

A rocky 50 years –
palestinian – israelie
relations essay



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On a night meant to celebrate freedom, a man walked into a Seder in Nentanya, Israel, and took away the freedom of twenty-two Israelis.

The suicide bomber, the fourteenth of two straight weeks of bombing, was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. Left with no choice, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon declared war against terrorism, starting with Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat. The United Nations pressured Israel to withdraw from this attack. President George W.

Bush was at a loss. Avoiding the Israel question up to this point, President Bush now had to take a stand. After the tragedy of September 11, 2001, President Bush waged a war against terrorism: " America and our friends and allies join with all those who want peace and security in the world, and we stand together to win the war against terrorism" (www. whitehouse.

gov). The first test of President Bush's words happened when America attacked Afghanistan to root out the Taliban. The United States went in and bombed every cave, every hillside, and every town. Yet the moment that another country adopted his policy, President Bush balked. The first worldwide test of his words, and President Bush hastened to find reasons why it did not apply to other countries. Should the United States become involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Diplomatically? Militarily? If so, then to what degree? Should America choose a side? Many Americans wondered at and debated the answers.

Yet, how can American not? America has been an ally of Israel from the making of the country to the present times, although the relationship has not always been congenial. Even before Palestine officially became Israel, the <https://assignbuster.com/a-rocky-50-years-palestinian-israelie-relations-essay/>

United States had an interest there. Read also what should you not do during a hostage rescue attempt? Before the Second World War, the United States adopted an isolationist policy. It rarely concerned itself with the Middle East, except for economic purposes such as oil.

Yet, despite the policy, Zionism—the support of a Jewish homeland—spread throughout the United States. In the Biltmore Conference, which took place in May 1942, in New York, Zionists pressed for a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine. After the war ended, President Truman recognized the support, and also felt a sense of compassion for European Jews: My purpose was then and later to help bring about the redemption of the pledge of the Balfour Declaration and the rescue of at least some of the victims of Nazism. I was not committed to any particular formula of statehood in Palestine or to any particular time schedule for its accomplishment.

The American policy was designed to bring about, by peaceful means, the establishment of the promised Jewish homeland and easy access to it for the displaced Jews of Europe (Relch, 3). In 1947, Britain decided to give up control of Palestine and hand it over to the United Nations. The United Nations formed a special committee, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP). UNSCOP proposed a “ plan for the partitioning of Palestine which recommended the creation of both an Arab state and a Jewish state that would be linked by an economic union” (Relch, 3). The United States approved of and supported the proposition. However, it was not to be.

Violence erupted among Palestinians in Palestine following the United Nations General Assembly vote to partition Palestine and create Israel on November 29, 1947. Thirty-three against thirteen voted for the partition, with ten abstentions. Warren R. Austin, the United States' representative to the United Nations, proposed that "on March 19, 1948, a United Nations trusteeship, as a temporary and emergency measure, be appointed to help restore public order" (Relch, 4). Unfortunately, the proposition had little support. Meanwhile, violence in Palestine kept escalating, resulting in the deaths of about one percent of the Jewish population of Palestine.

As news of the impending Israeli declaration of independence drew near, Truman did not know whether to recognize the declaration "de jure" (before it became official) or "de facto" (after it became official). In a debate between Presidential advisor Clark Clifford and Secretary of State George Marshall, Marshall, arguing against acknowledging Israel's statehood "de jure", alluded to the rumor that most of the Jews entering Palestine were Communists. Clifford reputed: It is important for the long-range security of our country, and indeed the world, that a nation committed to the democratic system be established there, one on which we can rely. The new Jewish state can be such a place. We could strengthen it in its infancy by prompt recognition" (Raviv and Melman, 30).

Technically, Marshall won the debate, since on May 14th, 1948, eleven minutes after the Israel proclaimed its independence, the United States recognized the statehood. However, the United States possessed ulterior motives. True to the policy of containment of Communism, the United States especially wanted an ally in the Middle East as a buffer to the spread of the

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Soviet Union (and to protect its interests in Middle Eastern oil). Truman recognized Israel's statehood quickly as to beat Moscow from making an ally of Israel, thus making sure that Israel did not fall under Soviet influences. Once Palestine became Israel, it needed the United States more than ever.

United States foreign policy towards Israel changed in the years between 1948 and 1967. Conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians once again escalated, this time into conflicts involving all of the Arab nations against Israel. Within hours of the Israeli declaration of independence in 1948, neighboring Arab countries invaded on all sides. The American ambassador to Israel passed warnings to Prime Minister Ben Gurion, advising him not to violate any truces. Ben Gurion replied by warning Truman and the State Department “ that they would be gravely mistaken if they assumed that the threat or even the use of United Nations sanctions would force Israel to yield on issues considered vital to its independence and security” (Raviv and Melman, 33).

Ben Gurion's reply became a litany for Israelis for decades to come. Israel refused to give an inch; even refusing to return land won during the war. Therefore, the United States supported a General Assembly resolution calling for the appointment of a mediator. On December 11, 1948, the Palestine Conciliation Commission (PCC) was formed to help the United Nation mediator try and achieve peace, or at least permanent borders in Israel.

When Dwight D. Eisenhower became president in 1952, he wanted to remain neutral in the Middle East. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles visited Israel in 1953 and his attitude added to the misgivings of the Israeli government

that the United States was becoming pro-Arab. Dulles' attitude came from his desire to protect American interests in oil. In August 1955, Dulles presented the idea of reestablishing permanent borders between Israel and neighboring Arab countries to settle any further disagreements. Israel had been keeping the land it was gaining in minor skirmishes with its Arab neighbors.

He also proposed that the United States join in a formal treaty to help guarantee and preserve the borders. But in 1956, the Suez War overshadowed this idea. Egypt, under Gamal Abdel Nasser, nationalized the Suez Canal, changing it from French and British control to Egyptian control. He also blocked the Strait of Tiran, which Israel used for importing and exporting goods. Israel, with the help of Great Britain and France, went to war with Egypt.

The United States made France and Great Britain pull out and made Israel withdraw from the Sinai and Gaza, the land Israel gained. The war brought the tension between the United States and Israel to a head. The United States was angry and mistrustful because the tripartite among Israel, Great Britain, and France excluded the United States. Israel also ignored entreaties not to go to war.

Israel was upset because instead of supporting Israel, the United States forced them to withdraw. Eventually, things righted themselves when the United States pledged support of Israel's right to sail in the Gulf of Aqaba, which has the Israeli port of Eilat at its head. As Great Britain and France faded into the background, the United States became the world's main

superpower. From the Eisenhower administration up to Johnson's Presidency in 1967, United States foreign policy towards Israel focused on the prevention of war, the maintenance of stability, and the promotion of economic and social development, as well as protecting the oil. The United States did not want further military action by Israel. However, that all changed in the War of 1967.

The War of 1967, or the Six-Day War, drastically changed American policy towards Israel. The cause of the Six-Day War had much to do with the Suez War of 1956. Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser vowed revenge on Israel for Arab losses and wounded Palestinian pride and nationalism. In the months leading up to the war, Nasser called for the removal of several United Nations forces stationed in Sinai, which bordered southern Israel. On May 22, 1967, Nasser again closed the Strait of Tiran, a vital port to Israel.

Egypt, Syria, and Jordan all signed a treaty placing their armies under Nasser's command. Israel foresaw the inevitability of war. Not wanting a repeat of the Eisenhower administration's lack of support during the Suez War, Israel went to the United States for permission to strike first. Johnson at first refused, wanting to promote peace instead. But a week later, seeing the unavailability of the war and listening to his advisors, he changed his mind and gave Israel the go ahead.

On June 5, 1967, the Israeli air force attacked the largest concentration of Egyptian forces. Six days later, the war ended. Israel won, not only the war, but their swift and decisive victory earned the respect and admiration of

Americans: Jews and Gentiles alike. The Johnson administration had changed American foreign policy.

Yet again, the reasons for doing so were not pure. Special Assistant Walt Rostow told President Lyndon Johnson: If the Israelis go fast enough, and the Soviets get worried enough, a simple ceasefire, i. e. without a return to pre-war borders might be the best answer. This would mean that we could use the de facto situation on the ground to try to negotiate not a return to armistice lines but a definitive peace in the Middle East” (Green, 4). The administration saw the war and victory as a gain for the United States.

American interests in Israel had as much to do with ensuring the flow of Arab oil to Western allies as with blocking Soviet attempts to infiltrate the Middle East. Although Johnson did not make Israel return the land won, he did suggest the release of some territory to appease the Arabs. Johnson told Washington that “ there must also be recognized rights of national life... freedom of maritime passage, limitation of the arms race, and respect for political independence and territorial integrity” (Raviv and Melman, 141).

The Six-Day War set the tone for future American policy towards Israel: “ Since the latter part of the Johnson administration, American diplomacy has been based on a commitment to Israel’s right to exist within secure and recognized boundaries to be achieved through direct negotiations with its Arab neighbors” (www. mfa. gov). Future Presidents would use meetings at Camp David as a resource towards peace.

Many Presidents, from Jimmy Carter to Ronald Reagan to George Bush Senior to Bill Clinton all used tactics to try and negotiate peace between Arabs and <https://assignbuster.com/a-rocky-50-years-palestinian-israelie-relations-essay/>

Israelis. The Camp David Accords—signed by Jimmy Carter, Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat, and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin on September 17, 1978, in Washington, D. C.—was the framework for peace. Unfortunately, it only led to a treaty between Israel and Egypt.

Carter first invited Sadat and Begin to Camp David in Maryland in September 1978 for a series of meetings. After thirteen days of negotiations, the leaders announced the conclusion of the two accords. Egypt approved the accords on September 19. Israel approved them on September 28. This led to the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty signed on March 26, 1979, at the White House. This is to be Israel's only peace treaty to date.

When Ronald Reagan became president of the United States, at first his administration did not even look at the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Until Iran-Iraq war came into sight. Iraq marched in Iran after years of strife between the two. With a lot of underhanded political dealings, the United States supported both Iraq and Iran. The United States openly gave Iraq trade credits, and stopped protesting when other countries helped it out. But underhandedly, Reagan traded arms to Iran to try and free American hostages in what later was called the Iran-Contra Affair.

Israel, too, supported Iran, hoping to make an ally among the hostile Arab countries. The result of the Iraq-Iran war led directly to the Persian Gulf War. In the Persian Gulf War, Iraq invaded Kuwait, and then Saudi Arabia. Reagan, in hopes of making another ally in the Middle East, wanted to sell arms to Saudi Arabia. Israel strongly protested, since Saudi Arabia had sent troops a

few times to help Arabs attacking Israel. In a lengthy and controversial Congressional debate, Congress almost chose to side with Israel, but did not.

Reagan was not happy: “ I didn’t like having representatives from a foreign country-any foreign country-trying to interfere with what I regarded as our domestic political process and the setting of our foreign policy” (Raviv and Melma, 195). However, tension decreased, and in 1981 and 1988, Reagan signed memorandums of understanding. He formed the basis for setting up a number of joint planning and consultative bodies, which in turn generated practical arrangements in both military and civilian fields. George Bush Senior was president during the Persian Gulf War. When Iraq began to lose, they tried to embroil Israel in the war by firing Scud missiles to hope to anger the government, thus enticing all the Arab countries to join in against Israel.

This tactic could have possibly started World War Three. However, with the United States backing it up, Israel abstained from joining the war. Bill Clinton has the distinction of being one of the most infamous presidents the United States has ever had. What Americans do not realize is all the great things he attempted regarding peace in the Middle East.

He brought Palestinian leader, Yasir Arafat, and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak to a fifteen-day summit at Camp David in July 2002. Barak went there willing to do all he could to make the dream of peace a reality for Israel. He even offered Arafat a part of East Jerusalem to call their capital. Arafat refused, which depressed Barak into making less of an effort. Israeli negotiator, Ben Ami called Clinton “ simply stunning”.

However, Arafat did not want peace; he refused every proposal given to him, and gave no counterproposal. Nothing was accomplished at Camp David, and the failure of peace led to the election of Ariel Sharon. Sharon differed from Barak just as Bush differed from Clinton. Today, foreign policy between Israel and the United States has many complications.

Times and circumstances have changed: “ Israel has the fifth or sixth most powerful army in the world (IDF). It has the third largest air force and nuclear weapons with five or six different delivery systems. Those systems are provided directly or indirectly by the United States” (Green, 1). Therein lies the controversy. The surrounding Arab countries do not have as impressive an army. So they resort to terrorism, mainly suicide bombs, which the most powerful army in the world cannot protect against.

Although the United States does not formally have a treaty with Israel, it is not in the interest of America to engage in a reversal of alliances. Israel supports America immensely. In the thirty-seventh United Nations General Assembly, Israel voted with America “ 86. 2 percent of the time” (Relch, 179).

If America abandons Israel, it loses all credibility as an ally, not to mention an oil hold in the Middle East. The United States has also helped Israel. It protects Israel from anti-Israel bills trying to be passed in the United Nations. Israel and the United States exchange intelligence and military information.

In the past few months, United States efforts for peace in the Middle East have changed Israel. There have been less suicide bombings and less

confrontation. In a recent Newsweek, Henry Kissinger noticed that “ the <https://assignbuster.com/a-rocky-50-years-palestinian-israelie-relations-essay/>

recent appearance of active American diplomacy in the Middle East and been greeted with a mixture of hope and trepidation...Many who generally criticize America's foreign policy are joining the widespread call for Washington to play a dominant role" (48).

President Bush does not want to see the good the United States can do for Israel: " Bush's biggest mistake was to say ' Let them bleed,' says former Israeli peace negotiator Yossi Beilin" (Hirsh, 44). Although President Bush would like to deny an obligation for the United States to become involved, intervention by the United States is necessary to preserve peace in the Middle East. American foreign policy has been to be an ally of Israel from the making of the country to the present times, although the relationship has not always been pleasant. In 1948, Clark Clifford noted the importance of being an ally to Israel because the United States needed a democratic system in the Middle East on which they could rely on as a buffer from the Soviet Union as well as a source of oil.

Prime Minister Ben Gurion set the tone for Israeli foreign policy towards the United States when he told Truman that Israel would not yield on issues considered vital to its independence and security. Yet the two have worked together, whether it be against the Soviet Union in the Truman era or against terrorism now. After September 11 our president told us and the world he was going to root out all terrorists and the countries that supported them. Beautiful.

Then the Israelis, after months and months of having the equivalent of an Oklahoma City every week (and then every day) start to do the same thing

we did, and we tell them to show restraint. If America were being attacked with an Oklahoma City every day, we would all very shortly be screaming for the administration to just be done with it and kill everything south of the Mediterranean and east of the Jordan. (Dennis Miller) On Monday, May 28, 2002, a suicide bomber killed a security guard and then blew himself up. He killed a forty-year-old woman and a baby. And yet the United States hesitates to become involved! America is the hope for the future of Israel.

Where is that future, however, if the children keep dying?