nevertheless, the United States abandoned the project after the war of attrition had calmed, and the occupation had weakened the Palestinian resistance. This was repeated after the first Intifada broke out. Moreover, this was the first invitation of its kind to negotiate with Palestinians directly without any other Arab parties (Jordan and Egypt as called for in Camp David Accords in 1978). The very same occurred in the Madrid Conference, which came three years after the start and continuation of the Palestinian Intifada. The conference and peace talks that followed helped bring the Intifada to the brink of calm. In view of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000, it is possible to note that the American projects, whether the Clinton plan or the Roadmap, were implicitly aimed at pacifying the Intifada. Reviewing all these projects leads to the conclusion that many of the proposed American projects came at important stages in time to help tactically aid the occupation, or relieve it from crises of confrontation.

The assumption that American projects are a tactic, rather than a strategy for a solution is reinforced by the fact that American tools to exert pressure are not being deployed against Israel to accept a number of internationally agreed dossiers such as the illegality of settlements. On the contrary, the Palestinians are sometimes pressured not to present any draft resolution to international organizations that condemn settlements, which is what occurred during the Obama era. Therefore, the American-Israeli strategy of dealing with the Palestinian issue has been one of “prolonging the conflict” in order to further achieve the goals.

### **Republicans and Democrats: Partisan convergence and divergence between presidents**

When comparing the contents of the projects issued by successive American administrations, whether Republican or Democratic, it is difficult to monitor fundamental differences in trends between the two parties. In addition, an important factor in the content of American projects is the subjective factor associated with the conviction and orientation of various American presidents. It is also difficult to classify the leaders' conviction between being

extremist and sympathetic to the rights of the Palestinians based on the ruling party represented by the president. For instance, we find that President Harry Truman, a Democrat, adopted a project to support the partition resolution at first, followed by a project to set Palestine under international guardianship which he then defended. However, he was the first to recognize the state of Israel, just minutes after its establishment. Then there is Jimmy Carter, a Democrat, who was the first to call for the importance of a national homeland for Palestinians despite his retraction later. At the same time, the Deal of the Century by Republican President Trump was unjust to Palestinians' right in all its dossiers, and yet it admitted to the existence of a Palestinian state. When comparing projects under Reagan's Republican presidency with the Roadmap during George Bush's Republican presidency, we find that the former did not recognize the Palestinians' right to establish a state, while the latter recognized the right in spite of his Republican affiliation. Therefore, it is possible to reach a conclusion that the position of the President and his team certainly have an influence on the contents of the draft settlements presented.

### **Between losing through rejection, and losing more with acceptance**

A descriptive reading of the Arab and Palestinian behaviour in American projects shows that it starts with rejection, losing what was presented and then accepting after the imposition of a new reality. For instance, the Arabs refused to obtain 44% of the land after the partition decision, but they called for a return to this division decision between 1948 and 1967 after Israel took control of 78% of the land, as declared by Gamal Abdel Nasser in the talks during the Gamal project of 1955. After the occupation of 1967, Palestinians as well as some Arab countries, such as Syria, rejected Resolution 242, but this resolution later became the basis of any political settlement between Palestinians and the Arabs. Although a superficial descriptive reading yields the conclusion that rejection generates loss, this outcome is inaccurate and requires deeper analysis. A comparison before and after the PLO signed the Oslo Agreement reveals that the Palestinians in fact lost much more after the signing compared to what they had prior to the agreement. For instance, in the 25 years between 1967 and the signing of the Oslo Agreement, the number of settlers reached

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200,000, while that number was almost quadrupled 25 years after the signing of the Oslo Agreement. In addition, the status of Jerusalem after the Oslo Agreement was much worse than before the signing of the agreement. The Apartheid Wall took 150,000 Palestinians out of the borders of Jerusalem, and settlement projects like the Greater Jerusalem project took control of 10% of the West Bank, meaning that the pace of annexation of land and blockading of the Palestinians only increased after the Oslo Accords.

Two important questions arise in this context: What is the extent of the Israeli occupation's desire to reach a political settlement with the Palestinians? And what does it hope to achieve by accepting some American projects and not applying their provisions?

The first question is answered by the point mentioned earlier: the occupation does not want a settlement, but rather applies a strategy of "prolonging the conflict", while the second question indicates that the occupation has not complied with provisions of international resolutions or agreements by multilateral parties such as the Oslo and Rogers Accords. At the same time however, Israel has benefited from these resolutions and agreements by obtaining legitimacy and recognition of its existence and expansion. For instance, despite the rejection of the partition resolution by the Arab parties, it is necessary to know that Israel itself did not wish it, but it relied on it as a starting point to obtain the legitimacy of claiming the whole land. This was proven by the statements of the Zionist leadership at the time. On November 30, 1947, Menachem Begin said that the legitimacy of partitioning was null and void and that all the promised lands, including Palestine, belong to the Jews and will remain so forever. This announcement was preceded by a statement made by Ben Gurion in June 1938 rejecting any idea of division with the Palestinians, and exclaiming that the conquest of all Palestinian lands was necessary after Israel establishes itself as a state.

Despite Israel's acceptance of Resolution 242 in 1968, on which many subsequent US projects were based, all failed due to the intransigent position taken by the occupation in not accepting the implementation of Resolution 242. This resolution, even if not applied, provides an implicit legitimacy by the Arab states and the PLO, which it later admitted to by turning the page on the 78% of Palestinian land, and instead discussing 22%. Another legitimate benefit from the resolution is that the draft resolution itself contains ambiguities in its wording. The English version of the resolution omitted the definition in the clause "The withdrawal of Israeli forces from (territories) occupied



*In this historical context, the main objective of the Deal of the Century can be understood as legalizing fait accompli rather than reaching any real settlement with the Palestinians*

in the last conflict.” The word “territories” has several possible explanations and definitions, which could be used to obtain legitimacy in the occupation of some of the occupied areas in 1967.

In this historical context, the main objective of the Deal of the Century can be understood as legalizing fait accompli rather than reaching any real settlement with the Palestinians. The historical reading of the various international projects and resolutions that Israel has passed pertaining to the Palestinian question leads to the conclusion that Israel will continue to annex land, build settlements, and blockade the Palestinians, whether it is accepted or not. From the Israeli point of view, the importance of the Palestinians recognizing the Deal of the Century rests in obtaining Palestinian legitimacy, not a political resolution.

### **The Palestinian Entity: The PLO's deciding factors**

The PLO's attitude towards the US and international resolutions, similar to Arab countries, has been flexible and changing: from a firm adherence to Palestinian principles on settlement issues such as refugees and land, to flexibility in dealing

with them. But the only issue in which the PLO did not show any kind of concession was the right of self-determination through the establishment of an entity and a Palestinian state. Although the Oslo accords did not stipulate the existence of a Palestinian state, but rather the recognition of the PLO as a representative body of Palestinians. However, it was accepted due to the implied consideration of the existence of the state after the completion of the permanent solution files. Therefore, even other details related to the state can be negotiated, but the idea of the existence of the state is the main determinant and an entry point to negotiating other files.

In examining the historical behaviour of the PLO, it can be seen as shifting from a stance of not recognizing Israel to an eventual recognition from Arafat in 1988 before the General Assembly, into the Oslo agreement under which Israel did not give the entirety of the West Bank and Gaza Strip to the PLO. Afterwards, there were follow-up negotiations which led to a Palestinian “willingness” in the Geneva Agreement of 2003 to give up the principle of the right of return in exchange for the majority of the West Bank, closely followed by an

amendment in 2013 to the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 by the Arab League, which allowed for the principle of land exchange. The adherence to the Palestinian state is the most concrete issue for the PLO. This principled commitment has had an impact on the essence of projects presented since Oslo accords. The Roadmap, Obama's policy, and even the entire Deal of the Century calls for the existence of a Palestinian state.

### **Acceptance by two parties is key to any project's success**

When analysing American projects, we find that they have all failed to achieve their goals. But at the same time, they have achieved partial success while failing, as with the Madrid Project, which achieved the goal of bringing Palestinians and Israelis together in direct negotiations for the first time, but failed to achieve its desired goals. The only project that succeeded in reaching an agreement, even if only partially, is the Oslo Agreement. Although this project was not American in terms of its idea, it was American in terms of oversight. When extrapolating from projects that have failed and succeeded, even partially, we find that the acceptance of the agreement by both parties is the main condition for success or failure. In this context, an important observation is made that the parties' failure to agree on a project or initiative does not necessarily mean that the other party (Israel in all cases) will stop applying its strategies in different files, as with the continuation of settlement expansion, the annexation of lands, and Judaization of Jerusalem. This is where the objective of the various settlement projects agreed upon by the occupation are highlighted as essential to legitimizing a new reality as opposed to returning to the past.

### **The Deal of the Century: Salient Points**

On January 28, 2020, President Donald Trump announced his administration's vision of resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, known as the "Deal of the Century". The vision provided a detailed framework for resolving outstanding issues in reaching a political settlement between the parties. The vision considered Jerusalem a unified capital of Israel and called for settling refugees in different countries, and assimilating some of them into the future Palestinian state. It did not call for compensating them, but refused to recognize their right to return to their countries of origin.

The plan calls for the existence of a Palestinian state after achieving a number of conditions, the most important of which is renouncing “terrorism”, stopping the payment of salaries to the families of martyrs and captives, stopping Palestine’s attempt to join international organizations without Israel’s consent, and withdrawing complaints submitted to the International Criminal Court. It also seeks to ensure the disarmament of Gaza, and the non-participation of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in any future government unless they recognize Israel. After these conditions are met, a Palestinian state will be established that includes Palestinian communities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip only, linked by a network of roads and infrastructure, and not throughout the entire West Bank. The plan grants legitimacy to the settlements on the West Bank, and their further annexation to Israel. It also confirmed Israel’s right to annex the Jordan Valley and compensate Palestinians for the area. The plan was rejected by the Palestinians.

## **An Analytical Reading of the Deal of the Century**

### **Circumventing Palestinians**

Unlike the various American projects, especially after Oslo, where the American administration used to be a sponsor of peace talks between Palestinians and the Israelis, the Deal of the Century circumvented the Palestinians as the American role turned from a sponsor of the talks to one of adopting the Israeli vision and trying to impose it on Palestinians. The Deal of the Century

seems to be a declaration, rather than a proposed “project”, at least with regards to the most important issues such as Jerusalem, settlements, the Jordan Valley, and refugees. The idea of having one party (Israel) and bypassing the Palestinian party in any American settlement project has not occurred since the Oslo Agreement, and moreover has not happened since the 1967 occupation with Arab parties. This is the first time that the “declaration” of an American vision has been made with prior Israeli coordination and agreement, with the other party being entirely bypassed. This behaviour is similar to the Balfour Declaration, which gave those without right a means to achieve the Zionist vision: a national homeland for the Jews in the land of Palestine without the involvement of the other party. The Arab rejection of Balfour’s promise did not contribute to its failure. Rather, the political will of a great state (Britain) and the Zionist vision at the time was sufficient to fulfill the Balfour promise, which could occur if the American political will continues to align with the Israeli vision.

### **Legitimizing the Status Quo**

The details of the Deal of the Century do not offer any conciliations on pending issues. Rather, it simply legitimizes the current reality which Israel has begun to impose gradually since 1967 up into the present. This, in turn, leads to Israel’s achievement of its most important goals in such dossiers and the closing of some completely. Although the policy of accepting and building upon the status

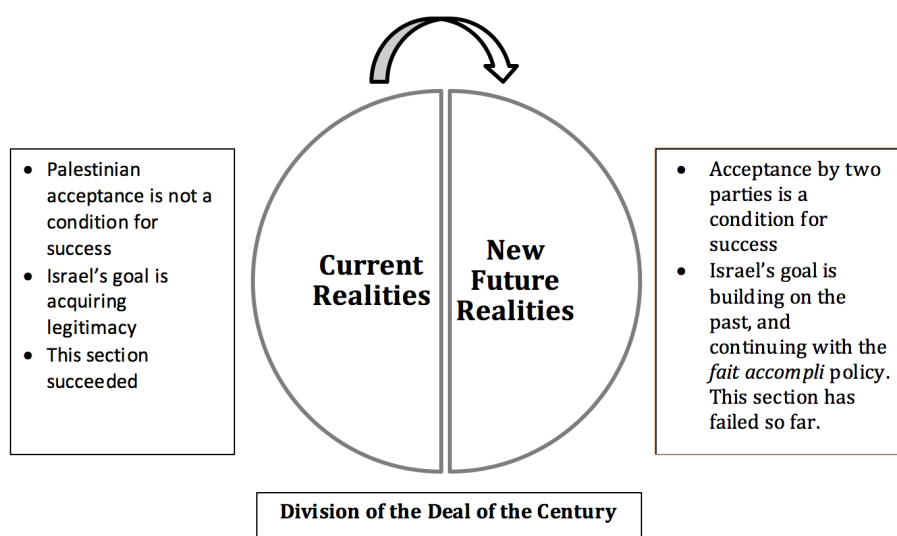
*The idea of having one party (Israel) and bypassing the Palestinian party in any American settlement project has not occurred since the Oslo Agreement, and moreover has not happened since the 1967 occupation with Arab parties*

quo, and the gradual bias in negotiating with Israel were one of the most important features of previous American projects, successive American administrations have maintained a certain level in which they appear to be a party that in the least respects Palestinians' minimum considerations, while maintaining their role as a sponsor of talks. For instance, the Clinton project in 2000 proposed that the Jordan Valley region fall under international and Israeli control, and not be limited to Israeli oversight alone. The 2003 Roadmap also proposed the dismantling of settlements built after 2001. Obama's envoy, George Mitchell, called for a freeze on settlements to resume negotiations. These calls are all in comparison to American projects that preceded Oslo, and show a lowering of the targeted ceiling in the contents of the negotiations' files in clear favour for Israel. But at the same time, it did not fully embrace the Israeli vision, while the Deal of the Century accelerated the process of recognition of their reality while maintaining a gradual and continuous bias in favour of Israel in the negotiations files, while leaping to the most strategic point that Israel seeks to achieve: legitimizing the status quo and basing it in any new talks with the Palestinians.

### **Two Projects in one deal**

The claim that the "Deal of the Century will fail because Palestinian approval is one of the conditions for its success", seems inaccurate when compared to previous projects and needs to be detailed. The Deal of the Century can be divided into two main sections. The first is related to facts on the ground, which the occupation began in 1967, as with the construction of settlements, the Judaization of Jerusalem, its siege by apartheid wall, and control over the Jordan Valley lands. This is an observable reality, whether Palestinians accept or reject it, and the deal of the century comes to legitimize it. The Palestinian rejection of the deal will not change these facts. However, it will prevent the execution of the other part of the Deal of the Century, that is yet to materialize on the ground, which include the annexation of the 'Triangle' to the West Bank, the creation of two industrial and agricultural areas adjacent to Gaza, and the linking of Palestinian areas in the West Bank to Gaza

via a transportation network, as well as the development of other infrastructure. The first section of the deal resembles the Balfour declaration, but the second section pertaining to the creation of new realities can be thwarted by Palestinian rejection of the Deal of the Century, as with the first part of the previous American settlement projects. The chances of the failure of the other sections of the deal are not only reinforced by the Palestinian rejection, but also by Netanyahu's retreat from accepting some details, as he stated on February 19 following the announcement of the deal, with this refusal to transfer residents of the 'Triangle' to the West Bank.



### Building on the old, to achieve future goals

Many have repeated that the deal of the century contributes to the termination of the Palestinian cause, and despite this being true, a tacit belief prevails among many that all Israelis are anxious to accept this deal. However, this needs to be scrutinized carefully. The Israeli Right rejects, in principle, the existence of a Palestinian state, and several right-wing leaders have expressed this before. This was repeated after the announcement of the deal by a number of leaders of the "Jewish Home" party, the Minister of Education Naftali Banat, and the Minister of Communications, Betzalel Smotrich, of the "National Union". The Israeli Right, including Netanyahu, generally call for the existence of a form of autonomy for the Palestinians without a sovereign entity. The Deal of the Century did not nullify the idea of a "Palestinian state", but imposed several conditions to achieve this. Netanyahu's acceptance of the deal, including the Palestinians' right to self-determination, does not necessarily mean that there was a concession on his part. First, he was certain that the Palestinians would reject the Deal of the Century and that the predetermined stipulations were difficult to achieve. Second, and based on the extrapolation of the Israelis behaviour towards previous US projects, and specifically their rejection by the Israeli right, generally contributes to strengthening the *fait accompli* policy. In this sense, the failure of the project



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means that Israel will continue to implement its expansionist policies, and all this will be achieved even in the event of the failure of the project. Thus, the deal of the century is a great opportunity for the occupation to legitimize everything that it has achieved so far. Thus, it means turning an old page and continuing to achieve expansionary goals.

The Israeli logic, in its interaction with various dossiers such as Jerusalem, settlements, and the Jordan Valley creates realities instead of reactions. Its behaviour is thus defined by previous plans and objectives, and it continues to strive to achieve them. For example, in 1979, the head of the Settlement Department, Matityahu Droblis, instituted a plan to house a million settlers in the West Bank. On January 8, 2020 the Israeli Minister of Défense stated that he seeks to increase the number of settlers in the West Bank from 400,000 (excluding Jerusalem) to one million within a decade. This along with the fact that the Deal of the Century requires the freezing of settlement construction for only 4 years, without a promise on halting any new settlement construction, only confirms that the Israeli occupation would continue to achieve its expansionist vision in the West Bank. Likewise, the Israeli Ministerial Committee on Jerusalem Affairs decided in 1973 to reduce the number of Palestinians in Jerusalem to 22%. To that end, the construction of the wall helped expel more than 150,000 Palestinians out of Jerusalem, while integrating 3 settlements in which about 150,000 settlers live. These examples show that Israel is continuing to enact its current colonial behaviour and thus not seeking a political settlement that would achieve the principle of a two-state solution. Rather, it is constantly practicing the principle of imposing new realities.

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#### ABOUT ALSHARQ FORUM

The Sharq Forum is an independent international network whose mission is to undertake impartial research and develop long-term strategies to ensure the political development, social justice and economic prosperity of the people of Al-Sharq. The Forum does this through promoting the ideals of democratic participation, an informed citizenry, multi-stakeholder dialogue, social justice, and public-spirited research.

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