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The evolution of US foreign policy in regard to Israel under changing Administrations: from Obama to Trump

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1. AIM AND INTENDED PURPOSE

The aim of this dissertation project is to examine the historical evolution of the United States' foreign policy regarding Israel from Barack Obama to Donald Trump, first providing an overview of the origin and current situation of the Jewish state in order to explain its privileged situation as one of the United States' strongest allies in the Middle East region, and then looking into the evolution of both states' diplomatic relations and the differences that have been set between the Obama administration and the policies carried out under the current Trump presidency.

It was in 1948 when President Harry Truman officially recognized Israel as a full-fledged state and its then-provisional government spearheaded by David Ben-Gurion as the *de facto* authority of the newborn country. Over the next decades, Israel not only consolidated its status as one of the most advanced countries in the world; it also developed and strengthened a relation with the United States that would not only shape and define the new country's foreign policy, but also condition its behavior and internal affairs.

As for the United States, it is important to highlight the key role that Israel plays in its foreign policy; a geographically small state is also one that boasts one of the strongest economies in the region and a culturally homogeneous, considerably prosperous society- a country that is widely believed to have developed advanced nuclear weapons- and since 1976, it stands as the largest annual recipient of US foreign aid while enjoying a far more privileged position than most other recipients of US assistance (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2008). The powerful Jewish lobby in the United States has long influenced the country's foreign policy regarding Israel, and is one of the main reasons why the US has maintained a consistently strong pro-Israel approach; through generous political campaign donations, heavy media presence, and individual donations to a wide variety of foundations and causes, the Jewish lobby's influence has been present through the consecutive presidential administrations and remains to be one of the most prominent lobbies in the United States.

This seven-decade long relationship has known both ups and downs throughout the years; the subsequent governments have taken on different approaches to the many matters regarding Israel, including its nuclear arsenal and the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The transition from Obama's Democrat administration to Trump's Republican one is proving to be impacting the partnership and bilateral relations between both countries.

The following pages will aim at analyzing this transition through a historical lens. In order to do that, we will start off by introducing the issue and framing it over time; emphasizing those aspects or specific events that have contributed to the shaping of Israel as it is today. From the very early origins to the concept of Israel to the present-day notion of the country, we will look into its roots, evolution, key episodes and conflicts. That analysis will take us to the current situation of the matter, and allow us to look into the United States' role regarding Israel; touching over issues such as the two-state solution or the ever-pressing discussion on nuclear proliferation.

The follow up to these sections will be the final conclusion and annexes, where we will reflect upon the previous pages and attach a series of documents and images to further clarify both the analysis and the aforementioned conclusion to the dissertation.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Israel was born as a country in 1948, but the Land of Israel is a geographical area that was first mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (the *Tanakh*) and features significantly throughout it.

2.1 ORIGIN AND BIRTH OF ISRAEL

2.1.1 GEOGRAPHICAL SITUATION: PALESTINE

Israel is located in the Middle East, a region of Western Asia, along the eastern side of the Mediterranean Sea. It shares its borders with Egypt to the southwest, Lebanon to the north, Syria to the northeast, and Jordan to the east. Its borders with Palestine are located both to the east (with the West Bank) and to the west (with the Gaza Strip). Israel also borders with the Red Sea to the south, with a mere few kilometers of coastline.

There are four maps that are useful to understand the evolution of Palestine and Israel before the latter became the country that we know today: the whole of the territory as it was under the Roman Empire, followed up to its situation under the Ottoman Empire, then the Mandatory Palestine under British administration and the current location of the Israeli borders within the same space.

As seen in Annex 1.1, the Roman Empire extended its territory to the Middle East, settling in the region of Judea while pushing to extend its frontiers further outwards. Emperor Hadrian, in the year 135 A.D joined two provinces to form the new province of Syrian Palestine or Palestine: Judea and Galilee (Carol, 2015). In 425 A.D, Palestine was formed by three administrative regions: Palestina Prima, Palestina Secunda and Palestina Tertia (Grief, 2013). The upcoming centuries saw the beginning of the Christianization of the Roman Empire after Emperor Constantine and the Crusades that swept through the eastern Mediterranean lands until the Ottoman Conquest of 1517.

The Ottoman Empire (see Annex 1.2) divided Palestine into the following districts or *sanjaqs*: Safed, Nablus, Gaza, Lajjun and Jerusalem, all subordinate to the governor of Damascus (Cohen, 1984). With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, and following years of a declining system, Palestine fell under the control of the British Empire and took the name of Mandatory Palestine. This new geopolitical entity (see Annex 1.3) would stand in place and help design the borders of present-day Israel. Created in 1948, the State of Israel has the geographical conditions described in the first paragraph of this section: its borders have evolved from the UN's original partition plan, which established the 1948 borders, through several wars with neighboring countries in which Israel came out victorious and acquired more land, and to the frontiers we know today (see Annex 1.4).

As of 2017, Israel has a population of around 8,3 million people that live in the six main districts of the country: Central, Haifa, Jerusalem, Northern, Southern, and Tel Aviv. A highly urbanized country with one of the highest life expectancy rates in the world, Israel is a Parliamentary Republic led by a chief of state, President Reuven Rivlin and a Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017)

2.1.2 HISTORICAL JEWISH CLAIMS OVER ISRAEL: HERZL AND ZIONISM

In order to understand the historical Jewish claims over Israel and the development of its history, it is important to first introduce and explain the concept of Zionism: the "belief in the existence of a common past and a common future for the Jewish people" (Laqueur, 2003), a nationalist movement that supports the creation and preservation of a Jewish national state in Palestine (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018). Zionism is a highly controversial issue, with both supporters and detractors even within the Jewish community.

Modern Zionism is generally considered to have risen in 19th century Europe, after Austro-Hungarian activist Theodor Herzl published a book under the name of *Der Judenstaat.* Born in Budapest in 1860, Herzl moved to Vienna to study law and he came

into contact with the anti-Semitic movements that were sweeping through the city. In later years, he became a press correspondent for *Neue Freie Presse* in Paris, but his concern and preoccupation regarding the Jewish problem kept growing until in 1897, he decided to call on a Zionist congress in Basel, Switzerland. This congress would lay the foundations of the World Zionist Organization (Laqueur, 2003).

Herzl's speech was a raging success amid other speakers and attendees, as he proposed a series of goals for the Jewish community; among them were the strengthening of the Jewish self-awareness and the collective consciousness of a nationality. Herzl also sought the approval of other governments to support his ambitions, although he soon was aware that his initial goals would not be easy to achieve. He engaged in a series of diplomatic missions in order to gain support for his cause, and in 1898 he set foot for the very first time in what would later become the country of Israel, but his wish to form a Jewish state would not be materialized until after his death.

Aside from the aforementioned reasons presented by Herzl and upheld by his supporters, there are also a series of ancient, religious claims over the land of Israel: the city of Jerusalem features consistently through the Hebrew Bible, and these Scriptures state that Yahweh referred to Jerusalem as follows:

"I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there forever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually" (Tanakh: Book of Melachim I, Kings 1, 9:3).

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 and the consequent fall and disintegration of the Ottoman Empire would entail the beginning of the realization of Herzl's aspirations, by paving the way for the Zionist and religious claims to become a reality.

2.1.3 THE SYKES-PICOT AGREEMENT

The Ottoman Empire was one of the Central Powers in Europe that was part of World War I's Quadruple Alliance (along with Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire

and Bulgaria). Opposing the Triple Entente made up of the United Kingdom, France and Russia, the Ottoman Empire would have crumbled into pieces by the end of the conflict.

But it was in 1916, two years before the War came to an end, that the United Kingdom and France put out a secret pact in which they established areas of influence and control in the Arab lands located in the Middle East that were still under the Ottoman Empire. The settlement, green-lit by Russia, came to be known by the name Sykes-Picot Agreement (see Annex 2). Under this pact, the United Kingdom would retain control of the central and southern parts of Mesopotamia, whereas France would get to keep the Syrian coast and Lebanon. The rest of the vast territory would be administered by both countries: the UK to the north and France to the south (The Sykes-Picot Agreement, 1916).

Even though the Sykes Picot Agreement proposed an international administration of Palestine due to all parties involved in the pact being interested in the region, it was in 1922 when a mandate by the League of Nations dictated that the United Kingdom was to extend its full control to the area, thus establishing a new geopolitical area: the British Mandate of Palestine. It became effective a year later, after the ratification of the Treaty of Lausanne, which also recognized the new borders of Turkey. The preamble of the Mandate for Palestine established two sections that would be key in the upcoming years for the region; first by speaking of the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine, and then by explicitly claiming that "recognition has thereby been given to the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine and to the grounds for reconstituting their national home in that country" (League of Nations, 1922).

2.1.4 THE BALFOUR DECLARATION

The Sykes-Picot Agreement overlapped in time with another document that would be crucial for the future of Palestine: the Balfour Declaration (see Annex 3). Issued in 1917, this text was an open letter from the British government that publicly expressed the country's explicit willingness to accept the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine:

"His Majesty's government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country" (The Balfour Declaration, 1917).

The issuing of the Balfour declaration marked a key step towards the achievement of the Zionist dreams of a national Jewish homeland; it was the first time that a major international player showcased its support for the Zionist cause so openly. Although somehow vague regarding the legal extent of the declaration, the impact and widespread significance of counting on such a categorical, sympathetic statement from the United Kingdom was a remarkable achievement for Zionism and those advocating for a national Jewish homeland.

2.1.5 1948: A NEW STATE IS BORN

After the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration, and up to 1948, the British Empire was still in control of Mandatory Palestine. For a few years prior, nationalist movements among the Jewish and the Arab communities had been arising. In 1936, the first Arab Revolt broke out when a group of Arab leaders began protesting the Zionist advances in Palestine, calling for strikes and boycotts that would eventually lead to serious attacks against Jewish property.

Negotiations between Arab leaders and British officials would eventually quiet down the revolt in 1939, the same year the British government issued the White Paper on Palestine: a document by the government of the United Kingdom in light of the failure of the London Conference between the Arabs and the Jewish of Palestine that had aimed at reaching an agreement. The White Paper of 1939 was then set as the governing policy to be followed from that year on, even though both Zionist and Arab leaders expressed their refusal to accept the document (The Jewish Virtual Library, n.d).

On November 29, 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted Resolution 181 (II) on the future government of Palestine: it stated that since the situation in Palestine didn't seem to allow for friendly relations among nations, and the United Kingdom was to terminate its Mandate by the first day of August 1948, the Security Council would be taking any necessary measures to implement the Partition Plan that had been previously approved by the organization. Zionist leaders accepted the document willingly, but all Arab countries rejected it unanimously and expressed their intention to oppose any state under said Plan.

This proposal first stated that British armed forces would be progressively withdrawn from Palestine, and that The City of Jerusalem would be kept under a special international regime administered by the United Nations. Regarding the rest of Palestine, the Plan provided for a peaceful division of the land into an Arab State and a Jewish State, plus Jerusalem in its international status. The plan explicitly said that

> "Independent Arab and Jewish States and the Special International Regime for the City of Jerusalem, set forth in part III of this plan, shall come into existence in Palestine two months after the evacuation of the armed forces of the mandatory Power has been completed but in any case not later than 1 October 1948 [...] The period between the adoption by the General Assembly of its recommendation on the question of Palestine and the establishment of the independence of the Arab and Jewish States shall be a transitional period" (The United Nations, 1947).

Regarding the borders of the proposed Arab and Jewish States, the United Nations designed a thorough plan (see Annex 4) and highlighted the fact that "existing rights in respect of Holy Places and religious buildings or sites shall not be denied or impaired" as well as the "freedom of conscience, religion and worship, language, education, speech and press, assembly and association, and petition" (The United Nations, 1947). On citizenship rights, the Plan proposed that

> "Palestinian citizens residing in Palestine outside the City of Jerusalem, as well as Arabs and Jews who, not holding Palestinian citizenship, reside in Palestine outside

the City of Jerusalem shall, upon the recognition of independence, become citizens of the State in which they are resident and enjoy full civil and political rights. Persons over the age of eighteen years may opt, within one year from the date of recognition of independence of the State in which they reside, for citizenship of the other State, providing that no Arab residing in the area of the proposed Arab State shall have the right to opt for citizenship in the proposed Jewish State and no Jew residing in the proposed Jewish State shall have the right to opt for citizenship in the proposed Arab State" (The United Nations, 1947).

However, Resolution 181 (II) was never implemented: its non-binding character was not enough to stop a civil war from breaking out in Palestine as soon as the Resolution was adopted. With the British troops already withdrawing from Palestine in accordance with the UN Resolution, the conflict escalated until in May 14, 1948 at midnight (the day the British Mandate expired) David Ben-Gurion, the Executive Head of the World Zionist Organization, announced the establishment of the State of Israel, which was recognized by the United States within a few hours. The Proclamation of Independence stated that

"[Accordingly] we, members of the People's Council, representatives of the Jewish Community of Israel and of the Zionist Movement, are here assembled on the day of the termination of the British Mandate over Israel, and by virtue of our natural and historic right and on the strength of the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish state in Israel, to be known as the State of Israel [...] We appeal to the United Nations to assist the Jewish people in the building up of its State and to receive the State of Israel into the community of nations [...] We extend our hand to all neighboring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighborliness" (Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, 1948).

President Harry Truman was quick to recognize the provisional Jewish government as *de facto* authority of the Jewish state. The following day, Israel's neighboring countries (Egypt, Syria, Transjordan, Lebanon and Iraq) declared war and launched an attack on the newborn state that would be known as the First Arab-Israeli

war. This conflict would result in Israel not only keeping the lands assigned by Resolution 181 (II), but also taking control of a large share of the area that was to be part of the proposed Arab State.

2.2 EVOLUTION OF US-ISRAEL DIPLOMACY (1948-2008)

2.2.1 CLASHING WITH NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES

The Israeli war of independence (the First Arab-Israeli War) was followed by a series of other conflicts that spanned over the next decades and would not contribute to the creation of peaceful relations with neighboring countries.

Starting in 1956, the Suez crisis or Second Arab-Israeli War was an international crisis that broke out when the Egyptian president at the time, Gamal Abdel Nasser, decided to nationalize the Suez Canal. By seizing control of the Canal, which up to that point had been under control of the British and the French, Nasser expected to collect enough tolls to allow for the construction of a dam that the American and British governments had refused to fund. Israel joined in on the tension in retaliation for Nasser's blockage of the Straits of Tiran, and sent military brigades in towards the Canal that would soon be followed by the United Kingdom and France.

International pressure from the United States and the Soviet Union forced the three invaders to withdraw their troops that same year, although Israel did manage to achieve the opening of a safe passage and freedom of navigation for its ships through the canal and the strait (Russell, 2013). This event prompted the United Nations to create a peacekeeping force along the borders of Israel and Egypt, which came to be known as the first United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF I), in order to secure the cessation of hostilities and ensure a peace settlement between the states (Kumaraswamy, 2015).

However, the tension kept growing until May 1967, when Nasser again decided to close down the Suez Canal and the Strait of Tiran to Israeli ships (Russell, 2013). A month later the Third Arab-Israeli War or the Six-Day War (see Annex 5) would last from

June 5-10; it began when Israel launched a series of pre-emptive air strikes against Egyptian, Jordanian and Syrian targets, effectively managing to destroy their air forces and take control of the Gaza Strip, the Eastern Sinai, the West Bank of Jordan, the Golan Heights of Syria and the city of Jerusalem (MacQueen, 2018). Hostilities continued into the War of Attrition (1967-1970), that concluded when a ceasefire was agreed upon between the contenders, with Israel keeping the borders won over in the Six-Day War.

These new Israeli borders would again prompt the break out of a new conflict: the Yom Kippur War of 1973. This conflict was fought between Israel and a coalition of Arab states led by Syria and Egypt (with the support of Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Jordan) that launched an attack and consequent invasion on the day of the holiest celebration in Judaism, *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement). The coalition hoped to win back territory lost to Israel during the third Arab-Israeli war; Egyptian troops went into the Sinai Peninsula and Syrian troops crossed into the Golan Heights. Israel was quick to organize its army and fight back, with the United States on their side, whereas the Soviet Union sided with the Arab block. A ceasefire pushed by the UN was reached in late October and would later lead to the signing of the Camp Davis Accords of 1979, a series of agreements that were the culmination of the peace process between Israelis and Egyptians and overseen by the United States. This event meant Egypt and Israel recognized each other sovereignty and put an end to the ongoing tensions (Mikaberidze, 2011).

Nevertheless, Israel still had many open, violent fronts. The Lebanon War broke out in 1982 when the Israel Defense Forces invaded southern Lebanon in a military operation targeting the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and a series of consequent conflicts with Lebanon would follow soon after: in 1985 it was the South Lebanon conflict between Israel and Muslim militant groups supported by Hezbollah, and in 2006 it was the Lebanon War (the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War) that broke out when a Hezbollah ground contingent crossed the Lebanese border into Israeli land and launched an attack against military ground forces. Israel's response was to instruct its air force to bomb many strategical infrastructures within Lebanon, such as the Beirut airport, power stations and military facilities, as well as the Hezbollah quarters in Beirut.

A month into the conflict, the United Nations brokered a ceasefire and put out Resolution 1701, accepted by both Israel and Lebanon (Aly, Feldman, & Shikaki, 2013). Israel lifted the naval blockade it had imposed on Lebanon and withdrew its Defense Forces from the country, although the disarmament of Hezbollah called for in UN Resolution 1701 did not take place.

On the Palestinian front, the two uprisings against Israel known as *Intifadas* were attempts to fight back against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip- The First Intifada (1987-1993) began when an Israeli army tank transporter collided into a group of Palestinian refugees in Gaza, killing four and injuring seven (Tamir, 2017). The incident prompted a series of strikes, boycotts, protests and other types of non-violent demonstrations, along with occasional acts of minor violence such as throwing stones (Spring, Aharoni, Summy, & Elliot, 2010) over the span of six years. The First Intifada managed to attract international attention and support for the Palestinian cause, and it came to an end with the 1991 Madrid Conference and the 1993 Oslo Accords, both processes aimed at achieving a peaceful solution to the ongoing dispute and supported by the United States and the Soviet Union/Russia.

However, these agreements proved ineffective when the Second Intifada, much more violent than its predecessor, erupted in the year 2000, after Ariel Sharon (then opposition leader of the Israeli government) visited the Temple Mount in the Old City of Jerusalem, which was seen as a provocation by the Palestinians- Israel once again claiming their right to all of Jerusalem, including the holy sites. With the peace negotiations between both parties already on the rocks, riots started and a wave of large-scale suicide attacks spewed across the area. Civilian marks were targeted and the Israeli military responded through air and ground strikes, while Israel began the construction of the West Bank separation barrier built mostly on Palestinian land.

A settlement was reached at the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit, when the Prime Minister of Israel, and the President of the Palestinian authority, with the contribution of the leaders of the United States, Jordan and Egypt, expressed their wish to put an end to the conflict. Israel agreed to resettle all its citizens from the Gaza Strip and from four

settlements in the West Bank (Scharia, 2014), and both parties declared they would cease all violent attacks against each other.

The two Intifadas were followed by the 2008 Gaza War or Operation Cast Lead, which began as an attempt by Israel to destroy the ability of Palestinian armed groups in the area to fire rockets into Israel- an ongoing practice that had long targeted Israeli objectives and that had just recently reached a ceasefire. Said ceasefire was broken by Israeli soldiers, who killed six Palestinian fighters that had crossed the Gaza border (Esveld, 2009). Israel then launched a full-scale invasion of the Gaza Strip, targeting underground tunnels and destroying weapon stashes all along the Strip. Many civilians were killed by Israeli air strikes, and the country called for a unilateral ceasefire in January 2009 and withdrew its troops. This conflict was severely condemned by many human rights organizations and the United Nations, which produced a report condemning the "disproportionate use of force" by Israel and accusing both parties of committing war crimes (The United Nations, 2009). However, that didn't stop two consequent military operations from taking over the Gaza Strip again: Operation Pillar of Defense (2012) and Operation Protective Edge (2014).

The conflicts that took place in the later part of the 20th century between Israel and its neighboring states were greatly influenced by the one event that shaped the international panorama from the 1950s onwards: the Cold War.

2.2.2 ISRAEL IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COLD WAR

The Cold War began in the decade after the end of the Second World War; it was a state of constant tension between two opposing ideologies: the capitalist bloc (the United States and its allied countries, including Israel and NATO members), and the communist bloc (the Soviet Union and its satellite states under the Warsaw Pact).

When David Ben-Gurion declared the new state of Israel in 1948, both the Soviet Union and the United States were quick to show their support for the country and recognize it as an official state. The two superpowers had agreed to the Partition Plan for

Palestine and were in favor of the creation of a Jewish state, even if it meant endangering the relationship with the Arab states of the region that radically opposed the establishment of such a state.

But that approach didn't last long: the Soviet Union's clear support for the Arab side on the Arab-Israeli conflict came after a shift on its initially friendly approach to Israel, and it was one of the factors that contributed to Israel moving closer to the United States and trying to find nearby allies to fight Soviet control.

On the American side and under the Eisenhower administration (1953-1961), the United States had initially sought to remain neutral in the Middle East; but Israel began to develop its *Policy of the Periphery*. This was a strategy that focused on the strengthening of the relationship with states on the periphery of the Middle East that were reluctant to accept Soviet influence on the region (Patten, 2013). The Israeli Prime Minister at the time, David Ben-Gurion[1], considered this policy to be a clear declaration of intent that his country had positioned itself on the side of the United States and its Western allies: the government took a step further as to express its willingness to be accepted into NATO (Eshed, 1997), therefore sending a sharp message to both the Soviets and the Americans of where the country's loyalty laid on.

The intended neutral position Ben-Gurion had initially designed in order to favor Israel's interests was no longer an option: the Korean War of 1950 was the one event that ultimately tipped the scale in favor of joining the Western bloc, and there were three factors that are key to understand this decision: first, the number of immigrants coming from Eastern Europe into Israel decreased significantly, which also decreased the number of supporters of the Soviet Union within Israeli borders. Second, Ben-Gurion was extremely intent on winning the support of the American Jews, both Zionist and non-

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[1] David Ben-Gurion was the first Prime Minister of the State of Israel from 1948 to 1963, with a one-year break between 1954 and 1955. His time in office spanned over the early years of the Cold War.

Zionist. This community rejected any sort of contact with the Soviet Union, and so in order to win their support, Israel was to show its proximity to the US rather than to the USSR. And third, Ben-Gurion sought reparations from the Federal Republic of Germany for the crimes that the Nazis had committed against Jews during World War Two, something that the Israeli Prime Minister knew would be unattainable without the cooperation of the United States (Shlaim, 2004).

By the mid 1950s, the United States, along with France and the United Kingdom, issued the Tripartite Declaration; it aimed at preserving the territorial status quo of the Middle East while regulating the supply of weaponry to the region. The declaration was first and foremost an attempt by western powers to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining too much power in the region by reaffirming the existent borders and their compromise to

> "[The three Governments] should they find that any of these states was preparing to violate frontiers or armistice lines, would, consistently with their obligations as members of the United Nations, immediately take action, both within and outside the United Nations, to prevent such violation" (Tripartite Declaration, 1950).

In continuing with its new pro-Western approach, Ben-Gurion welcomed the Declaration as an attempt to pacify and keep stability in the region, but it wasn't long before he took a more radical step and announced his intention to create an army of 250.000 men that would be ready to assist the United States, the United Kingdom, and Turkey should they require help in resisting the Soviet Union (Aandahl & Slany, 1950).

By 1967, the divide between the East and the West had done nothing but grow, and Israel's position had remained the same. When the Six-Day War broke out, and as the Soviets had consistently rejected and criticized Zionism, they were fast to side with the Arabs and launch an anti-Zionist campaign in the media that painted Zionism as one of the worst threats to not only the Soviet Union, but to the entire world. Linking Zionism to imperialism, capitalism and even fascism was the peak of the USSR's propaganda strategy against Israel, a strategy that reached its most aggressive form that same year of

1967. The Soviet Union and all its satellite states broke diplomatic relations with Israel, and the armed forces from the Arab states used weapons and techniques imported from the USSR. On May 13, 1967, the Soviets provided Egypt with false information that claimed that Israel was mobilizing its troops along the Syrian border in preparation to attack, which prompted Nasser to declare a state of emergency while Egyptian, Syrian and Jordanian troops mobilized themselves (Tucker, 2017). The war erupted on June 5, and the conflict can be perfectly summed up in one term: a *blitzkrieg*.

Israel's impressive military victory made it clear for Soviet leaders- as well as for the rest of the world- that the Arab states did not have the military capabilities required to compete against the Jewish state. Even though on-paper data and numbers seemed to predict an Arab victory for the Egypt-Syria-Iraq-Jordan coalition (409.000 to 230.000 troops, 2.437 to 1.100 tanks, 1.487 to 200 artillery pieces and 649 to 269 combat aircrafts) (Tucker, 2017), Israel's indisputable military advantage proved far superior to that of the Arab states that were being backed up by the Soviets.

In the decade of the 1970s, another large regional conflict involving Israel would be caught up in the middle of the Cold War: the Yom Kippur War of 1973. This conflict was the scenario for the worst confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War since the Cuban missile crisis of 1962: a naval standoff that occurred in the background of the Arab-Israeli conflict and threatened to drive both superpowers into a major confrontation.

The US 6th Fleet, which benefited from having a wide range of available ports for its ships in Italy, Spain, and Greece, became engaged in a confrontation with a nuclear-armed Soviet squadron, which was following the American vessels so aggressively close that it made US Admiral Murphy fear the incident was about to not only breach the 1972 US-USSR Prevention of Incidents On and Over the High Seas Agreement- which aimed at preventing incidents at sea between the two powers and, in case an incident occurred, minimize the impact of it- but to escalate into a full-blown war between the two superpowers (Rabinovich, 2012).

The Prevention of Incidents On and Over the High Seas Agreement pressured both countries into not pointing their missiles at each other, but both the US and USSR kept bringing in new vessels into the standoff in order to be prepared should a battle ensue. The US Admiral claimed that both fleets were

"[...] sitting in a pond in close proximity and the stage for the hitherto unlikely 'war-at-sea' scenario was set [and] fleets were obviously in a high readiness posture for whatever might come next, although it appeared that neither fleet knew exactly what to expect" (Ranft & Till, 1989).

For the two following weeks, the situation remained the same- but as a ceasefire between Egypt and Israel was reached, the 6th Fleet and the Soviet squadron retreated and the crisis was adverted- but the tensions between the East and the West had far from dissipated. In 1979, with the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, the relations deteriorated even further and the event was strongly condemned by the US and Israel, as well as by many Arab states, NATO and the United Nations: the General Assembly voted 104 to 18 to demand withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, which marked the most remarkable diplomatic defeat for the USSR since their invasion of Hungary in 1956 (DeYoung, 1980). This blow to Soviet foreign expansion was not enough to change the course of action: even under heavy criticism, troops did not withdraw from Afghanistan.

In 1985, the new head of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, enforced the *perestroika*- a policy that intended to restructure and reform the political and economic system of the USRR from within. The political climate between Israel and the Soviet Union improved to the point where the two countries established consular ties in 1987, allowing for Soviet Jews to emigrate after decades of estrangement (Haberman, 1991).

However, the impending and unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union could not be stopped: barely two months after the Soviet Union and Israel fully restored diplomatic relations in attempt to bring peace to the Middle East, and two years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall, the USSR collapsed completely in a matter of days.

By December 1991, the Soviet Union had dissolved, the Iron Curtain that had divided Europe into two areas of influence no longer existed and many of the now former Soviet republics had declared their independence. The Fall's most immediate impact was the spectacular increase in the number of immigrants that departed the ex-Soviet states towards Israel: a phenomenon known as the Russian Aliyah. The phenomenon saw hundreds of thousands of Jewish migrants head to Israel, as well as to the United States or Germany. The estimates put the actual number of mass migrants at around one million people over a decade (Ehrlich, 2008).

The disintegration of the Soviet Union put an end to the Cold War and made way for a new world order in which the United States was the new, undisputable, and sole superpower. The former Soviet Republics faced a period in which economic reconstruction was the main priority. Many of the newly independent countries moved away from Russia and the Warsaw Pact and opened up to the West in order to join the European Union and NATO.

As for Israel, at the beginning of the first Gulf War, it followed the American advice and refrained from intervening, enjoying its status as the most important ally of the United States in the Middle East. This privileged position not only shaped the development of the Cold War in the area, but it set the basis of the relationship between the two countries and their foreign policies for many years to come.

2.2.3 CURRENT SITUATION

The state of Israel, as explained in section 2.1.1, is a Parliamentary Republic led by a chief of state, President Reuven Rivlin (in charge since 2014) and a Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu (1996-1999, 2009-) and with borders detailed in Annex 1.4. It is precisely these borders that pose the main threat and, so far, render it impossible for Israel and Palestine to reach a peaceful solution to their demands.

2.2.3.1 PALESTINE

As of early 2018, the region of Palestine remains a territory that includes the State of Israel and the Palestinian territories, along with the self-declared State of Palestine. The State of Palestine has limited sovereignty: it is considered a *de jure* state, but it fails to achieve the category and recognition of a *de facto* state. While Palestinian authorities claim that their state is sovereign and that their government is legitimate, they are unable to fully control the entirety of the land they claim (as parts of it are under Israeli occupation) nor gain the status of an official sovereign state and be recognized by some countries.

However, the State of Palestine has indeed been successful in achieving at least some international recognition. In 2011, the State of Palestine submitted an application to the General Assembly of the United Nations for Palestine to join the organization as a new member. The approval of this application meant that Palestine would be upgraded from the 'observer entity' to the 'observer state' status; that is, that the United Nations viewed Palestine as a state, as only states are allowed to be granted full membership-therefore allowing Palestine to gain the international recognition it sought. The President of the Palestinian State, Mahmoud Abbas, addressed UN member states and asked them to make an "investment in peace" by helping Palestine rid itself of "aggressions, settlements and occupation" (The United Nations, 2012).

Resolution 67/19 of the General Assembly was passed on November 29, 2012, granting the state of Palestine the status of 'non-member observer state' and implicitly recognizing its sovereignty as a state. Out of 193 voting members, 138 states voted in favor of the resolution, while 41 abstained and 9 voted against it (including the United States and Israel). The resolution included some key points and concepts, such as the notion of self-determination or the reiteration that Israel was to withdraw from the occupied Palestinian territories.

"Reaffirming its resolution 3236 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974 and all relevant resolutions, including resolution 66/146 of 19 December 2011, reaffirming the right

of the Palestinian people to self-determination, including the right to their independent State of Palestine, [Reaffirming] all relevant resolutions regarding the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, which, inter alia, stress the need for the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination and the right to their independent State, a just resolution of the problem of the Palestine refugees in conformity with resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948 and the complete cessation of all Israeli settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem [...]" (General Assembly of the United Nations, 2012).

Even though the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly are not legally binding- that is, no action would be taken to force Israel to comply with the sections- the fact that the majority of members of the United Nations agreed with the fact that Palestine does indeed have a right to its own state and that the territory of said state (including East Jerusalem) is under Israeli occupation was met with extreme discontent and criticism by the Israeli government.

The United States delegates to the UN stated that the resolution was "unfortunate and counterproductive" as it did nothing but plant further obstacles in the path to peace. The US highlighted the need of both countries to put their main focus on negotiating towards an agreement that would end the ongoing dispute (The United Nations, 2012). However, contrary to this appeal, Benjamin Netanyahu announced his plans to build a new Israeli settlement on the Palestinian territories in a statement that was interpreted as retaliation to the UN vote. Netanyahu declared the new settlements were to be built next to the existing ones in the West Bank, and in East Jerusalem, which gained him recriminating remarks from the United States and the European Union (McGreal, 2012).

Five years after the UN vote, the State of Palestine remains a partially recognized state; a Republic lead by President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah with most of its territory currently occupied or under Israeli control. The West Bank and

the Gaza Strip, both claimed by the State of Palestine, saw most of their land taken by Israel after the Six-Day War of 1967.

2.2.3.3 THE WEST BANK AND THE GAZA STRIP

The West Bank is a territory located west of Jordan and east of Israel, with an estimated total area of 5,860 square kilometers (see Annex 6). To this day, around 60% of the West Bank remains under Israeli military control; with the Oslo Accords, some security competences in Palestinian-populated areas were transferred to the Palestinian Authority- but Israeli presence and control of the West Bank remains majoritarian. With a population of around 2.7 million Palestinians, 400,000 Israeli settlers and 200,000 Israelis living in East Jerusalem, the West Bank is the larger of the Palestinian territories (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017).

As for the Gaza Strip, it is located between Egypt and Israel, and it borders the Mediterranean Sea- with an estimated total area of around 360 square kilometers (see Annex 7). Even though there are currently no Israeli settlements in Gaza- they were evacuated and dismantled after the 2005 Disengagement Plan- the Strip has its maritime area under an imposed blockade by the Israeli Navy since the year 2009 and is highly dependent on Israel for energy and water supply. The population in Gaza is mostly concentrated around cities, with Gaza City being the most populated city, and a total number of 1.8 million people living in the Strip (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017).

Governance of the Gaza Strip is controlled by Hamas: even though it is widely considered to be a terrorist organization (as deemed by the United States, the European Union, and Israel), Hamas managed to win the legislative elections and consequently take over the Gaza Strip in 2007- after the Battle of Gaza against Fatah, the other main political party in Palestine (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). Conflict and incidents between members of Hamas and Israeli soldiers have been constant ever since, with military strikes, violent assaults and heightened tensions.

The United Nations have continued to express their concern over the situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. On November 14, 2017, the General Assembly issued a new report; the *Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories*. It highlighted the fact that the "[Israeli] occupation itself represents a gross and grave violation of human rights", and the document stated that

"[...] the occupation and ensuing persistent and systematic violations of international law by Israel, including international humanitarian and human rights law, are considered to be the main sources of other Israeli violations and discriminatory policies against the Palestinian civilian population in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem [...]" (The United Nations, 2017).

With this report, the United Nations once again called for the end of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian Territories- which would be a necessary first step towards the achievement of a peaceful solution.

3. STATUS QUAESTIONIS: FROM OBAMA TO TRUMP

In order to focus on the present-day situation, it is important to briefly introduce the situation of the United States' government within the last ten years and the shift from an eight-year Democrat administration into a Republican one.

3.1 POINTS OF DEPARTURE

On November 4, 2008, Democrat Barack Obama was elected president of the country with almost 53% of the popular vote and 364 Electoral College votes- while his opponent, Republican John McCain, only managed to reach 162 votes (Peters, 2012). Regarding Israel, Obama made a trip to the country before he was elected President in 2008; upon his arrival, he declared that if he were to be elected, he would not pressure Israel into accepting any deals with Palestine that would endanger Israel's security. He also stated that he would work towards reaching a deal with Iran regarding its nuclear program- which was and is one of Israel's main security concerns (Zeleny, 2008).

In the 2012 elections, Barack Obama was reelected for his second presidential term- this time, with 51% percent of the popular vote and 332 Electoral College votes, while Republican Mitt Romney only obtained 206 votes (Grigsby, 2011). Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu congratulated Obama on his reelection and expressed his intention to "continue to work with President Obama in order to assure the interests that are vital to the security of the citizens of Israel" and then-President Shimon Peres stated issued a statement that included the following assertion

> "Mr. President, I thank you for your unprecedented commitment and support for the security of Israel in your first term. I know that the United States, under your leadership, will continue to do so in the future, facing the Iranian nuclear challenge in the way you have outlined, as well as working together to achieve peace with our neighbors" (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012).

In late 2016, Donald Trump was elected President of the United States, effectively putting an end to eight years of a Democrat-led government. Trump managed to obtain 306 electoral votes against the 232 votes for Hillary Clinton- regardless of the fact that he lost the popular vote by almost two million votes; 62,238,425, which accounted for 46% of the popular vote, versus Clinton's 64,156,255 votes and 48 of the popular vote (Foster, 2017).

During his Presidential campaign, Trump released a video in which he declared himself as "very Pro-Israel" and stated his eagerness to see "a deal between Israelis and Palestinians" (The Washington Post, 2016). Upon his election, PM Benjamin Netanyahu once again welcomed the new President by hailing him as a "true friend of Israel" (Vick, 2016). However, a year into his presidency, Trump's unclear and unpredictable positions on transversal issues and policies regarding Israel present an uncertain future for US-Israel relations, posing an evident swing away from the Obama-era line of action.

The following sections will aim at comparing the different foreign policy approaches to key issues for Israel by both Obama's and Trump's administrations.

3.1.1 TWO STATE SOLUTION

The two-state solution is a theoretical way to solve the conflict between Palestinian and Israelis by creating two independent states within the territory of the former Mandatory Palestine. The proposal dates back to the United Nations' Partition Plan for Palestine- which would later be adopted by the General Assembly under Resolution 181 (II)- and it recommended the division of the land into two separate states: an Arab State and a Jewish state, along with an international regime for the city of Jerusalem. The immediate break out of the war after Israel declared its independence prevented the plan from being implemented, but the idea of a two-state solution would continue to be present in every peace talk.

After the many consequent wars Israel was involved in, it was in 1974 when the issue of Palestine was reintroduced to the United Nations; the organization put out Resolution 3236 (XXIX) on the Question of Palestine. The document

"Reaffirms the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in Palestine, including: (a) The right to self-determination without external interference; (b) The right to national independence and sovereignty; reaffirms also the inalienable right of the Palestinians to return to their homes and property from which they have been displaced and uprooted, and calls for their return; emphasizes that full respect for and the realization of these inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are indispensable for the solution of the question of Palestine; [and] recognizes that the Palestinian people is a principal party in the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East" (The United Nations, 1974).

Over the years, there have been many diplomatic attempts to bring the Israel and Palestine leaders together in order to engage in serious conversations focused on agreeing on this two-state solution as a means to put an end to their ongoing conflict; however, none have proved successful yet. With his rise to power in 2008, Barack Obama was quick to voice his support for the two-state solution, a position that he too had spoken of during his Senator years, and in the early years of his administration he kept pressing for the solution in his meetings with PM Netanyahu. Obama claimed that "[it] is in the interests not only of the Palestinians but also the Israelis, the United States and the international community to achieve a two-state solution" (Spetalnick & Heller, 2009), therefore reaffirming his support for a Palestinian state to coexist with the Israeli one.

Through the entire eight years he was in office, President Obama and his administration supported the negotiated solution to the conflict based on the pre-1967 borders, with Secretary of State John Kerry holding a new series of peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians that took off in 2013 (Pomante & Schraufnagel, 2014). During the final days of his presidency, and after the failure of said peace talks, Obama warned of the fact that the moment to finally agree on the solution might be passing, and stated the need to keep the solution alive while encouraging both Palestinians and Israelis to

make changes in their stances and approaches to the issue. In his final press conference as President, he also recommended his already-elected successor, Donald Trump, to refrain from making any sudden or unilateral movements that could in any way endanger the way towards the solution.

Trump's official stance on the two-state solution appears to be radically different to the one defended by Obama (which was the official approach for years, regardless of who the President was); for the first time in years of diplomacy between the two countries: Trump declared that the United States was no longer committed to that one solution. Trump stated that while the White House was fully committed to the establishment of peace, the traditional US endorsement on the two-state solution would no longer be considered the only road to peace in the conflict. As we will see in the following section, Trump's consecutive and consequent actions keep steering the new administration towards an unpredictable diplomatic direction.

3.1.2 SETTLEMENTS

The Israeli settlements are communities of Israeli Jews that have moved into the Palestinian Territories from the Six-Day War onwards. These settlements are considered to be the main impediment to peace between Palestinians and Israelis; the increasing amounts of settlers spread out across the West Bank and East Jerusalem seem to be continuously tampering with every attempt at reaching a peaceful solution. The official statistics for late 2017 provided by the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics account for nearly 600,000 Jewish settlers in 142 locations scattered through the West Bank (130) and East Jerusalem (12)- around 200,000 are located in East Jerusalem and the remaining 400,000 in the West Bank (Office of the European Union Representative, 2017)[2].

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[2] Data was recovered from the European Union January-June 2017 Report on Israeli settlements. Direct access to the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics' three documents on settlements is restricted.

Under international law, the settlements are considered illegal; a fact that has long been disputed by Israel. The international community, including all the allies of Israel, UN bodies, and the International Court of Justice, applies article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention to Israel's occupation of the Palestinian Territories (BBC, 2009): the last section of said article highlights that "[the] Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies" (Fourth Geneva Convention, 1949). Israel refuses to use the term "occupied territories" and rather speaks of "administered territories", thus denying an actual breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

In December 2016, the Security Council of the United Nations issued Resolution 2334, in which the organization reaffirmed Israel's obligation to abide by the Convention and condemned all the measures aimed at altering the demographics of the Palestinian Territories, once again stressing the fact that they were indeed "occupied territories". Furthermore, Resolution 2334 stated that the UN reaffirms

"[the] he establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace; [reiterates] its demand that Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and that it fully respect all of its legal obligations in this regard; [underlines] that it will not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties through negotiations" (The United Nations, 2016).

The Resolution warned of the endangering of the two-state solution caused by said settlements, and yet again urged Israel to withdraw from them and work towards a peaceful solution.

The United States has long opposed the building of further settlements and encouraged their dismantling. Throughout his presidency, Obama regarded the

settlements as illegal; however, and in line with many years of diplomacy between the US and Israel, the United States refrained from casting a positive vote for Resolution 2334 and chose to abstain, therefore not directly condemning Israel but not vetoing it either, allowing for the document to categorize the settlements as illegal. However, the official position of the White House remained the same as it had been with the previous presidents: the settlements constitute an impediment to peace and endanger the two-state solution; Obama reiterated the fact that the building of settlements must be stopped. Regardless of his comments and the official US statements, settlement construction was far from halted- in fact, over 100,000 more settlers moved into the occupied territories during the Obama years (Begley, 2016).

Although Trump seems to not be as intent as Obama was on the two-state solution as the only way to peace, he has also warned Israel of how the settlements obscure any hope of reaching an agreement with the Palestinians, stating that "the settlements are something that very much complicates and always have complicated making peace, so I think Israel has to be very careful with the settlements". He also highlighted the fact that he considered that neither the Palestinians nor Israel were yet ready to make peace (BBC News, 2018). Although not as openly condemning as Obama's remarks on the settlements, Trump has also shown his displeasure at the growing communities and his worry over the fact that they could be an impediment to peace. However, his position shows a shift from Obama's radical rejection of said settlements, which was the official approach of the White House for many years, into a less critical attitude that does not speak of international law violations nor calls for any dismantling.

3.1.3 EAST JERUSALEM

East Jerusalem is a sector within the city of Jerusalem; the area was contested between Jordan and Israel during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and annexed by Jordan in December 1948 (Klein, 2001). However, after the 1967 Six-Day War, East Jerusalem was occupied by Israel and came under its direct control; Israel then proceeded to amend its Law and Administrative Ordinance 5708-1948 and integrated East Jerusalem into the larger city:

"The law, jurisdiction and administration of the State shall extend to any area of Eretz Israel designated by the Government by order [...] This Law shall come into force on the date of its adoption by the Knesset. [...] The Minister may, at his discretion and without an inquiry under section 8 being made, enlarge, by proclamation, the area of a particular municipality by the inclusion of an area [...]" (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1967).

The General Assembly of the United Nations was quick to issue Resolution 2253 on the Measures Taken by Israel to change the status of the City of Jerusalem, which highlighted how the organization

"Considers that these measures are invalid [and] calls upon Israel to rescind all measures already taken and to desist forthwith from taking any action which would alter the status of Jerusalem" (The United Nations, 1967).

However, and regardless of the UN's Resolution and the opposition of its allies, Israel issued the 1980 Jerusalem Law declaring Jerusalem the complete and united capital of Israel, effectively delivering a death blow to global calls for withdrawal. However, the unilateral move failed to be recognized by the international community and the issue remains one of the focal matters of disagreement between Palestinians (and the whole of the Arab world) and Israelis.

The Obama administration kept in line with its predecessors and failed to recognize Israel's sovereignty over the city: the American diplomatic mission was headquartered in Tel Aviv rather than in Jerusalem, in line with all other embassies to Israel. However, in what is probably Trump's most significant detachment from the traditional approach of US foreign policy regarding Israel, and going against Obama's explicit recommendation, the President announced the upcoming move of the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, thus officially recognizing the latter city as the indisputable capital of the country and reversing nearly seven decades of diplomacy. President Trump declared that the recognition of Jerusalem was a necessary step towards

the achievement of peace in the region, a statement that was not met with the approval of the majority of the international community.

The United Nations and the European Union, both as an organization and as individual countries, expressed concern over the announcement. The French President, Emmanuel Macron referred to it as "regrettable" and highlighted the fact that the European Union was fully committed to the two-state solution. Aside from this, a spokesperson for German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated that "[Germany] does not support this position, because the status of Jerusalem is to be resolved in the framework of a two-state solution" (Horowitz, 2017).

Pope Francis spoke of the move by stating his concern for the situation and made a "heartfelt appeal to ensure that everyone is committed to respecting the status quo of the city, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations" (Horowitz, 2017). The Vatican's official position regarding the status of Jerusalem was that of an international, special status for the city that would allow for the protection of the sacred character and holy places of the Holy City. The Holy See not only has called for the two-state solution, but it also recognized the State of Palestine as a *de facto* state.

As for the Muslim world, the reactions were remarkably negative. The President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, criticized Trump's decision in a televised speech in which he accused the US President of deliberately damaging the peace process and allowing for extremist organizations to drive the region into never-ending wars (Rasgon, 2017). The leader of Hamas did indeed call for a new Intifada in response to what he considered "a declaration of war against the Palestinian people" (BBC, 2017). King Salman of Saudi Arabia called the move a "provocation". Turkey's President Erdogan announced his intention to retaliate by opening an embassy to the State of Palestine in East Jerusalem, and he called on world leaders to officially recognize both the State of Palestine and East Jerusalem as its capital.

However, Trump's decision was met with joy and delight in one country: Israel. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu regarded it as a "courageous, just" move and "an

important step towards peace, for there is no peace that doesn't include Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel" (BBC, 2017). While the decision was not met with praise from any of the US allies, Netanyahu hailed Trump for his "leadership and friendship" and vowed to strengthen the relation and cooperation between the two countries (The Times of Israel , 2018).

3.2 NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION

The concept of nuclear proliferation refers to the increase in the number of nuclear warheads and the amount of fissile material, parallel to the development and improvement of nuclear technology and particularly in countries that are not considered to be Nuclear Weapon States under the Treaty of Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Under said Treaty, only five countries are allowed to be in possession of nuclear weaponry: the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom and France. However, there are at least four other countries that are currently known (Pakistan, North Korea and India) or thought to have (Israel) functioning nuclear technology and warheads.

India, Pakistan and Israel refused to accept the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which pushed for the complete nuclear disarmament of South Africa, Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan (UNODA, 2013). The issue of nuclear proliferation is one of the main security concerns for both the United States and Israel and thus a crucial aspect of their foreign policies.

3.2.1 THE BOMB IN THE BASEMENT

Israel's policy regarding nuclear weapons is to neither confirm nor deny the widespread conviction that the country is indeed in possession of advanced nuclear technology and weaponry. This ambiguity relates to the fact that Israel refuses to sign the aforementioned Non-Proliferation Treaty, a move Israel considers to be contrary to their national security interests, and the country's ongoing refusal to allow international observes to freely inspect their facilities.

The United Nations has repeatedly condemned Israel's secret nuclear actions, and called for it to

"[...] place all its nuclear facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards in accordance with resolution 487 (1981) adopted unanimously by the Security Council [and] calls upon all States and organizations that have not yet done so to discontinue cooperating with and giving assistance to Israel in the nuclear field" (The United Nations, 1985).

Although Israel has never conducted public nuclear testing, estimates state that the country has around 80 nuclear warheads and enough fissile material for up to 200, an even larger number than India and Pakistan, which are also non-NPT signers (Arms Control Association, 2018). These numbers were somehow confirmed in late 2016, when a series of leaked emails from former US Secretary of State Colin Powell put the estimates at precisely around 200 nuclear warheads.

In 2016 President Obama spoke of nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism as the "largest threat to global security" and promised to lead an attempt to lock down all vulnerable nuclear material within four years (Smith, 2016). However, and in an effort that has proven to be ineffective so far, Obama's main focus was not the secrecy surrounding Israel's nuclear arsenal, but Iran's bids at developing their own nuclear weapons. As we will see in the following sections, preventing this was his priority in order to achieve peace in the Middle East region.

3.2.2 NUCLEAR TRIAD

Regarding Israel's nuclear weapons, most experts agree on the fact that the country has managed to develop what is called the *nuclear triad*; a combination of intercontinental land missiles, nuclear aircrafts able to carry missiles, and nuclear-armed submarines. As of 2018, only the Nuclear Weapon States under the Non-Proliferation Treaty and Israel are known to have developed the triad. Its intended purpose for the United States has been claimed to be deterrence- that is, developing a powerful nuclear triad in order to

discourage other actors from threatening or attacking the country. However, and in regard to Israel's nuclear triad, all facts are based on speculation from international experts, as the country's intent on keeping its secrecy and ambiguity regarding its nuclear technology and material prevent the international community from determining the extent and number of facilities and nuclear warheads- thus perpetuating Israel's label of being a "suspected triad power".

3.2.3 IRAN

Iran's interest in developing an advanced nuclear program dates back to the 1950s, when the United States put forward its 1953 Atoms for Peace program, which aimed at sharing nuclear materials and technology between nations for peaceful purposes. This program came to an end in 1974, when India performed its first nuclear test. The relationship between the United States and Iran deteriorated deeply in 1979, when the Iranian Revolution broke out, but the US had already provided the Middle Eastern country with plenty of nuclear supplies.

In the years that followed the Revolution, Iran kept working towards the full-development of its nuclear facilities, and in 1992 it signed a bilateral nuclear cooperation agreement with Russia- the two countries moving forward with their nuclear programs. In the early 2000s, the US expressed its concerns over Iran's nuclear development, and pushed for international inspections of the country's nuclear facilities. Despite agreeing to cooperate with international actors, Iran failed to halt its nuclear race- which prompted a series of sanctions.

From Israel's point of view, Iran's nuclear program constituted a threat to not only their national security, but global security as well. Following this line of thought, Israel repeatedly showed its willingness to attack and destroy Iran's nuclear facilities if diplomacy proved incapable of peacefully dissuading Iran from developing further technology and materials (Phillips, 2010). The Obama administration pushed for a nuclear agreement with Iran that sought to negotiate a deal that would be satisfactory for all parties; a preliminary framework was designed in 2015 between the five countries of

the United Nations Security Council, Germany, and Iran and is still considered one of the most important foreign policy achievements under the Obama presidency (BBC News, 2017).

The initial framework focused on lifting economic sanctions on Iran were the country to limit its nuclear program- thus cutting off any chances of developing a nuclear weapon. President Obama gave a speech in which he explained the framework for the plan, stating that is was indeed the fact that economic sanctions were imposed that managed to convince Iran to negotiate a deal, and claiming that his administration had been successful in rolling back the nuclear program, eliminating dangerous materials, and increasing the number of inspections to Iran's facilities in provisions ranging from 10 to 15 years. According to Obama, the initial framework also shut down the path to the creation of a bomb using either platinum or uranium and highlighted the fact that "as a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Iran will never be permitted to develop a nuclear weapon" (The Washington Post, 2015).

However, Israel was far from satisfied with the deal, becoming one of the most vocal opponents to the negotiations (Kaye, 2016). Netanyahu's fervent disapproval of the deal put a heavy strain on the relationship between the US and Israel. But going into Donald Trump's presidency, and as he continuously criticized the deal and branded it ineffective and "the worst deal ever", the new head of government threatened to pull out of the deal if the deal's "disastrous flaws aren't fixed". In a statement released in January 2018, Trump claimed that the deal "gave Iran far too much in exchange for far too little" and that he was

> "[...] open to working with Congress on bipartisan legislation regarding Iran. But any bill I sign must include four critical components. First, it must demand that Iran allow immediate inspections at all sites requested by international inspectors. Second, it must ensure that Iran never even comes close to possessing a nuclear weapon. Third, unlike the nuclear deal, these provisions must have no expiration date. My policy is to deny Iran all paths to a nuclear weapon—not just for ten years, but forever. If Iran does not comply with any of these provisions, American nuclear

sanctions would automatically resume. Fourth, the legislation must explicitly state in United States law—for the first time—that long-range missile and nuclear weapons programs are inseparable, and that Iran's development and testing of missiles should be subject to severe sanctions" (US Embassy Montevideo, 2018).

Nevertheless, and aware of the consequences of the ultimatum issued by Trump, there are many voices from inside the US government that are warning of the negative backlash that will arise were the President to pull out of the deal; the Israeli government, albeit not content with the deal, stated that

"canceling the deal will mean that Iran will harden its position. It wants to be the regional hegemon, and it will want to prove itself. And [that is] in the Middle Eastern sense — militarily — not using the graces of European diplomacy" (Tarnopolsky, 2017).

President Hassan Rouhani of Iran forewarned that his country would not withdraw from the deal, but that their response to a US pull-out would be "stronger than they imagined". Fearing Iran's retaliation, Netanyahu's former director of communications declared that even though the deal had caused his country significant damage, if

"[...] Trump certifies the deal, we have a borderline nuclear nation at our border and major consequences in terms of Iran's subsidy of terror organizations, especially Hezbollah. But if he decertifies, we're back where we were in the old days, where the only way to change the regional situation is a military strike" (Tarnopolsky, 2017).

President Trump set May 12, 2018, as the deadline date for the deal fix-it he demanded so as to keep the US from withdrawing- what his next move and the outcome will be, it remains to be seen.

4. CONCLUSION

From all the previously analyzed sections regarding the evolution of foreign policy of the United States concerning Israel, it would appear to be evident that Trump seems determined to distance his actions from those of Obama and the previous administrations, establishing an unpredictable line of action that complicates the task of predicting what his next move will be.

Starting with the sudden announcement of the impending move of the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, we are faced with a maneuver that Obama himself discouraged, convinced that the outrage it would cause among not only the Palestinians, but the Muslim world as a whole, would do nothing but complicate the path to peace in the region. Despite Obama's warning, and disregarding critical voices even from within his administration, Trump decided to take on a completely different approach to the conflict and venture into unexplored waters, putting an end to decades of one same-line policy that would not even contemplate moving the embassy from Tel Aviv, let alone to Jerusalem. Thus, from a tactic that would have been unthinkable of under the Obama administration, it took less than a year in office for Trump to make such a thorny, controversial decision.

Following the same line, the nuclear agreement with Iran that Obama considered to be a positive asset and the best legacy possible, Trump not only disagreed about the deal, but threatened to pull out of it immediately if reforms were not introduced. Paying no mind to the US's European allies that also signed the agreement in hopes for a peaceful deal with Iran, President Trump placed the spotlight on them and urged them to find a way to amend an agreement he labelled as insufficient and beneficial only for Iran. With this statement and his not-so-veiled threat of withdrawing from the deal, Trump once again showed his willingness to end one of Obama's most remarkable international diplomatic achievements in the region. While both leaders agree on the fact that Iran's nuclear program is a threat to international security, they have taken completely different tactics when it comes to facing the issue and coming up with a feasible solution.

The approach to the issue of Israeli settlements, a subject that Obama tackled by publicly stating their unlawfulness- to the delight of the many interest groups that claimed the settlements constituted a violation of international law and human rights- is another point in which Obama and Trump seem to differ. Whilst Obama did not hesitate to severely criticize and condemn the settlements, Trump has decided on a less aggressive critique while stating his opinion that although the settlements are indeed an impediment to peace, Palestinians and Israelis have yet to walk a long way before either of them are ready to make a compromise towards peace.

The two-state solution is another decade-long policy that remained the same, with certain remarks, throughout the different administrations. From Republican to Democrat presidents, they all commended and supported the two-state solution as "the only way" to achieve peace in a just, fair plan and encouraged Israel and Palestine to negotiate and find a common ground that suited both parties. However, after Trump's arrival to the White House, the new president stated that the United States was no longer committed to the solution, as he considered it more reasonable to try and find other routes that might prove to be more effective rather than keep insisting on a plan that, in his opinion, had proven unrealistic and unattainable after years of stalling.

Even though Trump has been in office for a relatively short time, his approach to the US foreign policy regarding the Middle East has been far from compliant with traditional US diplomacy. The announcement of the impending Embassy move to Jerusalem, which would take place in the upcoming years, is still causing turmoil in many Middle Eastern countries that have voice their anger over the decision. Nonetheless, Trump reiterated his decision and affirmed the move will indeed happen, albeit there are still some loose ends over how and when exactly it will happen. Regarding the nuclear deal with Iran, and still awaiting the May 12, 2018 deadline for a reform, there are two things that remain to be seen: whether or not an amendment of the deal will be carried out, and - should the agreement remain untouched- if Trump will keep his promise of withdrawing from it.

The wide discrepancies between Trump and Obama are not limited to the Middle East policies, as many key pieces of national legislation and international agreements with other areas of the world that were promoted by the Obama administration are being turned around or shut down by Trump's cabinet. But taking this region of the world in particular, and analyzing the evolution of the diplomacy and the different stances on the same issues by the two presidents, we arrive at the conclusion that their fundamentally antagonistic standpoints on almost every issue are the embodiment of two polar opposite personalities and conceptions of the world- and that will continue to impact Trump's policies and be reflected in his presidential strategy.

5. ANNEXES

ANNEX 1. MAPS OF THE EVOLUTION OF ISRAEL

1.1 UNDER THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Source: (The Jewish Virtual Library, n.d)

1.2 UNDER THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Source: (The Ohio State University, n.d)

1.3 MANDATORY PALESTINE

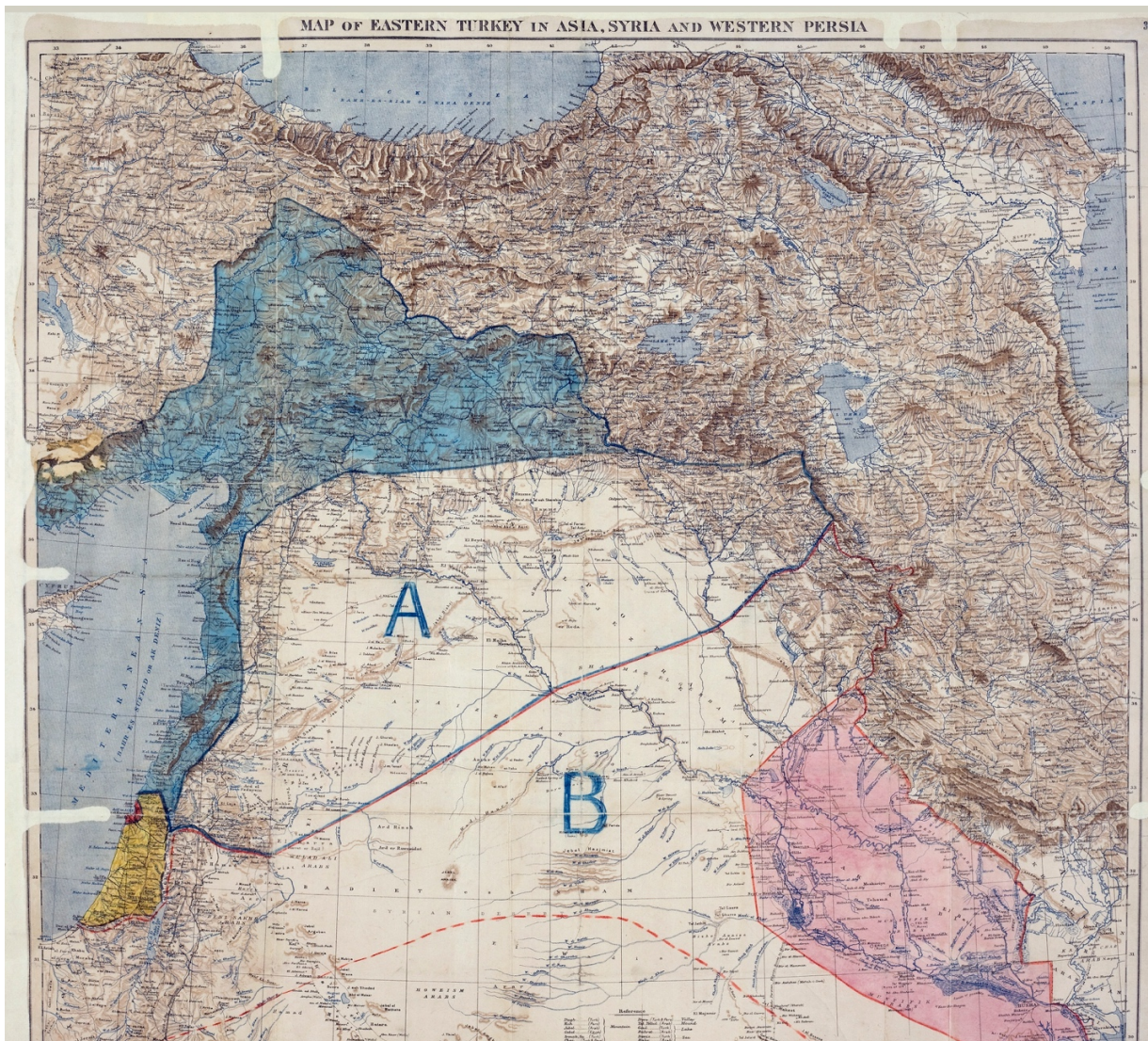Great Britain's Division of the Mandated Area,
1921-1923

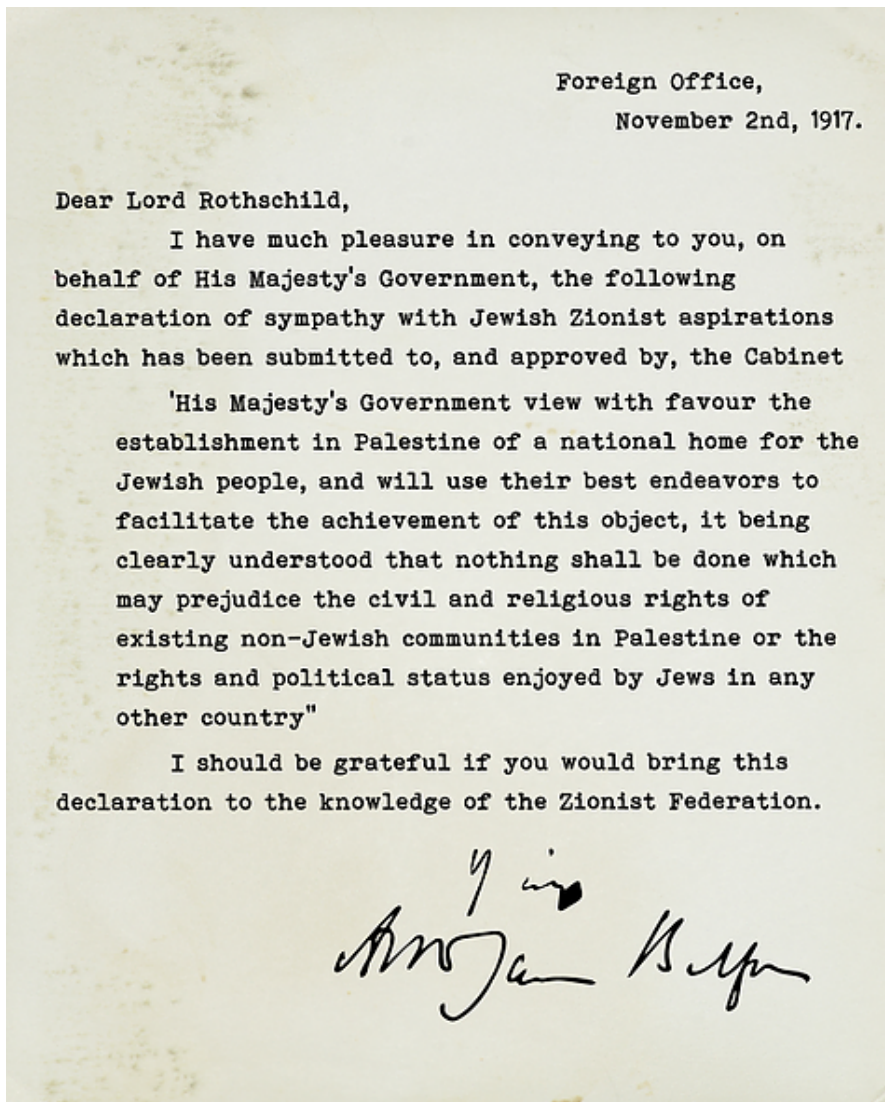Source: (The Jewish Virtual Library, n.d)

1.4 PRESENT DAY ISRAEL

Source: (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017)

ANNEX 2. SYKES PICOT

Source: (The National Archives, n.d)

ANNEX 3. BALFOUR DECLARATION

Foreign Office,
November 2nd, 1917.

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet

'His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country"

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Source: (The National Library of Israel, n.d)

ANNEX 4. THE PARTITION OF PALESTINE

Source: (BBC, 2001)

ANNEX 5. AFTERMATH OF THE SIX-DAY WAR
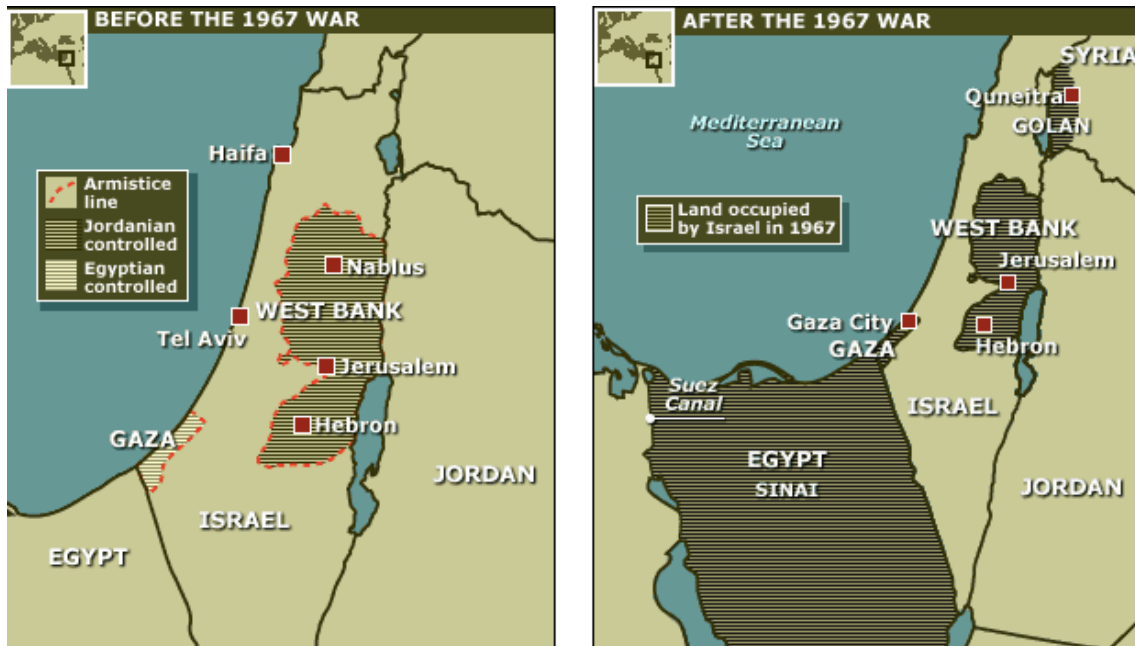
Source (BBC, n.d)

ANNEX 6. THE WEST BANK

Source: (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017)

ANNEX 7. THE GAZA STRIP

Source: (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017)

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