The Peace Process Carousel:
The Israel Lobby and
the Failure of American Diplomacy

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More than 50 years of American diplomacy in the Arab-Israeli "peace process" have revealed it to be a carousel of constant activity with no forward movement. Despite chronic failure and embarrassment, it continues in great measure because of the cumulative effects of the influence of the Israel lobby in the United States, through cycles of opportunity, initiative, retreat, and compensation. Mathematician John Nash's theory of an inefficient equilibrium is offered as an explanation for the still-sustained pretense of the possibility of a negotiated peace agreement and the conditions under which the peace process carousel could finally stop turning.

Beginning with Richard Nixon and continuing through Donald Trump, every American president has tried, at least officially, to move the Arab-Israeli conflict toward peace. More than five decades of this activity is known as the "peace process."

That is a misnomer. A process has direction. It entails movement toward a destination, from one stage or state of affairs to another. The blur of brave pronouncements, ambitious schedules, preparatory meetings, slightly adjusted formulas, missed deadlines, discarded plans, and promises of new initiatives that we know as the Israeli-Palestinian peace process has neither direction nor destination. It is not a process at all but, rather, a kind of carousel — always in movement but going nowhere. Why did the peace process turn into a merry-go-round? What role did American diplomacy and domestic politics play in that outcome, and why, despite the absence of any prospect of success, does the carousel continue to revolve?

My approach sharply contrasts with the treatment of the peace process and its failures by both scholars and former diplomats. Their analyses standardly praise behavior and policies they deem as conducive to negotiating success while criticizing mistakes that account for deterioration in the conflict and for missed opportunities to resolve it. Two kinds of conclusions flow from this approach. On the positive side are assessments that credit incremental or interim agreements as valuable given difficult circumstances, mistrust, and fundamental clashes of interest. The Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, along with the concomitant "Framework for Peace" that was supposed to deal with the Palestinian Territories, are often seen in this light. Negative assessments blame one or more of the protagonists for peace process failure. It is commonly

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asserted, for example, that had the Israeli government not been so intransient or demanding; had the Palestinians been more realistic, imaginative, or disciplined; had the United States understood the problem correctly and implemented policies based on real American interests and with a sophisticated use of American power; or some combination thereof, an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement could well have been achieved.[1]

The analysis offered here addresses a different question, for which evaluating the judgments, tactics, and policies of particular Israeli, Palestinian, or American leaders can yield no good answers. I challenge the idea that that there even has been a peace process since the collapse of the second Camp David summit in 2000 or that foreign policy goals, the quality of diplomacy, or how skillfully US resources were used to pursue them, are relevant questions. Instead I seek to explain the sustained pretense of a "peace process" and why that posture has continued despite increasingly embarrassing failures and despite the disappearance of any prospect for success.

I argue that the repeated reappearance of failed efforts to achieve a negotiated solution between Israel and the Palestinians was driven, in large measure, by the effective veto of the Israel lobby over US foreign policy toward Israel and especially toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The cumulative legacy of the lobby's sustained exploitation of domestic political imperatives associated with presidential action on this issue was to increase the difficulty of moving even marginally toward a solution based on territorial compromise. Ironically, perhaps, but effectively, the revolving cycles of the peace process carousel eventually helped destroy any basis for a negotiated settlement. With each revolution of the carousel, the main protagonists — rightwing Israeli governments, American administrations, the Palestinian Authority, and the peace process industry — were faced with imperatives to trade what they really wanted for what they absolutely needed. What they wanted was either a two-state solution or quiet absorption of Palestinian territories into Israel, while what they absolutely needed was to be protected from international obloquy (in Israel's case) or Israel lobby attacks (in the Americans') or to be assured of necessary economic support (for both Israel and the Palestinians). This is an outcome known to political scientists and economists as a *Nash equilibrium*.

In economics and politics the notion of equilibrium was traditionally associated with positive outcomes. But mathematician John Nash won a Nobel Prize for proving that rational competitors can be trapped into a suboptimal but nevertheless painfully stable predicament. In game theory, this Nash equilibrium is produced by players who recapitulate unsuccessful strategies in a recurring pattern because each knows that to try to get what it really wants will mean risk of an intolerable loss.[2] In this article I

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1. For examples of both of these types of arguments, see Dennis Ross, *The Missing Peace: The Inside Story of the Fight for Middle East Peace* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004); Daniel C. Kurtzer and Scott B. Lasensky, *Negotiating Arab-Israeli Peace: American Leadership in the Middle East* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2008); Daniel C. Kurtzer et al., *The Peace Puzzle: America's Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace, 1989–2011* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

2. For a technical explanation of the Nash equilibrium, see Charles A. Holt and Alvin E. Roth, "The Nash Equilibrium: A Perspective," Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 101, no. 12 (2004): 3,999–4,002. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0308738101. I have previously discussed the Nash equilibrium as a metaphor in "The Israeli-Palestinian 'Peace Process': Trapped in a Nash Equilibrium," *Middle East Media Monitor*, April 2, 2014, www.middleeastmonitor.com/20140402-the-israeli-palestinian-peace-process-trapped-in-a-nash-equilibrium/.

examine the Nash equilibrium's implications for understanding US foreign policy toward the Arab-Israeli and especially the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The development and denouement of diplomacy during the administrations of Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, and Barack Obama will be analyzed to show how the structure of American politics in general, and the increasing clout of the Israel lobby in particular, locked the US into sequences of Nash equilibrium–conforming behavior.[3] From the point of view of prospects for achieving a negotiated two-state solution, the cumulative consequences of these policy patterns were unintended but pathological, rendering a negotiated peace between Israel and the Palestinians increasingly difficult and ultimately impossible.

I begin with the inauguration of the Arab-Israeli peace process during the Nixon administration. I then show how the growing power of the Israel lobby in the US — conveniently if not entirely accurately imagined as the power of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) — produced cycles of ambition, failure, and increasing obstacles to peace. These cycles continued over four decades. Destruction of the possibility for a negotiated "land-for-peace" deal was not the Israel lobby's goal, even if it may have been the personal preference of some its leaders. Nonetheless, the eventual impossibility of fruitful Israeli-Palestinian negotiations was the result of the lobby's astonishingly successful exploitation of what George Washington warned in his 1796 farewell address was American democracy's dangerous vulnerability to the political influence of any faction with a "passionate attachment" to a foreign country.[4]

Since the Nixon administration, each of these cycles has moved through four basic phases: *opportunity*, *initiative*, *retreat*, and *compensation*. In the first phase, events in the Middle East produce what appear as an *opportunity* to arrange negotiations based on trading lands captured by Israel in 1967 for peace with its neighbors. In the second phase, an *initiative* is launched, involving intense American efforts that produce some limited results: steps to "disengage forces" or "build confidence" and new signs of either Arab willingness to cooperate with Israel or Israeli agreement to enter negotiations, accept the terms for negotiations, or restrain provocative behavior. In the third phase, pressures of American domestic politics, driven either by the direct efforts of the Israel lobby or anticipatory reactions to its influence, focus attention in Washington on the political risks and costs of diplomacy, leading to *retreat* from the original goals of the initiative. In the final phase, to protect the administration against domestic political attacks for being inadequately supportive of Israel, the initiative is withdrawn, sharply

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3. Space does not permit analysis of similar cycles of peace during the administrations of Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, or George W. Bush. However, since the Israel lobby was weaker during the Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations than it was subsequently, and since the Obama administration was the most prepared, most committed, and most vigorous in its initial readiness to confront Israeli governments in pursuit of a two-state solution, they pose particularly hard tests of the argument put forward here.

4. The locus classicus for the argument that US policy toward Israel confirmed Washington's prognosis of the dangers associated with the absence of countervailing power in foreign policy is George W. Ball and Douglas B. Ball, *The Passionate Attachment: America's Involvement with Israel, 1947 to the Present* (New York: Norton, 1992). Neither Washington, nor the Balls, nor I imagine this dynamic as the result of a sinister interest — whether French, in Washington's time, or Jewish in the contemporary period. The Israel lobby acts effectively and legitimately within an institutional context that greatly amplifies its effects on diplomatic outcomes.

curtailed, or declared a failure, while *compensation* is made to Israel in the form of higher levels of aid, more expansive guarantees, and promises that US policy would not again stray beyond stipulated limits.

The consequences of these cycles have hardened the protective cocoon surrounding the task of each successive US president seeking a negotiated peace between Israel and the Palestinians. They also contributed to rapid growth in the power of the Israel lobby — seen in the context of these cycles to be both crucial (in the eyes of supporters of the Israeli government line in the US) and successful (in the eyes of politicians who repeatedly witnessed the fruitlessness and high political costs of opposing the lobby's positions).

I analyze peace process cycles from the Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Obama administrations. In my view, observers have underestimated the amount of damage done to prospects for peace by the failure of the first and second of these presidents to contend with the power of the Israel lobby before its influence became as great as it did in the 1980s. Examining both the Carter and Obama administrations' peace efforts offers excellent tests of the argument, because both presidents came to the White House with stronger and more personal commitments to achieve a comprehensive peace than any others. I conclude by applying the concept of a Nash equilibrium to explain why, despite repeated failures and absent any genuine expectation of success, what I call the "peace process carousel" continues to revolve.

NIXON AND ROGERS, 1969–73

Shortly after taking office in 1969, Richard Nixon considered prospects for Middle East peace and was not optimistic. Nevertheless, encouraged by Secretary of State William Rogers and Middle East hands at the State Department, and hoping to "head off a 'major war,'" Nixon authorized launching what came to be known as the "Rogers Plan."[5] The idea was to work with both the United Nations and the Soviet Union to encourage Israel and Egypt to make peace based on Israeli withdrawal from a largely demilitarized Sinai Peninsula as well as general language about an eventual solution to the Palestinian refugee problem between Israel and Jordan, with the possibility of mutually agreeable border adjustments in the West Bank. The unity government in Israel, under Prime Minister Golda Meir but including right-wing minister without portfolio Menachem Begin, rejected the Rogers Plan outright, and the effort failed.

Soon, however, a bloody "War of Attrition" along the 1967 cease-fire lines increased in ferocity, creating incentives for Israel to entertain American peacemaking efforts. Suffering heavy casualties from Egyptian artillery bombardment of positions along the Suez Canal, and facing massive and direct Soviet intervention that blocked air raids on Egypt, Israel's position softened. Israel wanted Phantom jets from the United States, but it now also wanted an end to the casualties. This gave the Nixon administration, and in particular Rogers and Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs Joseph Sisco, a genuine sense of *opportunity* — some room to maneuver Israel and the Arab states toward peace.

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5. William B. Quandt, *Decade of Decisions: American Policy toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1967–1976* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 83.

While dropping the more ambitious aspects of the Rogers Plan, US diplomats pressured Israel to accept a cease-fire along the canal, conditional on its endorsement of UN Security Council Resolution 242 and its principle of land for peace. The effort continued in 1971 to move from cease-fire to peace, mainly in the form of strong backing by Rogers for Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat's proposal for an interim Israeli withdrawal from the east bank of the canal and from a slice of western Sinai. In return, Egypt would reopen the canal, rebuild the cities along its western side, and agree to substantial limits on military deployments within the zone evacuated by Israel.[6]

In the third phase, *retreat*, strong pressures emerged in the US to deprive Rogers of the presidential backing he needed to persuade Israel to proceed with at least some version of an interim agreement. Referring to the "omnipotent Israel lobby," journalist Seymour Hersh described "Israeli officials and leaders of the Jewish community in the United States" as "up in arms against what they perceived as the pro-Arab bias of Rogers and Sisco."[7] In his memoir Nixon complained that he had wanted to push forward strongly on the Rogers initiatives but that he and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger ultimately agreed that "the political problems were too difficult . . . [and that] the problem with the Israelis in Israel was not nearly as difficult as the Jewish community here . . ."[8] Kissinger himself reported that Nixon's "complaints about the pro-Israel lobby" were a main topic of conversation at a National Security Council meeting in July 1971.[9] That October, 78 senators sponsored a resolution, circulated by the Israel lobby a week earlier, calling for immediate shipment of currently withheld Phantom jets to Israel.[10]

The fourth phase, *compensation*, featured not only the delivery of 52 additional Phantoms but a large-scale increase in overall US aid to Israel through measures sponsored by the senators closest to the Israel lobby at that time, Jacob Javits and Henry "Scoop" Jackson, a Republican from New York and a Democrat from Washington, respectively. Between 1970 and 1973 annual American economic aid to Israel tripled compared to pre-1970 levels; military aid levels increased nearly tenfold. Contrary to Nixon's own belief, some senior American officials began publicly endorsing the lobby's argument — that Israel would be enabled to make concessions only by making it stronger militarily.[11]

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6. William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1993), 65–93; Elie Podeh, *Chances for Peace: Missed Opportunities in the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 93–121; *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Touchstone, 1978), 787.

7. Seymour M. Hersh, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House* (New York: Summit Books, 1983), 408.

8. Nixon, *RN*, 787. Kissinger's use of the Israel lobby's influence to discourage Nixon from strongly supporting Rogers can here be understood as partially driven by jealousy toward Rogers and Kissinger's determination not to permit success for a plan that entailed US-Soviet partnership. For more, see Teresa Fava Thomas, *American Arabists in the Cold War Middle East, 1946–75: From Orientalism to Professionalism* (London: Anthem Press, 2016), 135–62.

9. Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little Brown, 1979), 1,285.

10. John W. Finney, "78 Senators Ask Phantom Jets for Israel," *New York Times*, October 16, 1971, https://nyti.ms/2XHayYD.

11. For Kissinger's adoption of this point of view, at this particular time, see Edward R. F. Sheehan, *The Arabs, Israelis, and Kissinger: A Secret History of American Diplomacy in the Middle East* (New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1976), 19–21; Quandt, *Decade of Decisions*, 83.

Confidence in the continuation of Washington's forbearance and support freed Prime Minister Meir to adopt politically convenient "tough" postures by rejecting Sadat's and other initiatives. According to Hersh's detailed consideration of this episode, Meir rejected Rogers's entreaties because she "knew" that "Nixon would not provoke a fight with American Jews (and potential campaign contributors) by punishing Israel for not negotiating."[12]

NIXON AND KISSINGER, 1973–74

Opportunity came again on October 6, 1973, the day of Yom Kippur, a solemn Jewish holiday of self-reflection and repentance. With the Egyptian-Syrian attack on Sinai and the Golan Heights, President Anwar al-Sadat of Egypt had finally delivered the shock he had promised so many times and that most observers had ceased to believe. The target of these attacks was not Israel, but Israeli positions in territories it occupied in 1967. Their purpose was to inflict enough pain to trigger Israeli willingness to trade land for peace, and enough instability to push Washington toward making serious efforts to achieve that objective. By the end of two days of fighting, Israel had already lost 35 of its frontline warplanes. Israeli leaders were "close to panic," according to Henry Kissinger, and pleaded for the US to resupply urgently needed items.[13]

This desperation created *initiative*. Richard Nixon and Kissinger (now secretary of state) shifted from complacency to the viewing the Arab-Israeli conflict as a threat to American interests. Kissinger now saw Israeli overconfidence, not insecurity, as an impediment to successful peace negotiations.[14] According to one account, "In keeping with [Kissinger's] early perception that the war must be used to promote a settlement, Kissinger decided to withhold major deliveries to Israel so long as the Russians exercised restraint and so long as he hoped that Sadat would accept a ceasefire."[15]

Kissinger's general belief was that for states to compromise they first must suffer. Thus Israel, the victor in 1967, could be moved toward peace only in the aftermath of "a terrible and debilitating spasm of war."[16] Nixon agreed and did not want "this thing" hanging "over for another four years."[17] Although Kissinger himself has strenuously denied that he sought to squeeze Israel by delaying deliveries, the consensus of analysts and observers is that he did exactly that. Certainly the streaming arrival of enormous US cargo planes, clearly visible over Tel Aviv, made Israel's reliance on American aid clear to all.[18]

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12. Hersh, *Price of Power*, 408.

13. Henry A. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little Brown, 1982), 495.

14. See Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 451, 455, 466–67; Quandt, *Decade of Decisions*, 129.

15. Sheehan, *Arabs, Israelis, and Kissinger*, 33.

16. Tad Szulc, *The Illusion of Peace: Foreign Policy in the Nixon Years* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 734.

17. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 468.

18. On the debate over the degree of Kissinger's manipulation of the timing of aid as a diplomatic tool, see Walter Z. Laqueur, "Kissinger and the Yom Kippur War," *Commentary* (Sept. 1974), www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/walter-laqueur/kissinger-the-yom-kippur-war/; William B. Quandt, "Kissinger and the Arab-Israeli Disengagement Negotiations," *Journal of International Affairs* 29, no. 1 (Spring 1975): 33–38; Szulc, *Illusion of Peace*, 735–38; Motti Golan, *The Secret Conversations of Henry Kissinger: Step-by-Step Diplomacy in the Middle East*, trans. Sol Stern and Ruth Geyra Stern (New York: New York Times Book Company, 1976).

Kissinger's plans for postwar diplomacy were threatened when Israeli forces under General Ariel Sharon crossed the canal and moved south to surround and destroy Egypt's Third Army. In addition to infuriating the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which promised to intervene to protect the Third Army, the humiliation that Sharon was poised to inflict on Sadat threatened Kissinger's strategy of using a frightened mood in Israel to end its government's opposition to withdrawals from territory occupied in 1967. Faced with heavy losses on the battlefield, demonstration of the country's utter dependence on American resupply, and the specter — raised by Kissinger — of a Cuban Missile–type crisis between the US and the USSR for which Israel could be blamed, the Israeli cabinet voted to accept American terms for a cease-fire. That required Israel to spare the Egyptian Third Army; to support UN Security Council Resolution 338, which called for implementing Resolution 242 "in all its parts;"[19] and to attend an international peace conference to be hosted by the US and the USSR. In December 1973, the peace conference was convened in Geneva. Syria was invited but declined to attend. Nothing substantive resulted from the meeting, but it was the first time that leaders of Israel, Egypt, and Jordan met publicly to talk about a comprehensive peace. For that reason Kissinger regarded it as "a major step forward" — the beginning of a "peace process."[20]

In Israel, domestic politics were unsettled. Golda Meir had resigned the premiership, and a devastating report on the Yom Kippur War disaster had forced out several generals. In this context, Kissinger resurrected the Rogers Plan: a series of interim agreements brokered by US diplomats that would lead to a comprehensive peace settlement. American policy focused on achieving Israeli withdrawal from a significant portion of Sinai, permitting Egypt to reopen the Suez Canal, establishing a buffer zone between Israeli and Egyptian forces, and building confidence toward larger withdrawals and a more comprehensive peace agreement.[21]

FORD AND KISSINGER, 1974–77

But Israel stonewalled. Months of "niggling" negotiating tactics frustrated both Kissinger and his new boss, President Gerald Ford, who ascended to the presidency after Nixon's 1974 resignation.[22] In March 1975, Ford registered his personal disappointment in a strongly worded letter to the Israeli leadership. Insisting on more flexibility, Ford warned that the United States was unwilling to finance a stalemate when its important interests were involved, and threatened to "drastically reassess" policy. Kissinger met with veteran members of the foreign policy establishment (e.g., Council on Foreign Relations chair John McCloy, former under secretary of state Averell Harriman, former ambassador to the United Nations George Ball, former national security advisor McGeorge Bundy, and former secretary of state Dean Rusk) who described three options: Option 1 would move directly to a reconvened Geneva conference. In this setting, the US would cooperate with the Soviet Union to push hard for a com-

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19. UN Security Council, Resolution 338, S/RES/338 (October 22, 1973), https://undocs.org/S/RES/338(1973).

20. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 798.

21. Golan, *Secret Conversations of Henry Kissinger*, 144–252; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 141–63.

22. Sheehan, *Arabs, Israelis, and Kissinger*, 163. For an insider account of Israeli stonewalling as a long-term strategy, see "Trying to Sell the Deal," *Time*, September 22, 1975, p. 34.

prehensive settlement based on near total Israeli withdrawals on all fronts and official peace treaties between Israel and its neighbors. Option 2 would be to pursue a separate Egyptian-Israeli settlement. Option 3 would be to return to the step-by-step approach. The elder statesmen unanimously recommended Option 1.[23]

Clear indications that the administration intended to adopt Option 1 and move toward a comprehensive settlement triggered the third phase in the carousel cycle, *retreat*, after powerful mobilization by the Israel lobby against the plan. The lobby's mobilization against the plan to pressure Israel, and against Kissinger personally, was ferocious. Despite references to the destruction of members of his family by the Nazis, he was portrayed as a traitor, using his Jewishness to hurt Israel.[24]

The most impressive and important of the lobby's moves to block Option 1 was AIPAC's organization of a letter delivered to President Ford on May 22, 1975, signed by 76 senators,[25] that "shockingly undercut" the administration's reassessment.[26] Among other things it described US "national interests" as requiring that America "stands firmly with Israel in the search for peace in future negotiations."[27] Despite his personal irritation with the letter, to protect his chances for reelection in 1976, Ford remained silent and abandoned Option 1.

Washington next turned from sticks to carrots and moved to phase four, *compensation*. Thanks to the Israel lobby's influence, Israeli tactics of stalemate and delay were rewarded by positive American responses to a list of "unbelievable" Israeli demands.[28] One Kissinger aide described them as "mind-boggling" and "simply incredible."[29] In his book about the Middle East negotiations led by Kissinger, journalist Edward Sheehan titled the chapter dealing with Washington's response "Cornucopia." Taken together, Sheehan observed, American compensation commitments to Israel following the failed "reassessment" amounted to "a formal political and military alliance between Israel and the United States . . . [granting] Israel an outright veto over future American policy in the Middle East."[30] To reach what was called the Sinai II agreement in September 1975, while trying (unsuccessfully) to protect President Ford's reelection campaign from accusations that he was not sufficiently friendly toward Israel, the president and Kissinger straitjacketed US policy in the Middle East for decades to come by signing a veritable "marriage contract" between the two countries.[31]

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23. Sheehan, *Arabs, Israelis, and Kissinger*, 158–83. Chapter 12 of this book offers the best available account of the "reassessment" and the fate of the recommendations arising from it.

24. Sheehan, *Arabs, Israelis, and Kissinger*, 173.

25. On AIPAC's role in drafting and circulating this letter, and in pressing senators to sign it, see Edward Tivnan, *The Lobby: Jewish Political Power and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 88–90.

26. Steven L. Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict: Making America's Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 296.

27. *A Time to Heal: The Autobiography of Gerald R. Ford* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 287.

28. Ford, *Time to Heal,* 188.

29. Sheehan, *Arabs, Israelis, and Kissinger*, 178, 190. Kissinger's desperation to portray himself as someone "the pro-Israel community" could rely on is evident in his June 1975 remarks to 18 Jewish leaders in New York City, published as "Kissinger Memorandum: 'To Isolate the Palestinians,'" *MERIP Reports* no. 96 (May 1981): 24–30. https://doi.org/10.2307/3011393.

30. Sheehan, *Arabs, Israelis, and Kissinger*, 178.

31. Sheehan, *Arabs, Israelis, and Kissinger*, 194.

While annual subsidies granted to Israel secured the country against military and economic pressure, a sweeping collection of US political, economic, military, and diplomatic commitments removed almost any need for Israeli leaders to concern themselves with US or international efforts to move toward peace. Most of these promises were made in a US-Israeli memorandum of understanding signed on September 1, 1975.[32] The US promised F-16 fighters, reserve oil supplies, to consult with Israel if threatened by a world power, and to insist that Egypt implement its commitment regardless of Israel's progress toward peace with other Arab countries. Diplomatically, the US renounced any further effort to achieve a disengagement agreement between Israel and Jordan. More importantly, the US agreed not to recognize or negotiate with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which had been recognized as the representative of the Palestinian people, unless it recognized Israel's right to exist and accepted Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.[33] Indeed, the US effectively abjured *any* diplomatic initiatives to resolve the Arab-Israeli dispute that were not preapproved by the Israeli government.

The US once again rewarded Israel extravagantly for its minimal cooperation. To fulfill its commitments to Israel under the terms of Sinai II, the US provided Israel with $1.7 billion in 1977 and $1.8 billion in 1978.[34] In effect these were massive real estate transactions. The US paid Israel for each slice of Sinai it evacuated.[35] Even more significantly, the 1975 disengagement agreements sidelined the core Palestinian issue and pushed Egypt toward a separate peace, thereby isolating it from Syria and the rest of the Arab world. This effectively ended the Geneva process, squelched tentative US efforts to achieve an accommodation between Israel and Jordan regarding the key question of the future of the West Bank, and removed the weight of Egyptian military capacity from the political calculus of Israeli leaders and the Israeli public.[36]

Driven by the influence of the Israel lobby, the US had completed another cycle, from opportunity, to initiative, to retreat, and then to compensation. The Israeli political class was thereby denied precisely the opportunity it needed to learn how high would be the long-term costs of delay, of politically convenient policies "to decide not to decide,"[37] and of diplomatic strategies to suppress rather than solve fateful political problems. American acquiescence to Israeli demands against Arabs also

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32. Memorandum of Agreement between the Governments of Israel and the United States, September 1, 1975, available on the website of the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library and Museum at www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0331/1553991.pdf.

33. Crucial here is that neither resolution referred to the Palestinians, making it difficult for the PLO to accept them the framework for peace negotiations.

34. Clyde R. Mark, "Israel: U.S. Foreign Assistance," Congressional Research Service, CRS Issue Brief for Congress (updated April 26, 2005): 13.

35. Annual American aid to Israel and Egypt in the 1980s has been estimated at $5 billion. Laura Zittrain Eisenberg and Neil Caplan, *Negotiating Arab-Israeli Peace: Patters, Problems, Possibilities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 41.

36. See Quandt, *Decade of Decisions*, 253–86; Sheehan, *Arabs, Israelis, and Kissinger*, 159–92; "Trying to Sell the Deal," *Time*.

37. In January 1968, President Lyndon Johnson twice asked Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, "What kind of Israel do you want?" "My government," Eshkol said, "has decided not to decide." Quoted in Gershon Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967–1977* (New York: Times Books, 2006), 127.

gave Israeli parties and politicians associated with extreme versions of Jewish nationalism opportunities they would otherwise never have had. This is a key, if underappreciated, factor in the May 1977 victory of the irredentist Likud party, headed by Menachem Begin. As its first order of business, the Begin government launched a massive settlement campaign in the West Bank, more than tripling the number of settlers there — from 5,000 to 18,500 — within his first two years in office.[38] As was intended, settlement effectively transformed the occupied territory into a province of the state. Jews there could live as if they were in Israel; Palestinians would live with neither citizenship nor secure rights.[39]

CARTER AND VANCE, 1977–80: GENEVA AND CAMP DAVID

Smarting from his 1975 defeat by the Israel lobby over the "reassessment," President Ford promised in a personal letter to President Sadat: "next year is a presidential election year, I can't do anything . . . But when I'm re-elected, we're [*sic*] going to drop the step-by-step approach for a comprehensive settlement."[40]

But Ford lost, and former Georgia governor Jimmy Carter became president. Carter sought to contrast his open, sincere, human rights–oriented approach to foreign policy with what he called the "Nixon-Ford" administration and Henry Kissinger's perceived Metternichian style. Carter made forthright statements of American values and interests, emphasized public diplomacy, and sought to reduce if not eliminate domestic political considerations from foreign policy.[41]

Three factors combined to produce the sense of *opportunity* for peace: Carter's idealism and personal commitment, Sadat's eagerness to retrieve more of the Sinai Peninsula, and signals by Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin's Labor Party government that it was not unalterably opposed to territorial compromise in the West Bank or even to inclusion of the PLO within the negotiating process.[42]

In the early months of his presidency, Carter's poll numbers were high, bolstering his confidence and boosting his diplomatic ambitions. The American public seemed ready to trust a "problem-solving" president committed to openness and

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38. By 1984, within a year after Begin left office, the number had more than doubled again to 44,000. For details and sources on the scale and intensity of this campaign, see Ian S. Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank–Gaza* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 10–11, 459–60.

39. The devastating effects on political moderates in Israel of the failure of American presidents to stand up to domestic political opposition are documented in Ian S. Lustick, *Paradigm Lost: From Two-State Solution to One-State Reality* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 55–86.

40. The phrasing comes from a recollection in a 1991 interview by Ford's ambassador to Egypt, Hermann Eilits, quoted in Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 183.

41. Address by Jimmy Carter, "Relation between World's Democracies," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980, Volume I: Foundations of Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), doc. 6, pp. 28–38; Abraham R. Wagner, *Henry Kissinger: Pragmatic Statesman in Hostile Times* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

42. Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* (Simon & Schuster, 1983) p. 164.

fairness. In sharp contrast to Kissinger's step-by-step approach, Carter's *initiative* was launched to achieve a comprehensive peace to end the conflict by resolving its core issues. His first choice for secretary of state was George Ball, known for advocating American pressure to "save Israel from itself." Persuaded the Senate would not confirm Ball for precisely that reason, Carter instead appointed former deputy defense secretary Cyrus Vance.[43]

The centerpiece of the Carter *initiative* was a campaign to reconvene the Geneva peace conference. This included public endorsement of a "Palestinian homeland" in March 1977, criticism of Israeli prime minister Rabin and then of Menachem Begin (after he assumed the premiership in June), intensive communication with Arab leaders, and preparation of a joint US-Soviet communiqué to advance toward a comprehensive peace.

Shortly thereafter, Carter's conversations with Sadat, King Husayn of Jordan, President Hafiz al-Asad of Syria, and Crown Prince Fahd of Saudi Arabia made him optimistic about a peace deal that would include a solution to the Palestinian issue.[44] Israel, however, was less receptive.

 The political "earthquake" of the Likud party's victory over the hitherto dominant Labor Party in May 1977 made Menachem Begin Israel's prime minister the following month. He was fiercely opposed to negotiating with the PLO and ideologically committed to Israeli rule over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Begin saw settlement expansion as the key to making Israeli rule of those areas permanent. This was a point of strong disagreement with Carter. During their meeting in Washington in July 1977, Carter explicitly urged that Israel halt settlement construction.[45] Begin demurred but was said to have shown "far more flexibility in substance and procedure" than had been anticipated on issues such as Arab peace, reconvening the Geneva conference, and Israeli sovereignty.[46]

American diplomacy went into high gear. In August, Vance shuttled among multiple countries, trying to advance the idea of a "transitional arrangement" for the West Bank and Gaza and to find some way to integrate the PLO into the negotiating process, but with no luck. On October 1, Vance and the Soviet foreign minister, Andrei Gromyko, issued a dramatic joint statement calling for "a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East problem" that entailed "the resolution of the Palestinian question, including insuring the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people . . ." The statement also called for the inclusion of Palestinians in the process.[47]

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43. Douglas Brinkley, "The Lives They Lived: Out of the Loop," *New York Times Magazine*, December 29, 2002, https://nyti.ms/2ApCE2w.

44. "Visit of President Sadat of Egypt: Toasts of the President and President Sadat at a Dinner Honoring the Egyptian President, April 4, 1977," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Jimmy Carter, 1977 (Book 1)* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1977), 567–70.

45. Yossi Melman and Dan Raviv, *Friends in Deed: Inside the U.S.-Israel Alliance* (New York: Hyperion, 1994), 176. For the early readiness of Carter and his aides to confront Begin on this and related issues, see Nathan Thrall, *The Only Language They Understand: Forcing Compromise in Israel and Palestine* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2017), 10–15.

46. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 199.

47. "Soviet–United States Offer to Guarantee a Middle East Peace Settlement," October 1, 1977, doc. 270, in *American Foreign Policy Basic Documents, 1977–1980*, ed. Louis J. Smith et al. (Washington, DC: Department of State, 1983), 622.

Meanwhile, Israeli foreign minister Moshe Dayan set out on a speaking tour in the United States to mobilize Israel supporters against Carter's policies.[48] Though Carter's advisers were aware of the domestic sensitivity of a foreign policy that included public criticism of Israel, the administration was stunned by the Israel lobby's nearly apoplectic reaction to the US-Soviet statement. Senator Scoop Jackson, perhaps the lobby's most important asset on Capitol Hill, was described as "livid." A "media blitz" was unleashed against the administration with the message that "the administration had reneged on its commitments to Israel."[49] In a closely held 50-page memo for the president in early June, White House domestic advisor Hamilton Jordan warned of the political costs Carter was paying and would pay for his Middle East policy.[50]

This ended the cycle's *initiative* phase. The *retreat* phase began. Profoundly worried by the political fallout of his Middle East initiative, Carter requested a meeting with Dayan in New York.[51] Vance and National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski both attended. Multiple accounts confirm that the six-and-a-half-hour meeting was "unprecedented in terms of difficulty and rancor."[52] According to Brzezinski,

> Dayan in effect blackmailed the President by saying that unless he had assurances that we would oppose an independent West Bank and that we would give them economic and military aid, he would have to indicate our unwillingness in his public statements here in the United States. . . . "I can go to Israel and to the American Jews."[53]

Consequently, Cyrus Vance read a joint statement the next day that affirmed that "all the understandings and agreements between" Israel and the US apropos the Geneva conference "remain in force."[54] This signaled a humiliating American reversal, as William Quandt, a member of the National Security Council at the time, later noted, both sides knew "that Carter had backed down in the face of domestic and Israeli pressures.[55]

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48. Moshe Dayan, *Breakthrough: A Personal Account of the Egypt-Israel Peace Negotiations* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1981), 64.

49. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 218.

50. Daniel Strieff, *Jimmy Carter and the Middle East: The Politics of Presidential Diplomacy* (New York: Palgrave, 2015), 39.

51. On Carter's acceptance of the domestic political limits on the pressure he could exert on Israel, see William B. Quandt, *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1986), 134; Strieff, *Jimmy Carter and the Middle East*, 51, 68, 75; Ismail Fahmy, *Negotiating for Peace in the Middle East* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 196. Carter is on record as having repeatedly described defiance of the Israel lobby as "suicide." See Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 349.

52. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 218. Vivid details of the exchanges between Dayan and Carter and Dayan's assessment of the result are provided in Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 66–72.

53. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977–1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983), 108. See also Kenneth Stein's report of an interview with Brzezinski about the episode in *Heroic Diplomacy*, 218–19.

54. "Joint U.S.-Israel Statement," October 5, 1977, in *Department of State Bulletin*, November 7, 1977, p. 639.

55. Quandt, *Camp David*, 130–31.

A week later a US-Israeli "working paper" was released. It committed the US to Israel's view of Geneva as a ceremonial gateway to a series of bilateral negotiations between Israel and the neighboring Arab states. In effect, it reaffirmed the 1975 US commitment to Israel about nonrecognition of the PLO and pointedly made no mention of the "legitimate rights" of the Palestinian people or of the goal of achieving a comprehensive settlement.[56]

Sadat thought the US-Soviet communiqué had been a "brilliant maneuver."[57] He was shocked by Washington's quick retreat from it. A courier delivered a handwritten letter to Sadat in which Carter confessed his efforts had run up against "obstacles" he could not overcome and that at this "crucial moment" he was making "a personal appeal for your [i.e., Sadat's] support."[58]

Recognizing that Carter was unwilling or unable to pay the political costs of pursuing a comprehensive peace, Sadat chose a path he had secretly begun exploring with the Israelis — a separate peace negotiated outside the Geneva framework. In retreat from his own initiative, Carter reluctantly followed Sadat down that path, shifting his sights from ending the Arab-Israeli conflict by solving the Palestinian issue to achieving a peace between Israel and Egypt. Carter was never convinced this was the proper course, but he knew he could not run the domestic political risks of confronting the Israeli government over the Palestinians. Carter worked hard even to achieve the separate peace that he was forced to settle for.

Seeking to recover his political footing, Carter could not resist the attractions of a diplomatic strategy based on glorifying the idea of an Egyptian-Israeli peace, the successful consummation of which could mollify the Israel lobby and give his reelection prospects a needed boost. But by shifting from efforts to reconvene Geneva to a campaign to cajole Egypt and Israel into accepting each other's terms for a bilateral agreement, Carter had been forced to play Begin's game. This moved the peace process cycle from the *retreat* to the *compensation* phase.

Politically desperate, Carter rewarded Begin with almost everything he wanted, thereby abandoning his original position of not mixing domestic politics with foreign policy.[59] Consideration of the Palestinian issue, the future of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the issue of Israeli settlements in those territories — all issues on which he disagreed profoundly with the government of Israel — were postponed and separated from the goal of making peace between Israel and Egypt. In this effort, unprecedentedly high levels of American economic and military aid were guaranteed, including assurances of Israel's oil supplies. The PLO would continue to be isolated.[60]

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56. U.S. Israeli Working Paper on Conference Procedures, October 4, 1977, published in 2014 on the Center for Israel Education Website at https://israeled.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/1977-10-4-US-Israeli-Working-Paper-on-conference-proceduresx.pdf.

57. Quandt, *Camp David*, 123.

58. Quandt, *Camp David*, 140–41. See also Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 10; Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 221; Quandt, *Camp David*, 139; Anwar el-Sadat, *In Search of Identity: An Autobiography* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 301–5.

59. Strieff, *Jimmy Carter and the Middle East*, 123–25, 155.

60. On Begin's success in using Carter's diplomacy for his ends, rather than Carter's, see Rashid Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit: How the U.S. Has Undermined Peace in the Middle East* (Boston, Beacon Press, 2013), 1–28; Seth Anziska, "Autonomy as State Prevention: The Palestinian Question after Camp

After months of preparatory negotiations, a closely guarded 12-day summit was held at Camp David, Maryland, in September 1978, with teams led by Carter, Begin, and Sadat. This meeting produced the Camp David Accords, composed of two separate agreements: a framework for the negotiation of an Egypt-Israel peace treaty and a separate, more general framework for moving toward a broader peace. The former was eventually signed on March 26, 1979, while the latter included transitional arrangements for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which were never agreed upon or implemented.

CARTER AND AFTER: THE LEGACY OF CAMP DAVID

The separate peace between Israel and Egypt, enabled by American diplomacy, isolated Egypt from the Arab world and led to President Sadat's assassination on October 6, 1981, seven months before Israel evacuated its forces from Sinai. Peace was an enormous boon, however, to the Begin government. In 1982, it let the autonomy negotiations sputter to an end, exercising a new freedom of maneuver in June of that year by invading Lebanon without fear of a response by the Egyptian military. Known officially as Operation Peace for Galilee, the invasion was an all-out effort to destroy the PLO and remove the Palestinian question from the regional and international agenda.

But the most consequential form of Carter's compensation to Israel was political — the effective neutralization of American pressure on even a right-wing Israeli government. Early on Carter and his aides had considered Begin's hard-line positions an opportunity for a diplomatically productive confrontation — a public clash that would have been impossible for an American president to contemplate with an Israeli leader perceived as reasonable and moderate. In a detailed analysis, Daniel Strieff showed that "the [Carter] administration's fear of adverse domestic response played the pivotal role in its decision not to pursue such a 'showdown.'"[61] By 1980 Massachusetts senator Edward Kennedy was challenging Carter's renomination as the Democratic Party's candidate. Kennedy won primaries in New York and Connecticut by attacking Carter for being too critical of Israel. Carter's political weakness on the issue was humiliatingly exposed when he found himself forced to accept the resignation of Andrew Young, who as ambassador to the United Nations had met informally with PLO officials, and then to renounce the vote by Young's successor, Donald McHenry, in favor of a Security Council resolution condemning Israeli settlements.[62]

[continued from previous page]
David, 1979–1982," *Humanity* 8, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 287–310. https://doi.org/10.1353/hum.2017.0020; Eliyahu Ben-Elissar, לא עוד מלחמה [No more war] (Or Yehuda, Israel: Maariv, 1995), 31–32. One prominent Israel advocate commented that, in light of the economic picture at the time, only the influence of the Israel lobby can account for how easy it was to achieve congressional approval for this enormous aid package. See Mitchell Geoffrey Bard, *The Water's Edge and Beyond: Defining the Limits to Domestic Influence on United States Middle East Policy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 235–36.

61. Strieff, *Jimmy Carter and the Middle East*, 182.
62. Strieff, *Jimmy Carter and the Middle East*, 168–79, 182.

Largely because of his domestic political vulnerability, Carter effectively accepted Begin's terms for the implementation of the portion of the Camp David Accords that went beyond the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. Instead of serving as a route to a solution to the Palestinian problem, as they were officially described, the function of the autonomy negotiations and the secrecy with which they were conducted was to prevent politically damaging clashes between Israel and the US from becoming public. However unproductive the talks might be, the US government would not tolerate public failure. By signaling a serious split between the US and Israel, an end to the talks would open the Carter campaign to attack by the Israel lobby and his political opponents. Accordingly, the talks continued despite Begin's refusal to countenance any concessions toward creation of a Palestinian homeland or a freeze on settlement activity. Carter's decision to submit to Israel's conditions for holding the talks, a decision driven by domestic political requirements and encouraged by the distractions of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iran hostage crisis, [63] provided precisely the assurance against American pressure Begin needed to maintain the momentum of the settlement juggernaut his government had launched in the West Bank. Thus if the purpose of the provisions of the Camp David Accords dealing with the West Bank and Gaza was to protect Carter from politically costly clashes with Israel, its latent function was to enable rapid settlement of the West Bank and thereby sabotage future attempts to achieve a land-for-peace deal to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In light of the far-reaching consequences of the massive settlement project launched by the Begin government, it is important to appreciate just how consequentially the compensation phase of the peace process carousel contributed to the failure of future efforts to achieve peace based on an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank. Following the Camp David summit with Carter and Sadat, Begin appointed his most trusted lieutenant, Eliyahu Ben-Elissar, as chair of a semisecret "steering committee" to coordinate a wide range of policies conducted under the protective cloak of the autonomy negotiations so as to ensure the permanent of the terriories into Israel. [64] Meanwhile, the retired general and incumbent agriculture minister Ariel Sharon was chosen to head another interministerial committee on settlement. Despite triple-digit inflation and severe cuts in almost all other areas, huge budgets were authorized to expand and entrench the presence of Jewish civilians in the West Bank. [65] Large-scale land expropriations and settlement infrastructure projects were undertaken. Per capita government spending on settlers in this

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63. Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 438.

64. Gerald M. Steinberg and Ziv Rubinovitz, *Menachem Begin and the Israel-Egypt Peace Process: Between Ideology and Political Realism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 186. In 1984 Ben-Elissar affirmed that the policies he was implementing were "designed to guarantee Israeli rule over Judea, Samaria [i.e., the West Bank], and the Gaza District for an unlimited period." Arye Dayan, "האופציה האחרונה: תגובות" ["The last option: Reactions"], *Koteret Rashit,* March 21, 1984, p. 18. See also Ben-Elissar, לא עוד מלחמה [No more war].

65. Ian S. Lustick, "Israel and the West Bank after Elon Moreh: The Mechanics of De Facto Annexation," *The Middle East Journal* 35, no. 4 (Autumn 1981): 557–77. For details on the intensity and consequences of the Begin-Sharon settlement effort as protected by the autonomy negotiations, see Ian S. Lustick, "Kill the Autonomy Talks," *Foreign Policy* no. 41 (Winter 1980/81): 21–43. https://doi.org/10.2307/1148171.

period was more than 28 times the same figure calculated for Israelis living within Israel proper.[66] Speaking directly to President Carter in March 1979, Sharon was admirably candid about the purpose of all this activity: "Believe me, Mr. President, when I use this figure of one million, saying that in 20–30 years I hope that one million Jews will live [in the West Bank], I can assure you, they will live there. There's nothing to do about it."[67]

Carter's effort had been compromised by the downstream consequences of Nixon and Kissinger's efforts — in particular Ford and Kissinger's decision to scuttle the "strategic reassessment" and instead provide Israel with an effective veto over US relations with the PLO. The later effort by President George H. W. Bush and Secretary of State Jim Baker was, in turn, burdened by the legacy of the Carter cycle — specifically his acquiescence to Begin's demand for a separate peace with Egypt and Israeli processes of de facto annexation of the West Bank. The settlement project as it existed when Bush took office in 1989, with 70,000 Israelis in the West Bank,[68] was the product of what Begin and Sharon accomplished under the protection of the phony Carter-era autonomy negotiations. The Obama administration's peace initiative, to which I now turn, was burdened not only by these legacies but by the additional effects of the compensation phases of peace process cycles (unrecounted here) between the Reagan Initiative of 1982 and the George W. Bush administration's attempt after the 2007 Annapolis conference to implement a "road map to peace."[69]

OBAMA AND CLINTON, 2009–13: MITCHELL AND ROSS

No president before Barack Obama had entered the White House with such a detailed knowledge of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, such a record of personal engagement with both Jews and Palestinians, and such a sustained commitment to closer American relations with Arabs and Muslims.[70] Within hours of his inauguration, Obama called Palestinian Authority president Mahmud 'Abbas to signal his belief in the *opportunity* for peace. Within two days he appointed former Maine senator George Mitchell, who had previously been appointed by President Bill Clinton to head a commission to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that had recommended a total freeze of Israeli settlement activity, as his special envoy for Middle East peace negotiations.

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66. This number excludes Israelis living in East Jerusalem, calculated from Tzvi Shuldiner, "Real Cost of Settlements Revealed," *Ha'aretz*, July 25, 1980, translated in Joint Publications Research Service, report no. 76407 (September 11, 1980), 19–25.

67. Anziska, "Autonomy as State Prevention," 293.

68. Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands*, 12.

69. For analytically complementary treatment of these episodes, see, for example, Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit*. See also Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands*; Ian S. Lustick, "Ending Protracted Conflicts: The Oslo Peace Process between Political Partnership and Legality," *Cornell International Law Journal* 30, no. 3 (1997): 101–17; Lustick, *Paradigm Lost*, 76–81.

70. Peter Beinart, "Obama Betrayed Ideals on Israel," *Newsweek*, March 12, 2012, www.newsweek.com/peter-beinart-obama-betrayed-ideals-israel-63673.

Obama's ambition, optimism, commitment, and his initial focus on Palestinian national rights were similar to Jimmy Carter's, though the circumstances they faced were different in some key respects. By 2009 some elements of the conflict had changed, encouraging Obama that prospects for success might be greater than they had been 32 years earlier. While Carter had been forced publicly to abjure the idea of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, during Obama's two terms that objective was widely accepted, at least in principle — even by Israel's new hard-right prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, as well as leaders of the self-described pro-Israel community in the United States.

Yet Obama also faced higher barriers to success in this realm than had any other US president. When Carter took office in 1977, 45,000 Israelis lived in East Jerusalem and approximately 3,300 in the rest of the West Bank. By the time Obama arrived in the White House, there were 195,500 Jews in East Jerusalem and 300,000 in the rest of the West Bank.[71] The influence of the Israel lobby had grown at an even faster rate. Between 1993 and 2000, AIPAC conferences were attended by an average of 1,900 delegates. During Obama's time in office, with AIPAC increasingly aligned with Likud and other right-wing parties in Israel, the average number of AIPAC conference delegates skyrocketed, averaging nearly 10,000 in the years of Obama's first term.[72] Nor, in sharp contrast to Carter, could Obama hope that a confrontation with Israel would help an Israeli opposition favoring territorial compromise to win an election.

In light of these difficulties, and a year after the final collapse of George W. Bush's failed "road map to Middle East peace," Obama's goal was simply to restart the "peace process." The most prominent specific issue for Obama was to seek a freeze on Israeli settlement activities in the West Bank. Explaining American policy in May 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was explicit and emphatic about Washington's focus on the settlements. The president, she said, "wants to see a stop to settlements, not some settlements, not outposts, not natural growth exceptions . . . That is our position, . . . and we intend to press that point."[73]

It was the White House chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel, who pushed the idea of a settlement freeze as the centerpiece of the American initiative. His view matched the judgment of many American experts from the late 1970s through the 1990s.[74] If the US pushed Israel hard on the settlements, the government in Israel would have to choose between alienating die-hard maximalists or rejecting a path forward endorsed by most Israelis. This would establish the political basis for new elections, a more moderate government, and the beginning of productive negotiations.

71. American-Israel Cooperative Enterprise, "Settlements: Jewish Communities in East Jerusalem," Jewish Virtual Library, www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jewish-communities-in-east-jerusalem (updated May 2014); Peace Now, "Data: Population," Settlements Watch, https://peacenow.org.il/en/settlements-watch/settlements-data/population (updated 2020).

72. Attendee data for AIPAC's annual conferences were compiled from contemporaneous accounts by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. For examples, see "Behind the Headlines: Aipac Delegates Look to Future despite Cloud over U.S.-Israel Ties," May 19, 1998, www.jta.org/1998/05/19/archive/behind-the-headlines-aipac-delegates-look-to-future-despite-cloud-over-u-s-israel-ties-2; Ron Kampeas and Uriel Heilman, "Reporters' Notebook: AIPAC 2011" May 24, 2011, www.jta.org/2011/05/24/politics/reporters-notebook-aipac-2011.

73. Quoted in Kurtzer et. al., *Peace Puzzle*, 249.

74. Scott Wilson, "Obama Searches for Middle East Peace," *Washington Post*, July 14, 2012, https://wapo.st/2yPLpCU.

But Emanuel's thinking was obsolete. Almost a decade had passed since the Labor Party had led a coalition government in Israel. Its fortunes, along with the rest of the Israeli left, had sunk so low that virtually no Israeli political observer believed a government committed to a solution to the conflict along lines favored by the US could emerge from new elections.[75] Instead of optimism among Israeli moderates, US pressure on settlements triggered a storm of outrage in Israel and among leaders of the Israel lobby in the US, who were reported to be "stunned" at the daily barrage of American demands for a settlement freeze and the urgency and intensity of American diplomatic focus on the issue. Prime Minister Netanyahu himself responded with a mixture of delay, defiance, and obfuscation, tactics for which he paid no discernible political price.[76]

To be sure, Netanyahu offered his official, albeit elaborately hedged, acceptance of the principle of a two-state solution in a June 2009 speech. This declaration by an Israeli prime minister representing Likud would have been hailed previously as a significant breakthrough. But the gap between what Palestinian leaders and Netanyahu meant by "Palestinian state" was so great that the move was more important as a maneuver to deflect Washington's campaign to freeze settlements than as a genuine opening. Moreover, following on a formulation first advanced by Ariel Sharon as prime minister in the 2000s, Netanyahu added a poison-pill condition to his ostensible acceptance of a two-state solution, namely that Palestinians formally accept the legitimacy of Zionism by endorsing the formula of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people.[77] In any case, Obama's *retreat* phase from his early "tough love" approach to Israel had already begun. Washington's demand for a settlement freeze, detached from a larger strategy for dealing with Likud's solid grip on power in Israel and overwhelmed by Israeli lobby opposition, meant that the increasingly public and personal feud between Obama and Netanyahu was more costly to the former than the latter.[78] While defending his public criticism of Israeli settlements in a meeting with Jewish leaders in the White House in July,

75. In 2008, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, about to leave office to be tried for corruption, made a substantial, albeit verbal, offer to 'Abbas. But even had 'Abbas agreed immediately, Olmert had no real hope of implementing a deal. Despite his more moderate party's plurality in the 2009 election, Netanyahu was able to come to power as head of a right-wing coalition, firmly linked to extreme religious and ultranationalist parties. Indeed, the Israeli political spectrum has shifted so far to the right that, insofar as any alternative to a Likud-led coalition is imagined, it would rely on similarly hard-line figures who have made clear their distaste for any negotiated settlement that the Palestinians could ever contemplate accepting. See Lustick, *Paradigm Lost*, 82–83.

76. Peter Beinart, *The Crisis of Zionism* (New York: Picador, 2015): 124–59; Wilson, "Obama Searches for Middle East Peace;" Aluf Benn, "Why Won't Obama Talk to Israel?" *New York Times*, July 27, 2009, https://nyti.ms/30GI8kX. In spring 2009, I participated (as Prime Minister Netanyahu) in a US government simulation to explore prospects for success of the settlement moratorium initiative. The simulation's conclusion was "not optimistic based on Netanyahu's political strength in Israel, his tactics of delay and obfuscation, and support he could exploit from the Israel lobby in Washington."

77. Diana Buttu, "Behind Israel's Demand for Recognition as a Jewish State," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 43, no. 3 (May 2014): 42–45. https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2014.43.3.42; Douglas Bloomfield, "When Yes Means No," *Jerusalem Post*, May 4, 2016, www.jpost.com/opinion/washington-watch-when-yes-means-no-453124.

78. On the "stranglehold" that AIPAC had on Congress by this time, see James Traub, "The New Israel Lobby," *New York Times Magazine*, September 9, 2009, https://nyti.ms/2AoThM8.

Obama simultaneously signaled a weakening of his commitment by inviting former president Bill Clinton's Middle East negotiator Dennis Ross to "quarterback" the administration's policies toward Iran, the so-called Arab Spring, and, eventually, the Arab-Israeli conflict.[79]

In September 2009, echoing the plaintive apologies and admissions of failures handed to Anwar al-Sadat by Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, Obama confessed to PA president Mahmud 'Abbas that he "couldn't get the freeze," according to one of 'Abbas's aides. The terms of Obama's initiative changed accordingly. Calling for Israeli restraint on settlements, Mitchell proposed a temporary moratorium on settlement construction, with exceptions and loopholes as negotiated with Israel. Meanwhile, Obama urged the Palestinians to enter negotiations, despite continued settlement construction.[80] Israel acceded to a 10-month freeze, beginning in November 2009, with an exception for 3,000 housing units already under construction in the West Bank. Israel imposed no limits, however, on building in East Jerusalem, and it granted permission for "public building" construction within existing settlements.[81]

A key factor in Obama's decision to demand a complete settlement freeze had been 'Abbas's argument that, as long as the settlement juggernaut continued, he would be unable to negotiate with Israel.[82] Netanyahu's demand that Palestinians accept a Zionist definition of the State of Israel, his tactics of obfuscation and delay, and the toothless and temporary "moratorium" that had been substituted for the promised freeze were too much even for the usually pliable 'Abbas. The furthest the PA president would go was to agree to relaunch negotiations subject to a "a complete halt to settlements, including in Jerusalem, for a fixed period."[83] US diplomats begged 'Abbas to change his mind but finally settled for "proximity talks," with Mitchell carrying messages back and forth between Israelis and Palestinians. Washington's goal in these talks, as *Time* magazine put it, was not to reach an agreement but "to avoid being blamed for their failure."[84]

Indeed the most memorable aspect of the proximity talks were the frantic efforts made by the US to persuade Israel to accept a mere three-month extension of the moratorium that had made those (fruitless) talks possible. Although the offer's de-

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79. Wilson, "Obama Searches for Middle East Peace." Ross was widely perceived as the Israel lobby's man in the Obama administration. Akiva Eldar, "Obama, the First U.S. President to Tell AIPAC the Truth," *Haaretz*, May 22, 2011, www.haaretz.com/1.5015420. Upon leaving his post in November 2011, Ross joined the AIPAC-tied Washington Institute for Near East Policy, where he was named "counselor and William Davidson Distinguished Fellow." The overall argument of Ross's 2015 book, *Doomed to Succeed*, is that America always loses when it distances itself from Israel.

80. Elise Labott, "Obama Drops Demand that Israel Freeze Settlements," *CNN*, September 23, 2009, https://cnn.it/2ZVEymB. See also Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, 371–72.

81. Ethan Bronner and Mark Landler, "Israel Offers a Pause in Building New Settlements," *New York Times*, November 25, 2009, https://nyti.ms/2TLZ7On.

82. 'Abbas made this argument directly to Obama in a May 2009 meeting. See the account provided by PA foreign minister Saeb Erekat, reported in Clayton Swisher, *The Palestine Papers: The End of the Road?* (London: Hesperus Press, 2011), 227–28.

83. Agence France-Presse, "Abbas Calls for Settlement Freeze 'for a Fixed Period,'" *Miftah*, January 14, 2010, http://miftah.org/Display.cfm?DocId=21500&CategoryId=5.

84. Tony Karon, "Israelis and Palestinians: Agreeing to Talk, and to Fail," *Time*, March 8, 2010, http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1970563,00.html.

tails were not made public, its scale was so astounding that its contents were quickly leaked. The offer included $3 billion worth of stealth fighter-bombers, layered missile defense and early warning systems, and a one-year guarantee of US vetoes of United Nations Security Council resolutions. The US also endorsed Israel's conception of the Jordan Valley as a security zone and promised not to ask for limits on settlements again, to place more sanctions against Iran, to continue supporting Israeli policies of ambiguity regarding its nuclear weapons, and to eventually sign a comprehensive US-Israel security agreement.[85] Even veteran observers were baffled at the American offer and highly critical.[86]

No one has argued that a three-month extension of the proximity talks would have resulted in substantive progress toward peace. So what was the motivation for making such an extravagant offer? The episode is best understood as the beginning of the *compensation* phase of the peace process carousel: the beginning of a five-year quest to repair the domestic political damage done by Obama's short-lived but high-profile 2009 demand for substantial Israeli restrictions on West Bank settlement construction.

As early as May 2010, Democrats in Congress had begun worrying about the political consequences of Obama's demands. In a meeting with 37 Jewish senators and House representatives, Obama heard worry, concern, and criticism. He was told that the administration had adopted too harsh a "focus on settlements, undertaken without congressional consultation."[87] For the president, the odds that his shrunken peace initiative might succeed and actually lead to an Israeli-Palestinian peace appeared insignificant compared to the certainty that the Israel lobby and its supporters would derail his domestic agenda and punish his party.

In Washington, Ross went head to head with Mitchell. While Mitchell wanted to continue with the peace process, Ross wanted to ditch it.[88] By shifting American emphasis from Israeli behavior (e.g., expanding settlements) to Israeli concerns (e.g., Iran and international boycott and "delegitimization" campaigns), Obama could burnish his "pro-Israel" credentials as part of an extended campaign to compensate for the perceived affront to the American-Israeli "special relationship" associated with his quarrel with Netanyahu over West Bank settlements.

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85. David Makovsky, "Dear Prime Minister: U.S. Efforts to Keep the Peace Process on Track," Washington Institute, *Policy Watch* no. 1707 (September 29, 2010), www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/dear-prime-minister-u.s.-efforts-to-keep-the-peace-process-on-track; Noam Shelef, "The American Incentives and the Settlements Freeze: What's on the Table?" Americans for Peace Now, November 15, 2010, http://archive.peacenow.org/entries/the_american_incentives_and_the_settlements_freeze_whats_on_the_table; Nimrod Goren, "A Package Not Delivered: US Incentives and Israel's Settlement Freeze," *International Spectator* 46, no. 1 (2011), 29–30, https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2011.567904.

86. See the remarks of two former American ambassadors to Israel — including Martin Indyk's warning "not to pay with strategic coin for mere tactical breathing room" and Daniel Kurtzer's description of the proposal as "an extraordinary package for essentially nothing" — quoted in Mark Landler, "Risk and Advantages in U.S. Effort in Mideast," *New York Times*, October 5, 2010, https://nyti.ms/3ccIXnr. When Netanyahu demanded explicit exclusion of expanded East Jerusalem from the moratorium, Washington withdrew its offer.

87. Wilson, "Obama Searches for Middle East Peace."

88. Wilson, "Obama Searches for Middle East Peace."

Ross's view prevailed.[89] In late 2010 and early 2011, both Israeli and Palestinian officials expressed "bewilderment at Mitchell's hands-off approach."[90] In early April 2011, Mitchell submitted his resignation. The shift in diplomatic gears, from retreat to compensation was also apparent in the president's own behavior. In a phone call that January, Obama threatened 'Abbas with pulling $450 million in US aid if the Palestinian president did not withdraw an anti-settlement resolution that had been submitted to the UN Security Council. 'Abbas refused. Despite his earlier initiative for a freeze, the US vetoed the anti-settlement resolution three weeks later; the Obama administration's first use of that power.[91]

Five days after Mitchell's resignation Obama went to the State Department to give a speech on Middle East policy in the midst of the Arab Spring. Obama angered the government in Israel by referring to the pre-1967 armistice lines as the basis for negotiations but followed Ross's advice by avoiding the issues of Jerusalem and refugees and moving dramatically away from the "even-handed" or "honest broker" posture he had cultivated previously.[92] Obama noted that Palestinians continued to suffer the "humiliation of occupation," but his language about Israeli concerns was considerably stronger: for Israelis, he said, the conflict "has meant living with the fear that their children could be blown up on a bus or by rockets."[93]

Obama's volte-face on the issue of Israeli-Palestinian relations was dramatic. For peace activists his shift of gears on the issue was "jarring." It was now "all AIPAC, all the time."[94] Doubling down in this *compensation* phase of the cycle, Obama's speech to AIPAC's annual conference in 2011 featured two references to Israel as both a Jewish state and "the homeland of the Jewish people," formulations very close to Netanyahu's demands. Obama also retreated from remarks he had made about the pre-1967 lines as a basis for negotiations with land swaps by reinterpreting them as consistent with the Netanyahu position that areas of the West Bank densely populated by Jewish settlers would not be subject to negotiations.[95] In his annual address to the UN General As-

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89. See Dennis Ross, *Doomed to Succeed,* 382; Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit*, 98–99.

90. Daniel Stone, "George Mitchell Resigns: What Envoy's Awkward Exit Signals for Mideast," *Daily Beast*, May 13, 2011, www.thedailybeast.com/george-mitchell-resigns-what-envoys-awkward-exit-signals-for-mideast.

91. Colum Lynch, "Obama Administration Rejects Israel Resolution, Using U.N. Veto for First Time," *Foreign Policy*, February 18, 2011, https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/02/18/obama-administration-rejects-israel-resolution-using-u-n-veto-for-first-time/.

92. Stone, "George Mitchell Resigns."

93. White House, Office of the Press Secretary, Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa, May 19, 2011, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/19/remarks-president-middle-east-and-north-africa%20.

94. MJ Rosenberg, "Obama Gives Up, AIPAC Wins," *Al Jazeera*, May 18, 2011, www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/05/201151783043474842.html. The shift was apparent three months earlier when the US vetoed the UN Security Council resolution on settlements whose language matched the president's own rhetoric. Rosenberg quoted Obama as a candidate as having told him that, as president, he would eventually have to eschew the role of an "honest broker" and bow to the power of the Israel lobby. Rosenberg had worked at AIPAC for four years in the 1980s, then as an aide to various congressional representatives and senators.

95. White House, Office of the Press Secretary, Remarks by the President at the AIPAC Policy Conference 2011, May 22, 2011, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/22/remarks-president-aipac-policy-conference-2011.

sembly that year, Obama shifted from criticizing Israeli settlements and advocating a two-state solution to identification with Israeli victims of Palestinian terrorism, opposition to UN action as contrary to the principle of direct negotiations between the parties, and condemnations of challenges to the legitimacy of the Jewish state.[96] Remarkably, Obama's 2015 speech to the General Assembly contained not a single reference to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.[97]

The Netanyahu government quickly exploited Obama's new rhetoric of understanding and support for Israeli positions. In the summer of 2011, Israeli officials worked closely with Dennis Ross. By cherry-picking language from Obama speeches, they produced a one-page position paper that omitted any mention of settlements. Ross then presented this statement to the other members of the so-called Quartet (Russia, the European Union, and the UN) as a framework for resuming Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.[98]

OBAMA AND KERRY, 2013–17

In his second term President Obama remained in a *compensation* posture toward Israel. To be sure, Obama did authorize his new secretary of state, former Massachusetts senator John Kerry, to try to restart Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Universally referred to as the "Kerry initiative," the effort lasted for nine months but elicited almost no public support from the president. Though Kerry initially declared his goal to be a comprehensive peace, that objective was "steadily downgraded," as author Nathan Thrall described, "to a framework agreement between the parties, to an American framework proposal . . . , to a mere extension of talks without a framework."[99] In fact, the talks never really moved beyond disputes over confidence-building measures related to settlements and Israel's release of Palestinian prisoners. Despite an estimated 100 meetings, Kerry's efforts came to naught, with Palestinians and Israelis blaming each other for the failure.[100]

Middle East foreign policy activity during Obama's second term was dominated by the long and complex negotiations leading to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, signed in July 2015 by the US, China, Russia, Britain, France, Germany, and

96. Josh Gerstein and Jennifer Epstein, "Netanyahu Praises Obama," *Politico*, September 21, 2011, https://politi.co/2zIoWYM.

97. White House, Office of the Press Secretary, Remarks by President Obama to the United Nations General Assembly, September 28, 2015, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/28/remarks-president-obama-united-nations-general-assembly.

98. Daniel Levy, "America's Failed Quartet Sophistry," July 22, 2011, https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/07/22/americas-attempted-quartet-sophistry/. The Quartet had been established in 2002 as part of the Madrid negotiations as diplomatic vehicle for coordinating efforts to achieve an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. Ross's proposal to the Quartet was rejected.

99. Thrall, *The Only Language They Understand*, 203.

100. William Booth and Ruth Eglash, "Kerry's Nine-Month Quest for Middle East Peace Ends in Failure," *Washington Post*, April 29, 2014, https://wapo.st/2AoJIfP. On the failure of the Kerry initiative, see also Rashid I. Khalidi, "Chronicles of a Death Foretold," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 43, no. 3 (Spring 2014): 40–42. https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2014.43.3.40; Mouin Rabbani, "It's Not Over until It's Over," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 43, no. 3 (Spring 2014): 51–55. https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2014.43.3.51.

Iran to limit Iran's nuclear program. Israel ferociously opposed almost any negotiated agreement with Iran. It is in this context that one can understand not only Obama's avoidance of confrontation with Israel over settlements and Palestinian issues, but the public zeal with which he and administration officials advertised their campaign for a 10-year memorandum of understanding that would award Israel with a guarantee of unprecedented American military support.

In September 2016, administration officials bragged that this promise of $38 billion dollars in military aid to Israel was "the single largest pledge of military assistance to any country in American history."[101] The new aid package was an attempt by Obama to mend relations with the Israel lobby and its constituencies. This was apparent not only in the repeated efforts by administration officials to highlight its unprecedented scale and generosity but by the Netanyahu government's cat-and-mouse game of publicly casting doubt on whether it would agree to accept it, thereby threatening repeatedly to deprive the administration of the political capital it was trying to retrieve.[102]

THE FUTURE OF A NASH EQUILIBRIUM

Repeated cycles of futile American-orchestrated negotiations involving Israelis and Palestinians are a Nash equilibrium. Fruitless negotiations or talks about starting negotiations stagger on, fail, restart, stagger on, fail, restart, etc. because four key (but not equal) players in this "game" prefer the facade of a peace process to unilateral attempts to achieve what they would really like. These four players are the Israeli government, the United States government, the Palestinian Authority (PA), and what might be called the "peace process industry." Traditional scholarship and punditry, focused on the dexterity or ineptitude of the players or on evaluating diplomatic tactics or prospects for successful negotiations, can contribute no more to understanding why the carousel continues to revolve than would consideration of the equestrian skills of riders on a real merry-go-round for predicting where they are headed. What must be understood is the logic of the set of circumstances driving this outcome.

Israeli governments would prefer the Palestinian cause be removed from the agenda altogether, affording them a free hand in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Continuing negotiations to nowhere, with a vacant two-state slogan as an official framework, is suboptimal but acceptable. Under the pretext that negotiations may be about to begin, or might be reaching a crucial stage, settlement construction and other steps toward annexation can be encouraged as an urgent necessity to secure the Jewish presence in the Biblical homeland. An official stance of openness to "painful compromises" and "unconditional negotiations" with Palestinians also aids Israeli diplomatic efforts to avoid international pariah status.

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101. Susan Rice, "The U.S. Is Making a Historic Investment to Protect the Security of Israel," The White House, blog, September 14, 2016, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2016/09/14/us-making-historic-investment-protect-security-israel.

102. Barbra Opall-Rome, "Israel Balks at Obama's New 10-Year Aid Offer," *Defense News*, July 15, 2016, www.defensenews.com/2016/07/15/israel-balks-at-obamas-new-10-year-aid-offer/. For an inside account of Obama's frustrations with Netanyahu's behavior, see Ben Rhodes, *The World as It Is: A Memoir of the Obama White House* (New York: Random House, 2018), 145–46.

Though American presidents have genuinely desired a negotiated end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they have never found it politically rational to exert the pressure on Israel required to compel concessions necessary for a sustainable peace. On the other hand, even the incumbent administration of Donald Trump has found that diplomacy offering at least the appearance of the pursuit of peace has rewards to justify the humiliations associated with failure. Most important is the protection against Israel lobby attacks that presidents typically gain by officially engaging with Israeli governments in talks about peace. US administrations also find it convenient to respond to European, Arab, and Muslim criticism of Washington's unbalanced policies by using the "peace process" to justify its "restraint" toward Israel. This is why the Trump plan of January 2020, despite its unprecedented endorsement of far-right Israeli talking points, officially presents itself, as have so many other American diplomatic initiatives, as a vehicle for achieving peace by means of a two-state solution.[103]

The PA would certainly prefer establishment of a real Palestinian state next to Israel. But faced with Israeli stonewalling and American diplomats who operate as Israel's lawyers, that objective is unattainable. The (barely) acceptable alternative is for it to continue pretending that productive negotiations might occur. Thanks to this charade it has collected billions of dollars from the US and Europe to pay the salaries of its employees, preserve VIP treatment for the leadership, and support a halfway decent standard of living for most of those Palestinians living in the cities and towns putatively under PA control.

And then there is the peace process industry. Legions of pundits, scholars, commentators, funders, and conference organizers have built careers around both the hopes and fears that the revolving carousel produces. Their speculations, warnings, maps, and advice fill the newspapers, social media, and the airwaves. While they themselves do not enforce the cycle of failure, the images they produce of the imminent implementation of a two-state solution (as a goad to those terrified of it), or of its complete and final disappearance (as a goad to those yearning for it) do grease the carousel's mechanisms. Meanwhile the endless demand for analysis of the implications of the imminent arrival or demise of a two-state solution ensures the attention and funds required for think tanks, foundations, advocacy groups, and media outlets to thrive.[104]

Of course, those working for or against a peace agreement would prefer it to end decisively, either in success or failure. But so long as the process itself continues, they can manage. Most relevant here is the perspective of *proponents of a negotiated two-state solution*. Given the choice between a vanishingly small chance of success and having to develop and adopt an entirely new framework for pursuing values of peace, equality, and democracy in this domain, most prefer continuing the fight. It is far easier to raise funds, preserve institutions, and promote careers by describing a closing window of opportunity for two states than to admit that, in fact, the window is closed.

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103. Ian S. Lustick, "The One-State Reality: Reading the Trump-Kushner Plan as a Morbid Symptom," *Arab World Geographer* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 20–28.

104. For more on the peace process industry, see Ben White, "The Peace Process Industry Keeps the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Running," *Middle East Eye*, July 26, 2017, www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/peace-process-industry-keeps-israeli-palestinian-conflict-running; Mark Habeeb, "Washington's Peace Process Industry Faces Tough Times," *Arab Weekly*, January 28, 2018, p. 17.

If a new president enters the White House in 2021, the most probable outcome will be a more vigorous affirmation than its present occupant has been willing to make of the need for two-state solution negotiations. Such a course would be politically safe but substantively destructive, since it would push even further into the future the day when the real problems — not of territorial independence but of inequality and political discrimination — can be addressed.

But Nash equilibriums do end. They end when players can no longer sustain themselves on suboptimal outcomes or when at least one player risks pursuing its real goal. Annexationist pressures in Israel; Palestinian calls to replace the PA with a more effective structure; partisan polarization in America, including a new willingness by progressive Democrats to question US policies toward Israel; and increasing confusion among two-state advocates in the peace process industry all suggest directions from which change can come. Once the diplomatic merry-go-round does grind to a halt, new ideas can take hold, ideas rooted in new configurations of interest and belief. The insoluble problem of negotiating a two-state solution over months and years can then be replaced by better problems about how, over decades and generations, to reform and democratize the one state, Israel, that exists between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River.