



## THREATS, CONFLICTS AND WARS: THE ROLE OF ISRAEL IN SECURING PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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### Abstract

*The state of Affairs in the Middle East has been unstable for about a century. The emergence of Israel as a Sovereign state stirred both ideological, historical, religious, and political differences. Thus, in a volatile Middle East, Israel has had to not only survive but thrive against all odds. The present Israel-Palestine conflict is merely a reflection of the long-standing crisis in the Middle East and a continuous attempt of the majority of the Arab world to ensure the destruction of the only Jewish state. Irrespective of Israel's desire and subsequent attempts at facilitating peace in the Middle East, there remain direct and indirect forces, both external and internal who deem the instability and crisis in the Middle East as favorable and profitable. It is on this backdrop that this paper critically explores the concept of threats, conflicts, and wars with an emphasis on the Israeli-Palestine Crisis as well as the inherent forces and culprits responsible for perpetuating the crises in the Middle East to define Israel's role in securing peace in the Middle East.*

**Keywords:** Israel, Palestine, Conflict, Middle East, Terrorism.

## **Introduction**

The concept of threats, conflict and wars is one that is peculiar to Israel and the Middle East. It is a recurring feature in international polity, academic literature and news reportage. Over the past decades, the region has hosted two wars with the most international participants. The combination of internal and regional instabilities has further enabled close relations between Middle Eastern and arms producing governments [Sorli, Gleditsch, Strand: 2005].

The history of Israel has defined the trajectory of her foreign policy and national interest. Since 1967, though it was believed to lack any sense of direction, it has and still remains singularly reactive. With a foreign policy headed with generous offers, and innovative plans in her foreign relations with other states, the bodacious and emphatic component in Israel's foreign policy remains a proclivity to react to occurrences and crises by a heavy-handed fusion of military activism and diplomatic immobility [Shalim, Yaniv: 1980].

The historical perspective of Israel's foreign policy is rooted in both the historical knows of the Jewish people in contemporary times and by the traditions of Zionist statecraft. Israel's foreign policy has been imbued with the strong belief that Israel can effectuate its essential territorial and political objectives only by means of the successful applications of force in its international relations. However, in accordance with the universal understanding of the fundamentals of power polity in international politics, Israeli statesmen tend to dismiss the argument that Israel cannot guarantee its principal interests without peacefully reaching a mutually satisfactory compact with the Arabs [Roberts: 1972].

The 1948 war between Israel and the Arab countries of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon was as a result of a piece of disputed land known as Palestine which signaled the beginning of an enduring conflict in the Middle East. Generally known as the Israeli-Arab Conflict, three broad dimensions are visible. The first being the bilateral conflicts between Israel and Its Arab rivals, the second which involves the conflict among the Arab countries and the third being the core and fundamental goals of the Israeli foreign policy amidst tensions in the Middle East [Lai: 2001].

One challenging paradigm to Israel and Middle Eastern diplomatic relation is the suspicion and fear of dominance. This has altered possible outcomes of the Arab-Israeli peace process, although polls have long suggested both Israelis and Palestinians favor peace despite conflict, terrorism and war, the Israelis have developed doubts as regards negotiations and peace talks. Enthusiasm was never reawakened from the violence of the second Intifada as which proved that Palestinian hostility still remains towards the Jewish state [Byman, Hamid: 2015].

Hence, Israel has resulted to foreign relations outside the Middle East to prevent any form of isolation not just from within the region but the world at large.

### **1. The Israel-Palestine Crisis**

The recent flare up and confrontations across Israel and Palestine. In light of recent events, this crisis was triggered due to the Israeli police a conduct against Palestinians remonstrating home eviction and praying at the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, cross border conflict in Gaza, violent

rampage in Israel's mixed cities amongst other inherent conditions unusual to this crisis. The fighting we see in 2021 is one born of more than hundred years of struggle. The contention between Israel and Palestine could be worse should Israel decide to set in motion a take down offensive into the Gaza Strip. The situation could further deteriorate if Israel employs its military battalions into the mixed cities, a likely point for consideration. In reiteration, Palestinians engaged in this conflict have called for the aid of Hamas, a Palestinian Sunni-Islamic fundamentalist and self-proclaimed Islamic national liberator and resistance movement. Focalization on one historic but futile attempt to achieve peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is the 2000 Camp David Summit. The 2000 Camp David Summit shed light on the deep rooted intricacies of war and peace in the Middle East. Problems such as the establishment of a Palestinian State, the location of land for the Palestinian State, the evacuation of Israeli settlements, the partition of Jerusalem, the Palestinian Custodianship over the Temple Mount and the refugee problem all spawned the dilemma of an inevitable dead end of the Arab- Israeli Conflict [Lewin, Bergh: 2016].

The proceeding of the Camp David Summit was attended by President Bill Clinton, Chairman Yasser Arafat and Minister Ehud Barak in July 11, 2000 and July 25, 2000 respectively. The facilitating of the United States as well as the Israeli-Palestinian delegations dealt with the most unstable and temperamental issues of the conflict, unfortunately all attempts proved rather futile as the summit ended with no agreement. Thus, Clinton, Arafat and Barak failed in their historic endeavor as the summit ended with no agreement [Lewin, Bergh: 2016].

After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War One, Britain took control of the area known as Palestine. Back then it was occupied by an Arab majority and a Jewish minority. Thus, British were tasked by the international community with setting up a national home for Jewish people in Palestine but both the Jewish people and Arabs claimed that historical Palestine was their land. The 1920s - 1940s saw a majority of the Jewish people fleeing to Palestine, escaping persecution and the Holocaust.

In 1947, the United Nations voted for Palestine to be split into separate Jewish and Arab states and Jerusalem a Holy Land for both would become an International City [Shushan: 2014].

Although the Jewish leaders embraced the plan, the Arab Leaders did not. Sequel to the exit of British political and diplomatic engagement in the Middle East, Jewish leaders then declared the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 with the backing of then US President Harry Truman. This course of action did not go down well with many Palestinians and soon, a war broke out with neighboring Arab countries such as Jordan and Egypt joining the fight, this marked the beginning of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the evolution of the emergence of the Jewish state, we must understand the power and influence of the age-old yearning for the restoration of the Jewish people to their homeland. Amidst the challenges of its history, traditional Jewish daily life was full of practices and observations ascertained to keep the Jew aware of his old glory and hope of a return to triumphal Jerusalem [Shwadran: 1948].

June 5, 1967, marked the beginning of the six-day war, this was significant because the map was again re-drawn. Israel captured and occupied the West Bank, the Gaza strip, and other Arab

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territories. The most recent peace plans came from Donald Trump in January 2010. What triggered the recent developments and subsequent escalation of the Israeli-Palestine crisis were separate but interrelated events that became militarized building on stages of conflict and wars. The next trigger was in the form of growing agitations over an Israeli Supreme Court ruling as regards the prospective expulsion of four Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah, a neighborhood located in the Eastern part of Jerusalem. This conflict between Israel and Palestine over the last decades hasn't been about theological differences between Islam and Judaism, but rather about land. Portraying the conflict as eternal or religious makes it intractable in a way that it isn't. It is significant to note that not all Muslims are Arabs, not all Arabs are Palestinians and not all Palestinians are Muslims. "Palestinian" is a word used to describe the ethnic identity of those who have historically lived in Palestine. There were for instance lots of Christians in the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) formed in 1964 and led by Yasser Arafah.

What had originally been believed to be Palestinian territory such as East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, became Jewish settlement after the Israeli government began its annexation of these territories. There is now an estimate of over three hundred and fifty thousand Jewish settlers in the West bank, over two hundred thousand in East Jerusalem, and these settlements are illegal according to International Law, but Israel counters by saying they aren't really illegal because Palestine is not really a State: Seeing the conflict, facing Israelis and Palestinians is more than 100 years old, and still without elucidation and ratification, despite important measures by Several US administrations. Sequel to the Oslo accords of 1993, the International community measures have amalgamated around the goal of direct Israeli-Palestinian dialogues with the aim of establishing a Palestinian state alongside Israel [Goldenberg, Koplow, Wittes: 2020].

The incessant uprisings and wars have upset what has been a somewhat stable regionalistic order superintended by the United States and its major regional partners [Goldenburg, Koplow, Wittes: 2020].

*"An integral dimension to the crisis is Israel's territorial expansion and political volatility. Israel has continued the construction of settlements and civilian infrastructure in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. This course of action shows Israel prevailing power in the region as well as the potential for the further annexation and subsequently the total control of Palestine"* [Goldenberg, Koplow, Wittes: 2020].

In the context of anxiety about American commitments, regional competition for power, and focus on regime security, it is not surprising that most Arab governments have deprioritized the stalemated Israeli-Palestinian conflict in their political-diplomatic strategies. In relation to the case of the United Arab Emirates agreement, the dedication by Israel to give up annexation for the time being also signified that there is hope and elements of positive connections to addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "With Jerusalem growing to 220,000 this compares with 116,300 settlers living in the West Bank and roughly 140,000 in East Jerusalem when the Oslo accords were signed in 1993. The result is that the hurdles to constructing a viable Palestinian state have grown to a point where it may no longer be feasible. In addition, attitudes in Israel towards relocating settlers have hardened. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has now

embraced the principle, endorsed by Trump, that no Israeli living in the West Bank should have to relocate in the event of an agreement with the Palestinians" [Goldenburg, Poplow, Wittes: 2020].

## **2. Israel and Terrorism in the Middle East**

Terrorism is a term that is notoriously hard to explain. There is no international consensus on the definition legally or academically for the term "Terrorism" or "Terrorist" but there are generally accepted characteristics or elements of terrorism. Terrorism involves violent acts or acts that are dangerous to human rights and violate federal or state laws. It could attempt to intimidate; harass or coerce a civilian population, influence or alter the policy of a government through intimidation and coercion, to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, kidnapping and transcends national territorial jurisdiction in terms of the means by which their goals and objectives are accomplished. What constitutes terrorism is primarily violence or a threat of violence against non-combatants, precisely civilians which are usually motivated by political, religious, traditional, or ideological beliefs.

Terrorism can also be a result of xenophobia; which is a dislike of or prejudice against people from other countries. One correlating impact of xenophobic attacks and terrorism is the fact that those who are engaged in such acts undoubtedly contribute to the downfall of the economy either directly or vice versa [Ige: 2018].

The act of terrorism is often relative to the ownership or subsequent control of territories. Bahgat and Medina in their article "An Overview of Geographical Perspectives and Approaches in Terrorism Research" define terrorism's territoriality as the desire and achievement for ownership of territory by terrorist actors vis-a-vis the state. The most obvious linkage to territoriality is that terrorism has territorial intentions. Another perspective to the analysis of the concept of terrorism is that it is a phenomenon related to conflict-ridden, weak, and failed states and regions" [Bahgat, Medina: 2013].

The topic of terrorism has motivated voluminous literature in recent years. However, nowhere among the highly varied treatments does one find a general theoretical analysis of the causes of terrorism [Crenshaw: 1981]

There are principal terror groups and entities against Israel in the Middle East. which include Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Islamic Jihad in Palestine, the Hamas, and Fatah just to mention a few.

### **2.1 Hamas**

Hamas as its name implies is the Islamic resistance movement with aims to liberate Palestine from Israeli occupation and transform the country into an Islamic State. Hamas is also a militant and nationalist organization with its social wing known as "DAWAH" and military wing known as "The Izz ad-Din al Qassam Brigades". The organization was founded in 1987 with Gaza as its headquarters. Gaza or also known as Gaza city is a Palestinian city located in the Gaza Strip both

Gaza and the West Bank are claimed by the De jure (according to a rightful entitlement or claim by right). The sovereign State of Palestine but is separated from each other by Israeli territory.

One memorable but tragic act of Hamas was the murder of three teenagers which was considered a heinous act of terrorism that revealed the inception and organization of Hamas' civilian, terrorist and political framework in the West Bank. During the inquiry and the investigation of the kidnapped teens, youths, and their abductors, Israel obtained a legitimate claim to pursue actions with the aim of dismantling its infrastructures. Sequel to critical and concrete investigations, finding proved that the abduction was carried out by a cell (units within Hamas) belonging to Hamas, although there was no concrete evidence that the attack came directly from the Hamas leadership in Gaza, the West Bank, or abroad [Michael, Dekel: 2014].

There are limits to Hamas' ability to perpetrate terrorist attacks because of a significant Israeli defense force military presence. The present escalation in the Gaza sector calls for the consideration of other options such as limiting or restricting Hamas' ability to produce missiles and rockets and launch them into Israel, toppling Hamas' government which of such includes understanding the replications of such a move including a threat or risk assessment who is likely to fill the vacuum as well as it's the impact on the IDF and the state of Israel [Michael, Dekel: 2014].

## **2.2 Hezbollah of Lebanon**

Hezbollah is a Lebanese Shia Islamic political party and a militant group led by its Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah since 1992. Hezbollah's paramilitary wing is the Jihad Council, and its political party is the loyalty to the resistance bloc party in the Lebanese Parliament. The word "Hezbollah" simply means "Party of God" established in 1982, during the Lebanese Civil war. It has since expanded its reach to almost every continent on the planet. Its operations have often been violent but the groups' activities are multifaceted. One of the reasons why it has proven somewhat difficult to take down Hezbollah is the fact that it's an organization that spans many categories. It is a political party, a social welfare organization, it is a standing militia better funded, better armed than the Lebanese armed forces. It is also a terrorist organization that engages in acts of terror at home in Lebanon and abroad as well as a transnational criminal organization. Being a hybrid organization has advantages for Hezbollah, the many hearts it wears are all a means to one end. Spreading what it calls an ideology of resistance as far and as wide as possible. a strong anti-Israeli, anti-Zionist and anti-American because it sees itself as the liberator of those who are suffering from the oppression of colonial imperialists, this is the main narrative of Hezbollah. Under its leader Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah has gained enduring popularity reflected in its election result. It has won seats in every parliament since 1992 and has participated in governments since 2008. This popularity often runs deep in Lebanese communities abroad. Hezbollah sympathizers include entrepreneurs and businessmen who send money to the group back in Lebanon. Lebanese in the diaspora is merely one part of the groups' global reach. Another key thing to know about Hezbollah is its intimate relationship with Iran that is immensely ideological. Iran has also used its relationship with Israel to gain leverage over Iran. In 2006, after capturing two Israeli soldiers, Hezbollah was involved in a month-long war with Israel that left many civilians dead on both sides. Iran supplied Hezbollah with arms used in

the conflict. During the bloody and Long 33 day Israel War of 2006, Hezbollah fighters sent a letter to their Leader, Hassan Nasrallah in which they expressed their loyalty to Hezbollah's mission, its founders, martyrs, and their passion for the Prophet's grandson Imam Hussein. They then pledged to protect Lebanon and ensure the realization of Nasrallah's sincere promise, a code name for Hezbollah's Military operation that led to the abdication of Israeli troops and the trigger for the war [Saouli 2017].

Iran may not be a borderline state with Israel but by virtue of having Hezbollah, they're effectively a borderline state with Israel.

Hezbollah has managed to attain a position of leadership and dominance through a balanced merger of consent and coercion, through its provision of much-needed services and welfare programs, and on the other, through oppressive and authoritarian measures directed against those who step outside the norms established by the party. These interrelated factors of consent and coercion are established through Hezbollah's wide-ranging networks of organizations, which has ensured the dissemination of its ideas as well as deepen its support base within a Shia population [Daher: 2016].

### **2.3 The Islamic Jihad Movement**

The Islamic Jihad movement in Palestine is known in the west as Palestinian Islamic Jihad is a Damascus-based Palestinian Islamist Organization Founded in 1981. The Palestinian Islamic Jihad is arguably the most violent in the region. I was inspired by the Iranian revolution and the Muslim brotherhood. Unlike Hamas, Islamic Jihad is not involved in the political process. It refuses to negotiate with Israel, favoring violence over diplomacy. Since the 2014 truce between Israel and Hamas, the group is responsible for most of the rocket strikes coming from the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian Islamic Jihad is labeled a terrorist organization by the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, Japan, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Israel. "The barrage of rockets launched at Sderot and the Gaza Periphery by the Islamic Jihad in Northern Gaza on the night of November 2019 underscored the Israeli dilemma regarding the Gaza Strip. This attack was yet another indication of the rise of the Islamic Jihad, which impacts on Hamas' status, security stability in Gaza, and prospects for Israel reaching an accommodation with Hamas" [Michael, Tzoreff. 2019].

### **2.4 Fatah**

Fatah, formerly known as the Palestinian National Liberation Movement, is a Palestinian Nationalist and Democratic political party and the biggest cabal of the confederated multi-party Palestine Liberation Organization and the next largest party in the Palestinian Legislative Council. The word "Fatah" is a reverse acronym of the Arabic Harekat at-Tahrir al-wataniyyeh al Falastiniyyeh, meaning "conquest using Jihad (Islamic holy war). Founded on the 10th of October 1959 in Kuwait, its founders were Yasser Arafat, Khalil al-Wazir, Salah Khalaf, Khaled-Yashruti. Fatah was also pivotal and instrumental in the disengagement process for the Oslo Peace Accord of 1993. After signing the Oslo Peace Accord 1993, Yasser Arafat began the first stage called "The Declarative Disengagement". This phase was transitional. The Oslo

Accord provided Arafat with the motivation and resources to implement Fatah's disengagement [Clubb: 2009].

Fatah is opposed to Israel as evident in its 1989 political program which emphasized the barbarism of colonial Zionism, the success of the first Intifada, and the centrality of the Palestinian-Arab national rights within the Arab-Israel conflict. 1964 marked the first Fatah terrorist attack against Israel. By the year 1967, Fatah became the best-funded Palestinian organization as it went ahead to take over the PLO. By the year 2006, Fatah lost the Palestinian Legislative Council elections to Hamas and by the year 2014, Fatah and Hamas signed a reconciliation agreement in April and went month ahead to form a unity government. Thus, the Egyptian announcement of April 27 stating Hamas and Fatah reached an accord on reconciliation took many by surprise, Palestinians inclusive. Both Israel and the United States who had factored the rift between Hamas and Fatah as a central element in their policies were likewise caught off guard although this agreement subsequently fell apart, it goes to show the ability of ideology to unite even the worst enemies [Brom: 2011].

### **3. Israel's Role in Securing Peace in the Middle East**

Peace in the Middle East is the holy grail of foreign policy. Israel's geographical location since the inception of its creation as the one and the only Jewish state has made it an easy target in the Middle East. This has influenced its emphasis on building its military might in relation to the popular phrase "defense is the best form of attack". Irrespective of Israel's military prowess, Israel's goal has been and still is a peaceful and stable Middle East. Irrespective of its ideological, religious, and traditional differences with its Arab neighbors, Israel has sought to establish peace treaties, accords, and agreements time and time again. In the seven decades since the founding of Israel, only Egypt and Jordan have signed peace treaties but in September 2020, Israel signed a historic peace agreement known as the Abraham Accords. The Abraham Accords is a collective statement between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States which was agreed upon on the 13th of August 2020. This term was subsequently used to refer accordingly to agreements between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain sequentially. This agreement with the UAE was formally titled the Abraham Accords Peace Agreement: Treaty of Peace, diplomatic relations, and full normalization between the United Arab Emirates and the States of Israel. The agreement between Bahrain and Israel was formally titled the Abraham Accords: Declaration of Peace, Cooperation and Constructive Diplomatic and Friendly Relations and was announced by the United States on September 11, 2021. The peace agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and the Manifesto of Peace between Israel and Bahrain (The Abraham Accords) is a representation of progress and lasting peace in the region [Even, Fadlon, Guzansky: 2020].

In an attempt to curtail Arab infiltration into Israel and to defend its sovereignty without any offensive damage to its enemies and Arab neighbors, Israel adopted a military operation known as Operation Northern Shield in the year 2018.

Operation Northern Shield was an Israeli Military operation that took place from the 4th of December 2018 up until the 13th of January 2019. The operations' clear agenda was to locate and



destroy Hezbollah tunnels that cross the Blue Line from Lebanon into Northern Israel. Irrespective of the skepticism about the Israeli defense system on the eve of Operation Northern Shield in respect to the nature and urgency of the operation, the operation's success was indicative of Israel's achievements primarily on the military level, the exposure, and destruction of five tunnels as of 2019, denied Hezbollah plot to make use of tunnels to surprise Israel in the events of a ground attack which would include villages, market places, and worship centers accompanied with the threat of massive rocket firepower on the Israeli home front [Mizrahi: 2019].

It is safe to say that Israel and the Israeli defense force are not looking for war, her soldiers do not seek conflict. The Israeli dream to have peace in the Middle East, peace with her neighbors and the world at large explains Israel's historic attempt at peace agreement as well as its decision to sign numerous peace treaties particularly the Abraham Peace Accords of 2020.

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