

# After Normalization, Why Does the Middle East Peace Process Still Matter?

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## Key Points

- Normalization between some Arab countries and Israel cannot replace a comprehensive peace between the Palestinians and Israel.
- A comprehensive peace between the Palestinians and Israel is still important to the US and its allies in the region, especially Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan.
- The Palestinian cause is being exploited within the framework of Great Power Competition by China and Russia.
- Iran uses the Palestinian cause to expand its influence in the Middle East and undermine the influence of the US and its allies.
- The Palestinian cause can be analyzed through a counter-terrorism lens.

## Introduction

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been described as the mother of all issues in the Middle East. It is one of the most protracted and potentially dangerous conflicts in the world. After more than seven decades, resolving the conflict remains a distant dream. It has caused wars, bloodshed, chaos, and destabilization in the region. Indeed, the impact of the conflict is not limited to the region, almost the whole world bears the brunt of it. This Palestinian issue has become a symbol and a root cause of extremism and anti-Western sentiments and its colonial history between countries of the world in general and between Arabs and Muslims in particular. Moreover, the Palestinian issue is being exploited in conflicts and rivalries between various major and regional powers, from extremist groups to great power competitors. Based on the above, peace between the Palestinians and Israel is multidimensional, therefore the entire international community has to bring an end to this conflict.

## Normalization is not a Comprehensive Peace

The phrase "peace in the Middle East" has been repeated for decades to the point where we have forgotten what it means or we might be so excited that we pay attention to whoever turns it around. We cannot consider normalization as a substitute for a comprehensive peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis. However, it can be a factor in driving peace if used effectively and correctly. The recent normalization deals are not peace treaties in their true meaning because they do not end any actual state of war. Israel and the UAE have enjoyed quiet security relations for more than a decade, and Israel has had a diplomatic office in Abu Dhabi since 2015. Sudan has joined the agreements only on the condition that the US removes Sudan from the list of state sponsors

of terrorism. Morocco also accepted normalization in exchange for the US declaring Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara, in what appears to be a distorted trade deal and not a political process with foundations and rules. This can create a superficial, fragile, and weak peace that will not stand through any small problem. On the contrary, the consequences of a future demise of this fragile peace may be worse than the past indirect relations between those countries with Israel.<sup>1</sup>

The wave of normalization cannot be considered as peace in the Middle East because the foundations of hostility and conflict do not lie in the Arab countries far from Israel, but within Israel itself. The hostility against Israel in the Middle East stems in essence from the establishment of the State of Israel on land inhabited by Palestinians and thus the subsequent dual claims of both sides to control the land. Therefore, the diplomatic confusion by the US between the origin of the hostility and the hostility of distant countries to Israel is due to the absolute avoidance of the real issue that was required to be resolved decades ago. Israel's occupation of the Palestinians land and its fear of violent threats is the source of the indisputable hostility in the conflict. Without a Palestinian state, we cannot talk about real peace. The escalation of Palestinian hostility to respond to its occupation, which was expressed through the election and support of armed groups, will not be quenched through Israeli agreements with distant Arab countries.<sup>2</sup>

Jared Kushner's exclusion of Palestinian leaders from participating in preparing his plan for peace in the Middle East illustrates his understanding of the Middle East conflict as two separate conflicts: Israel's problems at home and Israel's problems with its neighbors. Therefore, he believes that the Palestinians are not necessary players in the peace process, which explains why his peace plan is directed first and foremost towards Arab countries and not towards the root of the problem, "the Palestinians."<sup>3</sup> Trump's policy risked uniting Palestinian moderates with more extreme elements and pushing their union into Iran's open arms. This became clear after the Palestinians rejected Trump's peace plan of buying places of residence, and economic and political isolation. The Palestinians are unlikely to accept an imposed peace. Their response may include rallying around Iran and embracing militant ideology.

While the Abraham accords may have created a superficial "peace" between the nominally contesting states, they did little to address the actual source of the conflict. And as long as the "peace" fails to address the source, peace will remain superficial. In the wake of the Abraham Accords, former US Secretary of State John Kerry was severely mocked for his comment in 2016 that "there will be no separate peace" for Israel without engaging the Palestinians. Events on the ground, whether from the cessation of enthusiasm for normalization or the recent violent incidents in May 2021, prove that John Kerry was right.<sup>4</sup>

Israel made no real commitment to peace with the Palestinians in exchange for the Abraham Accords. There was news of the intention of Israel to annex the West Bank lands, but after the deal, as Netanyahu made clear, the annexation "is not on the table only at present." This is the whole commitment, a mere postponement of the

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1 Fred Larsen, "The Facade of Middle East Peace?" Harvard International Review, January 18, 2021, <https://hir.harvard.edu/the-facade-of-middle-east-peace/> (accessed February 22, 2021).

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

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Ibid.

illegal annexation of the West Bank. Netanyahu agreed to build 3,000 new homes in the occupied Palestinian territories on the same day that his government approved the Abraham Accords, making 2020 "one of the most prolific years of settlement construction." So why did the UAE, Bahrain, and Sudan enter into this agreement? The real winner may be the arms dealers. One tangible development is that the Israeli arms industries can now increase their sales to participating Arab countries under the guise of normalizing relations. Some speculate that this increase in arms sales will fuel the war in regional battlefield states such as Libya, Yemen, and Syria - all under the guise of peace.<sup>5</sup>

The Abraham accords may ensure that there will be less Arab pressure on Israel regarding future negotiations, but these close relations between Arab countries, especially the oil-rich ones, may be a doubleedged sword. If the US administration becomes serious about relaunching negotiations, it may work constructively with its moderate allies in the Arab world to advance the peace process and provide Israel with the guarantees and incentives needed to conclude a comprehensive agreement.<sup>6</sup>

The Abraham Accords "if they are used positively" can merely be viewed as a means to break the deadlock between Israel and Palestinians and restore a sense of the possibility of creating a comprehensive peace. But it will not result in an Israeli-Palestinian peace in the short or medium term. By analyzing the importance and manner of using the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, it can be said that a comprehensive peace between Israel, the Arab countries and the Palestinians will positively affect the policy of the US and its allies in the region. Therefore, it could have a positive effect on US Central Command's fourth strategic priority.<sup>7</sup>

### CSAG Perspective on US Strategies

The US sponsorship of the "peace process" is supposed to embody evidence of American diplomatic strength and the need for all those interested in peace to submit to America. Instead of such an embodiment, the proposed "peace process" tarnishes the reputation of US power and diplomacy. US diplomacy in the region is now seen as an elaborate strategy of diplomatic ploys that have resulted in the continued expansion of the Jewish state at the expense of the Palestinians.<sup>7</sup> Such a strong bias toward Israel by US administrations, undermines the mediation efforts of US diplomats. After decades of the approach, US officials has failed to produce anything beyond

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5 Fred Larsen, "The Facade of Middle East Peace?," Harvard International Review, January 18, 2021, <https://hir.harvard.edu/the-facadeof-middle-east-peace/> (accessed February 22, 2021).

6 Ksenia Svetlova, "The Two-State Solution Won't Save Itself, Mr. President," Newsweek, March 04, 2021, <https://www.newsweek.com/two-state-solution-wont-save-itself-mr-president-opinion-1573885> (accessed February 28, 2021).<sup>7</sup> Dennis Ross, Juan Zarate, "Are There Pieces of Trump's Foreign Policy Worth Keeping?," Washington Institute, January 27, 2021, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/are-there-pieces-trumps-foreign-policy-worth-keeping> (accessed February 28, 2021).

7 Chas W. Freeman, "Israel-Palestine: The Consequences of the Conflict," Middle East Policy Council, January 27, 2020, <https://mepc.org/speeches/israel-palestine-consequences-conflict> (accessed March 08, 2021).

providing political cover for Israel. The achievement of American peacemakers has been to discredit themselves. US diplomacy on the Israeli-Palestinian issue has become increasingly unacceptable to the world as a whole.<sup>8</sup>

The major oil-producing countries - particularly Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar – have a decisive and unbreakable military and economic alliance with the US, so America must strive to strengthen a united Arab-Israeli alliance against Iran. Iran, with its network of influential proxies in the region, may be a new entrant to Russian and Chinese influence. This Arab-Israeli alliance against Iran cannot be effective or even achieved without a comprehensive peace.<sup>9</sup> The Biden administration's commitment to a two-state solution is significant because it conflicts with a distorted perception of President Donald Trump's treatment of the peace process as a trade deal. The use of important words and concepts such as “human rights” or “the two-state solution” completely disappeared from the global and Middle Eastern vocabulary under President Trump. There is a likelihood they may return under President Biden. However, if words are not backed up by a plan of action, they will further destabilize security, expand settlements, and increase the fragility and vulnerability of the Palestinian Authority. This will create a toxic and explosive mixture with unknown consequences, evidenced by the outbreak of conflict in a wide, sudden and violent way, similar to what happened in May 2021.

### Looking at Israel

If Israel does not cooperate to create a Palestinian state, they will face a situation in the future where Arabs constitute the majority or a near majority of the population of Israel and the West Bank. Israel will then face a very difficult choice of granting West Bank Arabs voting rights. This would mean the end of Israel as a Jewish state, or not to do so and be seen by most of the world as an apartheid state. Of course, neither of these options would be in the best interest of Israel.<sup>10</sup>

The importance of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has declined significantly since the beginning of the nineties, due to several factors, including the optimistic view of the conflict after the conclusion of the Oslo Agreement in 1993. Other factors include the Iranian threat, the Syrian war, the Iraq disaster, the rise of ISIS, waves of Iraqi and Syrians refugees, the so-called “Arab Spring” and the subsequent waves of instability. Amidst all this (as much as some try to reject reality) a sustainable solution for the Palestinians remains the key for Israel and its Arab neighbors need to build a regional economic and security structure.<sup>11</sup>

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8 Ibid.

9 Dani Tahrawi, “The Arab-Israeli Peace Process is More Important Now than Ever,” Fikra Forum, April 22, 2016, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/arab-israeli-peace-process-more-important-now-ever> (accessed March 08, 2021).

10 Sam Bahour, “Time is not on Israel’s side,” Mondoweiss, August 03, 2020, <https://mondoweiss.net/2020/08/time-is-not-on-israelsside/> (accessed March 03, 2021).

11 Mara Rudman, “The Middle East Peace Process: An Analysis From Former US Negotiators,” The Center for American Progress, April 27, 2020, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2020/04/27/483987/middle-east-peace-process-analysis-former-us-negotiators/> (accessed March 03, 2021).

Instability and the spread of hatred and violence in the Middle East as a result of preventing the Palestinians from establishing their independent state could lead to a wider war with dire consequences for Israel and many other countries. This war may be particularly devastating to Israel because Hamas and Hezbollah are stockpiling and developing more rockets and other increasingly lethal weapons, as confirmed in the May 2021 clashes.<sup>12</sup> The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian Arab conflict is one of the main roots of anti-Semitism. The resentment against Israelis and Jews is building due to media reports of the brutal assault by the IDF in Gaza and compare the death toll on both sides; and seeing the detention of Palestinians at security checkpoints (often crudely) and other examples on what they perceive as humiliation. The failure to achieve a settlement to the Israeli- Palestinian conflict harms Israel's image worldwide.<sup>13</sup>

In the past, Israel needed to be in a state of war to achieve internal cohesion for its people. Now in Israel, there is a large and growing poverty gap threatening its internal cohesion. Therefore, Israel needs a state of comprehensive, sustainable, and secure peace to deal effectively with its main economic, social, and environmental problems.<sup>15</sup> Israel needs peace to effectively address an impending climate crisis and many other environmental threats. Some climate experts say climate change could spin out of control with catastrophic impacts within a few years unless drastic changes are made soon. If this crisis is not resolved, then nothing else will matter.<sup>14</sup>

### **China's Role as an Emerging Power**

Recently, financial analysts reported that China may overtake the US as the largest economic superpower within the next decade. However, economic supremacy alone will not be sufficient to overtake the US as the number one superpower in the world.<sup>15</sup> China must establish itself as a military, cultural and diplomatic power. Engaging China further in the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks may be a major step for China to achieve its goal of becoming a major diplomatic power. It is therefore appropriate for the Chinese to express their willingness to help solve

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12 Richard H. Schwartz, "Why Resolving the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict is So Important," Times Of Israel, April 30, 2017, <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/why-resolving-the-israelipalestinian-conflict-is-so-important/> (accessed March 06, 2021).

13Ibid.

15Ibid.

14 Sue Surkes, "Israelis should prepare for 50-degree Celsius summer days, climate expert says," Times Of Israel, November 21, 2019, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israelis-should-prepare-for-50-degree-celsius-summer-days-climate-expert-says/> (accessed March 17, 2021).

15 Roie Yellinek, "Is China Intervening in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?," Besa Center, August 13, 2017, <https://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/china-israel-palestinians/> (accessed March 17, 2021).

the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is, after all, a widely publicized struggle. This propaganda could give China many "credit points" among the international community, and of course, at the expense of the US.<sup>16</sup>

China's economic interests are to see "development and cooperation" between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Both Israel and Palestine are partners in the "One Belt, One Road" initiative as they will benefit from Chinese funding to develop transportation routes linking Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. China is using the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to promote its businesses, energy, transportation, and infrastructure projects. Chinese companies are slowly taking control of the region at the expense of Western companies that have been operating in the region for years.<sup>19</sup>

China is the largest foreign investor in the unstable and conflict-ridden Middle East, so resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict under a Chinese umbrella would be one of their main long-term goals. Strategically, the BRI is how China seeks to peacefully collapse American hegemony in the region. The link between the Belt and Road Initiative and the strategic partnerships that China is establishing in the region allows it to gradually dominate the region without creating tensions with the US or the West. In other words, the BRI is an advanced Chinese plan to transfer hegemony from the West and the US to China without war or conflict, which may be helped by a growing Chinese role to solve the Palestinian issue at the expense of the US role.<sup>17</sup>

### **Make Room for Russia**

In the last decade Russia has shifted its geostrategic center of gravity, with a major restructuring of its foreign policy priorities. As Washington retreats from the Middle East, Moscow is consolidating its presence in the region. The consolidation gradually began with its calculated participation in the Syrian conflict in 2015 and its attempts to translate operational gains into strategic capital across the region. During this time, the US-sponsored peace process reached a dead end (from 2014 until now). This allowed Russia to consolidate its influence in the Middle East by proposing the idea of sponsoring talks between Palestinians and Israel.

Russia does not necessarily see its diplomatic participation as a means of ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Instead, this engagement serves to gain Russian influence in the Middle East. Russia aims to build a 'network of influence' among regional actors and enhance its image as an attractive political partner. It is clear that Russia's desire to play an influential role in the Middle East peace process is part of President Vladimir Putin's plan to return Moscow to the region in a profound way after years of retreat. This plan revolves around everything except

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16 Charlotte Gao, "China Vows to Play an Active Role in Settling the Palestine-Israel Issue," *The Diplomat*, December 28, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/china-vows-to-play-an-active-role-in-settling-the-palestine-israel-issue/> (accessed March 10, 2021).<sup>19</sup> Herb Keinon, "China pushing its four-point peace plan," *The Jerusalem Post*, August 02, 2017, <https://www.jpost.com/Arab-IsraeliConflict/China-pushing-their-four-point-peace-plan-501375> (accessed March 07, 2021).

17 Mercy A. Kuo, "Israel, Iran, and China: US-Middle East Relations," *The Diplomat*, March 10, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/03/israel-iran-and-china-us-middle-east-relations/> (accessed March 09, 2021).

for the creation of peace in the Middle East. Instead, it has to do with Moscow's ambitions and Washington's competition.<sup>18</sup>

### Iran's 'Axis of Resistance'

It is clear that the Biden administration's regional priority on its foreign policy agenda is Iran's nuclear activities, and believed that the JCPOA may be restored. The change in the American administration allowed Iran to increase its influence at the regional level. This may cause the normalization process to be interrupted. Thus, it can be said that Arab-Israeli normalization is weak on various levels and will not be achieved at the rate required to bring about a qualitative change in the course of the peace process.<sup>19</sup>

Iran is using the Palestinian cause in the interest of increasing its influence in the region at the expense of its regional and global rivals. The state-owned or pro-Iran media outlets are standing unanimously with the Palestinians as they take their anti-Israel rhetoric to the extreme. They are not spreading Iranian leaders' denunciations of Israeli actions, as is the case in Gaza only, but rather they are spreading controversial news about the rapprochement between Israel and Saudi Arabia and are also denouncing the countries that have sought to normalize relations with Israel. This emotional and dramatic narrative allows Tehran to portray itself as the leader of the 'axis of resistance.' This is facing a certain success in Arab opposition movements and public opinions that blame their leaders for their authoritarian policies and their subservience to the US. In the same manner, Hezbollah is trying to exploit the Palestinian issue. In December 2017, Hassan Nasrallah called on the Palestinians to declare the outbreak of an intifada and "expel any delegation that comes to normalize relations with Israel" while the Lebanese Shiite leader sponsored the notion that Saudi Arabia and Israel had colluded in attacking his movement in Lebanon.<sup>23</sup>

Hezbollah, one of the main proxies of Iran, has fought several wars against Israel and continues to mobilize new and existing adherents through strong anti-Israel rhetoric. Conversely, a peaceful settlement in the Arab-Israeli conflict would strip Iran of its most widespread excuse for providing material and financial support to terrorist groups that oppose Israel's existence and wage proxy wars between Arab states throughout the region.<sup>20</sup>

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18 Ibid.

19 Ceyhun Cicekci, "Scenarios for future of Arab-Israeli 'normalization'," Anadolu Agency, January 27, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/analysis-scenarios-for-future-of-arab-israeli-normalization/> (accessed February 28, 2021).<sup>23</sup> Elisabeth Marteu, "Saudi Arabia and the Israel-Palestine conflict: between a rock and a hard place," The Conversation, June 24, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/saudi-arabia-and-the-israel-palestine-conflict-between-a-rock-and-a-hard-place-98129> (accessed March 07, 2021).

20 Dani Tahrawi, "The Arab-Israeli Peace Process is More Important Now than Ever," Fikra Forum, April 22, 2016, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/arab-israeli-peace-process-more-important-now-ever> (accessed March 07, 2021).

## A Saudi Perspective

Saudi Arabia has long been reluctant to show any sign of détente with Israel, but with the announcement of the official normalization of relations between the UAE and Israel, the situation is changing. In this current situation, Mohammed bin Salman, who wants to strengthen his relationship with Washington and highlight the nation's economic, political, and cultural openness. Mohammed bin Salman was keen to express his support for the "two-state solution" by stating, "I believe that the Palestinians and Israelis have the right to own their land. But we must get a peace agreement to ensure stability for all and for us to have normal relations."<sup>21</sup> Although nothing official would happen before significant progress was made in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Mohammed bin Salman's statement clearly expresses that he wishes to develop relations with Israel. As the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and the leader of the Sunni world, the Saudi leadership cannot risk cutting its traditional stance on the Palestinian issue if Tel Aviv does not offer something in return.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the government of Israel is deluding itself if it believes that it can normalize its relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia while refusing to negotiate and imposing a violent policy against the Palestinians.

## Looking through the Counter-Terrorism Lens

The US will not be able to build an effective coalition in the Middle East against terrorism as long as it continues its unconditional support for Israel. What the US describes as a 60-nation alliance against ISIS is, at least in the Middle East, an alliance only with governments. Governments cannot contain and defeat extremism on their own without the availability of popular support. If they could, NATO would have eliminated Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, and US drones could have eliminated Al Qaeda in Yemen. Instead, they failed. The people who are the main recruiting base for extremist groups are the ones who can neutralize extremism, and this only happens when their hearts and minds oppose it. It is people, not governments, who can legitimize any campaign against extremism.<sup>23</sup>

In many Arab countries, there is opposition to terrorism, but there is also opposition to partnerships with the US (the perceived guarantor of a Zionist project in Palestine). This image of the US, along with its history of interventions in the region, fuels mistrust among Arab citizens and impedes the formation of a partnership to counter extremism. Washington should understand that every time it uses its veto power against a UN Security Council resolution regarding Israeli settlements or the establishment of a Palestinian state, it sabotages its efforts to combat extremism.<sup>24</sup>

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21 Mark Heinrich, "Saudi crown prince says Israelis have right to their own land," Reuters, April 02, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-prince-israel/> (accessed March 29, 2021).

22 Ibid.

23 Ibrahim Fraihat, "Palestine: Still key to stability in the Middle East," Brookings, January 28, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/palestine-still-key-to-stability-in-the-middle-east/> (accessed March 07, 2021).

24 Ibid.

Not surprisingly, Palestinians are being recruited not only by Hamas, but also by other extremist terrorist groups of global reach. Radical Islamist groups have actively recruited individuals from the Palestinian refugee camps. Examples are: the late Abdullah Azzam, who was Osama bin Laden's spiritual guide; Abu Qatada the Palestinian, the spiritual leader of Al Qaeda in Europe; Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, the teacher of Abu Musab alZarqawi, the former leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq. In April 2017, Jordan's King Abdullah indicated that the Palestinians had carried out 96% of ISIS attacks in the Kingdom of Jordan.<sup>25</sup>

When Rob Malley, the Obama administration's senior adviser on countering ISIS, was asked whether the group had anything to do with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he replied: "There are many reasons for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict ... One of the reasons is that will help defuse a problem that fuels extremism." While admitting that resolving the conflict will not be "the magic wand that would put an end to all the problems that plague the Middle East," Malley reiterated that "the lack of a solution fuels extremism." Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi seemed to confirm Malley's point of view, when he said: "The Jews thought that we forgot Palestine and that they distracted us from it. Jews. We have not forgotten Palestine for a moment. We are getting close every day."<sup>26</sup>

Many political figures in the Middle East use the Palestinian cause (whether honestly or otherwise) as a political tool. The use of the Palestinian cause is not limited to political figures, but, of course, extends to terrorist and subversive groups. As in Yemen, the Houthi slogan is "God is Great .. Death to America .. Death to Israel. The

Curse of the Jews ... A Victory for Islam." Even as they advanced in the Yemeni capital in 2014, they never lost sight of generating sympathy using the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and adopted a secondary slogan, "We fight in Sanaa with our eyes on Jerusalem!"<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion

The recent wave of normalization between some Arab countries and Israel will never be a substitute for a comprehensive peace agreement, but if properly used, may help improve the negotiating environment between the Palestinians and Israel. Peace comes from common understandings and agreements concluded on an equal footing. Therefore, Palestinian hostility will not be silenced through diplomatic treaties between the Arab countries and Israel, but through changing the conditions for negotiation. Any claim that peace in the Middle East will come from side agreements reflects a blatant disregard for the most important factor of "the Palestinians" because they simply will not go anywhere and Israel will end up being an apartheid state. The Israeli-

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25 Luis Fleischman, "Biden administration needs creativity to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," The Palm Beach Post, March 03, 2021, <https://www.palmbeachpost.com/story/opinion/columns/2021/03/03/luis-fleischman-biden-needs-creativity-solve-israeli-palestinianpuzzle/6891210002/> (accessed March 13, 2021).

26 Ibrahim Fraihat, "Palestine: Still key to stability in the Middle East," Brookings, January 28, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/palestine-still-key-to-stability-in-the-middle-east/> (accessed March 07, 2021).

27 Ibid.

Palestinian conflict is the main driver of all conflicts in the region and must be taken into account in our perceptions of greatpower competition, regional conflicts, or ideological conflicts.

#### **Recommendations for the US / for USCENTCOM**

- Reshape the US role for greater persistence and impact, through adjusting both how the US engages with the parties and the rest of the world on this issue, and how its own policymaking process is organized.
- Preserve and advance the vision of a negotiated solution between Israelis and Palestinians that brings about a mutually agreed end of conflict.
- Pursue concrete steps to meaningfully improve freedom, security, and prosperity for Israelis and Palestinians, and advance the prospects of an agreed two-state solution to the conflict over the medium term.
- Consult friends, allies, and international organizations in major decisions as unilateral 'fait accompli' decisions usually embolden revisionist states or terrorist organizations, eager to oust the US from the region.
- Reassess the meaningful and unpopular support provided to Israel within the larger context of a regional and global awareness of the Middle East.
- Caution Israel not to abandon democracy over religion and ethnicity.