

The Middle East Peace Process

THE HISTORY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE 2013 JOHN KERRY PEACE EFFORTS

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Since the end of World War Two, the United States has assigned itself the primary responsibility for the security and order of the Middle East. Most early U.S. actions in the region were carried out under the anti-Communist doctrine of Containment. However, since the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and especially since the collapse of the U.S.S.R. in 1991, the United States has had two important remaining goals in the Middle East: the securing of Persian Gulf oil supplies, and establishing peace between Israel and its neighbors in the Levant. These conflicts have involved several countries, and center on holy sites sacred to almost half of the world. The efforts to bring about a peace settlement by the United States accelerated rapidly after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, and what has been known as the "Peace Process" has consumed the time of many American policy makers and Presidents since.

From Henry Kissinger's *realpolitik* shuttle diplomacy in the 70s, to the brusqueness of James Baker in 1991 and the soft touch of Bill Clinton and Dennis Ross in the run up to Camp David, the personal character, preferences, and techniques of the lead American negotiators has had an outsized influence on the success or failure of negotiations. This is especially important to observe in light of Secretary of State John Kerry's recent visits to Israel and the Palestinian territories in the summer of 2013. What this investigation will try to answer is how Secretary Kerry's efforts reflect or contrast the efforts of past American negotiators, both successful and unsuccessful. We will first review the relevant history of pre-1991 peace efforts by the United States in the Middle East, the most important of

which are the efforts of Henry Kissinger from 1968-1977 and Jimmy Carter from 1977-1981, then examine three eras of American peacemaking in the last 22 years: The efforts of James Baker and the first President Bush relating to the Madrid Peace Conference, the initiatives of Dennis Ross and Bill Clinton during the 1990s to bring about a final settlement culminating in Camp David, and finally, the efforts of the Bush and Obama administration during the War on Terror. We will then use these histories to reflect upon Secretary Kerry's visit, and what the initiatives, techniques, and failures of his predecessors can tell us about his personal attempts to find a solution to this conflict.

Pre-1967 American Diplomacy: Reactive Anti-Communism to Proactive Engagement

Before the outbreak of war between the Israelis and Arabs in 1967 and 1973, the United States did not take a strong interest in peace making between the Arab states and Israel. President Truman (1945-53) recognized and supported the creation of Israel and sponsored the failed Palestine Conciliation Commission talks to create a settlement¹, but did not make a comprehensive peace his priority. President Eisenhower (1952-60) saw Israel as an ally during his tenure but was more concerned with forming a containment alliance of anti-Soviet states, and did not wish to anger the

¹ Tiller, Stian Johanson; Waage, Hilde Henkriksen, "Powerful State, Powerless Mediator: The United States and the Peace efforts of the Palestine Conciliation Commission". *The International History Review*, 33:3, 501-524

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Arabs who he saw as potential allies. This led to both American threats to cut off loan guarantees to Israel during disputes over the Jordan River in 1954², and the United States forcing Israel, Britain, and France out of the Sinai Peninsula after their botched conspiracy to seize the Suez Canal from Egypt in 1956. President Johnson's Presidency (1963-1968) saw the Six-Day War with Israel and its neighbors occur after President Johnson wavered on giving either a clear "yes" or "no" to the Israelis on whether or not a pre-emptive strike would be opposed by the United States. Israel ended up winning control of the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai. Critically, President Johnson decided against President Eisenhower's policy of pressuring Israel into leaving the occupied territories, stating that Israel should leave the captured lands in exchange for peace with its neighbors.³ However, President Johnson would leave office shortly after the 1967 war, and the task of achieving peace would be taken up by his successors in the Nixon Administration, with its powerful National Security Advisor and later Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger.

Henry Kissinger: Tough, Secret Diplomacy

The principles of American engagement in the peace process came into formation mostly during Henry Kissinger's time in government from 1969-1977. Henry Kissinger was a tough, sober minded diplomat who carefully orchestrated numerous American diplomatic successes in the early to mid-1970s. After Secretary of State Rogers' influence was severely circumscribed following his failed peace initiative of 1970, which promoted "linkage" between the various problems of Israel and its neighbors in an attempt to negotiate a comprehensive, final agreement, Kissinger was left in strong control of Middle East policy. From 1970-1973, the U.S. followed a

² Murphey, Dan. "U.S. say no plan to cut Israel loan guarantees, but it's been tried before," CS Monitor, January 11, 2010.

³ Quandt, William. *Peace Process*. (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001) 26-51

cautious, simple policy of strengthening Israel. This was done with the objective that this would compel the Arabs to negotiate with the United States, turning away from their Soviet allies in the hopes of using the U.S. to gain concessions from Israel. While this static policy did ultimately work in the sense of forcing Egypt to turn from the U.S.S.R. to the U.S.A., the Yom Kippur War forced the United States to take a much more active negotiation role, as the U.S. realized that simply underwriting Israeli strength could not constitute a successful Middle East strategy.⁴

In this new, post 1973 phase of Kissinger's diplomacy, and in strong contrast to the Rogers Plan, step-by-step diplomacy was paramount. Initial steps were not linked to a broader peace agreement and Kissinger shuttled all over the region in secret, intensive talks in order to complete his vision of a step-by-step peace that would later culminate in a multi-lateral summit to verify what had already been concluded. This diplomacy of Kissinger's achieved the extremely successful Syrian-Israeli and Egyptian-Israeli peace agreements immediately after the war. The subsequent 1975 Sinai II agreement furthered peace and laid the ground work for the 1978 Camp David Accords, while the Syrian-Israeli interim agreement has proven stable for decades.

Despite Kissinger's commitment to Israeli strength, in order to gain American leverage over the Arabs Kissinger and the Nixon and Ford Administrations were willing to lean hard on the Israelis to get what they wanted. For example, Nixon threatened to cut off support for Israel if it would not attend the Geneva peace conference or sign American sponsored agreements with Syria. The late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin described a later threat by President Ford to "reassess" the American alliance with Israel, if it did not sign the Interim Sinai Agreement (Sinai II) in 1975, as the worst ever phase of U.S.A.-Israel relations. Also during the Ford Administration, President Ford actually cut off economic and military cooperation after Israel delayed the signing

⁴ Quandt, *Peace Procsss*, 56-103

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of a second Sinai agreement that would entail limited withdrawal, because of the issues of settlements and Israeli security and oil guarantees. A strong primary challenge from Ronald Reagan before the 1976 election and strong congressional action forced President Ford to let up on pressure over settlements and other issues. However, this American strong-arming did have positive results in assisting the establishment of a ceasefire and some sense of peace between Israel and its neighbors. Ford would be defeated in the fall by a man who came into office with strong ambitions for the Middle East, President James "Jimmy" Carter.⁵

Jimmy Carter: Idealism and Ambition find Success

Unlike many presidents who preceded or followed him, Jimmy Carter came into office with a focus on Middle East policy and strong desires to shape the region. Jimmy Carter was and is a idealistic, passionate, and optimistic man with a strong desire to make the world a better place in whatever way he can. Carter rejected Kissingerian step-by-step secret diplomacy, and instead desired grand, multi-lateral initiatives that would solve the problem in one fell swoop. He also talked openly of his initiatives to the public, much to the consternation of the American diplomatic community. Menachim Begin's election, the first ever of a member of Likud, in 1977 led to conflict with Israel over settlements, and Carter, in contrast to Kissinger, traded softer American negotiating positions in return for a slowdown on settlements, as opposed to negative pressure. Carter attempted to organize his grand summit with the coordination of the Soviet Union, who he thought could encourage Syria and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to come to the negotiating table with the Israelis at Geneva. When negotiations with Syria, Jordan, the PLO and the other rejectionists stalled out, Anwar Sadat, the Egyptian leader, decided to cut past the Americans and go to Jerusalem, which set the stage for the bilateral Egypt-Israeli talks that would culminate at Camp David.

The Carter Administration immediately switched its focus to trying to conclude a bilateral Israel-Egypt agreement that would also gain concessions for the Palestinians living the West Bank and Gaza. Two issues were prominent, Israeli settlements in the Sinai, which Begin did not want to give up, and Sadat's desire to get something for the Palestinians in the peace treaty. Carter's negotiation techniques included bringing Begin and Sadat to the United States where he kept them separate and played negotiator between them. Carter pushed hard for a full settlement freeze in the West Bank and Gaza, which was categorically refused. However, both parties had a strong interest in peace, and Israel was persuaded to evacuate the Sinai settlements and gave back the Sinai Peninsula in exchange for two airfields built by the United States, and Egypt gave full recognition and peace to Israel, making the country much more secure. Both sides in return received lavish funding for their militaries from the United States, which helped guarantee the agreement's long-term viability. The lack of American and Egyptian sustained commitment towards helping the Palestinians helped torpedo any substantive assistance for the inhabitants of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza. Sadat needed a peace treaty to gain American aid more than he needed to press the Israelis, and the lack of a domestic constituency for the Palestinians limited Carter's willingness to pressure Israel. The issue of the Palestinians was put on the backburner, as Carter's successor, Ronald Reagan, had little taste for grand Middle East initiatives. It would be President Reagan's Vice President and successor, George H.W. Bush, to once again jump start the peace process.^{6,7}

James Baker & George H.W. Bush: Skillful Diplomacy and America Triumphant

While President Reagan was not one to attempt Middle Eastern peace initiatives, with his quickly aborted 1982 initiative as the

⁵ Quandt, *Peace Process* 130-174

⁶ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 174-242

⁷ Ross, Dennis. *The Missing Peace*. (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, New York, 2004) 50

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only exception⁸, neither were President George H.W. Bush, nor his powerful Secretary of State, James Baker, at the beginning of their term in office. Both long time civil servants, James Baker and President Bush were careful stewards of American power during the tumultuous times before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. They were cautious and calculating, taking decisive steps only after careful preparation.

The Administration came into office associating itself with a more step-by-step approach to diplomacy and were suspicious of ambitious initiatives, lest they fail and leave the parties and the U.S. worse than they started. This approach was different than both Carter and Kissinger, as it neither supported secret high level diplomacy nor grand public initiatives. It was the policy of waiting until the time was right to move. Tentative steps were made to negotiate peace with Israel and its neighbors, including the PLO since 1988 with the help of Egypt, but these went nowhere. However, the subsequent Gulf War would give the United States a huge opportunity to negotiate Middle East Peace. The United States, after assembling a coalition of 38 nations and almost a million soldiers, kicked Iraqi forces out of Kuwait, weakening the cause of Arab nationalist radicals in the region. From this position of strength, the United States got approval from its Arab allies to attempt a peace conference between the Arab states and Israel. What became the Madrid Peace Conference was co-sponsored by the United States and the Soviet Union. The conference was less of a success in establishing peace as it was a precedent-setter for future negotiations. Israel under Yitzhak Shamir was reluctant in coming to the conference and the country was basically dragged to the negotiating table by the United States using the threat of cutting off loan guarantees.⁹ James Baker was known for his oftentimes brusque methods. In 1988 he blocked U.N. recognition of a

Palestinian state by threatening to cut off all U.N. funding, and once told the Israelis during heated negotiations that "the number of the white house is "1-202-456-1414, when you get serious about peace, call us"¹⁰. Despite this, Madrid was a huge success for the state of Israel, with dozens of countries extending recognition in its aftermath, and the taboo about negotiating with Israel in the Arab world was severely weakened. Additionally, for the Palestinians, it was an important step to the verification of the international legitimacy of the PLO as negotiators for the Palestinian people, and it led directly to the Oslo accords two years later.¹¹ Though Baker's efforts largely ended with his departure as Secretary of State to work on President Bush's re-election campaign, one of his ranking diplomats, Dennis Ross, would take point in carrying on his efforts in the subsequent Clinton administration.^{12 13}

Dennis Ross & Bill Clinton: Great Promise and Broken Dreams

Dennis Ross, though a lifelong Democrat, had nonetheless gotten his start in the White House in 1986 working for the Reagan administration, continuing on in a high level position under President Bush. Subsequently asked to stay on by the incoming Clinton administration, he was given the new position of special negotiator for Middle East peace. The efforts of his, Bill Clinton, and Secretaries of State Warren Christopher and Madeline Albright, would define the peace process for the next eight years, and their failures have haunted the peace process since. Clinton, working with the framework of the Bush-Baker team, displayed enthusiasm for the task of achieving Middle East peace, and his personal charisma and charm would play a key role in American efforts throughout the 90s. With a treaty with Egypt already concluded and a Jordanian-Israeli treaty well on the way with the help of American debt forgiveness and military aid, the Clinton Ad-

⁸ Kurtzer, Daniel et al, *The Peace Puzzle*. (Cornell University Press: Ithica, New York, 2013) 8

⁹ Kornblut, Anne. "The Bushes and the Jews" *Slate*. April 17th 2012.

¹⁰ Church, George. "Middle East: Call Us We Won't Call You" *Time*. June 25th 1990

¹¹ Kurtzer, *Peace Puzzle*, 21-58

¹² Quandt, *Peace Process* 292-323

¹³ Ross, *The Missing Peace*, 53-92

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ministration had two remaining treaties to conclude between Israel and its neighbors, that of between Israel and Syria, and Israel and the Palestinians. Though most today remember the 1990s in the context of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, Israeli-Syrian negotiations were initially nearly as prominent, if not more so, in the minds of U.S. and Israeli diplomats. As Israeli leaders believed they could only achieve one peace deal at a time, the Israeli government oscillated between the "Syrian Track" and the "Palestinian Track" throughout the 1990s, using the Syrians to pressure the Palestinians and vice versa, with the U.S. providing supervision and assistance along the way. This was a feature of Middle East negotiations throughout Clinton's tenure. Post-Madrid talks, which took place first under the Clinton Administration, started in Washington but were superseded by secret meetings held between the Israelis and Palestinians in Norway.

The Oslo Accords, the implementation and attempted conclusion of which would dominate the peace process until 2000, were concluded initially without much American help. Though the secret talks were technically monitored by the United States' Secretary of State Warren Christopher, the United States were skeptical of their validity, preferring its own Washington talks between non-PLO Palestinian negotiators, while keeping a greater focus on Syria. The Washington talks between the U.S., Israel, and the Palestinians were so weak and unfocused in the context of the U.S. election and its aftermath, that the Israelis and Palestinians felt compelled to negotiate themselves instead of working with America.¹⁴ When success was evident however, Yitzhak Rabin and Yassir Arafat were brought to the White House in order to bless and encourage the proceedings.¹⁵ Clinton additionally authorized 2 billion dollars in aid for the West Bank to help seal a deal.^{16 17}

After Oslo has been concluded in 1993, Rabin wanted to slow things down and try and improve on the Syrian track, which would define peace efforts until 1994. Like Ehud Barak later in the decade, Rabin wanted to focus on Syria as Israel saw Syria as a "real" threat, as opposed to the Palestinians. Warren Christopher made 20 trips to the Middle East in the early Clinton administration in order to try and conclude a Syria deal, but it wasn't in the offing.¹⁸ Tensions over the nature of withdrawal, water, and security guarantees in the form of warning systems and redeployments killed a deal.

The Israelis turned their attention back to the Palestinian track in 1994-95 with Oslo II, where despite terrorist attacks and tensions between the speed and size of the withdrawal versus security guarantees for the Israelis, zones A, B, and C, were established and the timeline for the final status negotiations were further clarified under the supervision of the Americans, and was ratified in Washington.¹⁹ Tragically, in the fall of 1995, Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by an anti-peace Jewish extremist. His successor, Shimon Peres, came into office determined to further the cause of peace, especially on the Syrian track in 1995 and 1996.

The United States hosted the Syrian and Israeli negotiators at Wye, attempting to broker a deal. Progress was being made, and the negotiators were close to a deal when a spate of terrorist bombings in Israel and a "tough" response by Peres that accidentally left many civilians dead in Lebanon completely scuttled a deal. Peres then lost the elections, and Benjamin Netanyahu of Likud became prime minister. Netanyahu had opposed Oslo, and the period of 1996-1999 was defined by painstaking negotiations to try and get Netanyahu to carry out the Oslo agreements without compromising either side.²⁰ Additionally, the United States moved from its previous role as a facilitator towards actually conducting negotiations to

¹⁴ Kurtzer, et al. *Peace Puzzle*. 41-46

¹⁵ Clinton, Bill. *My Life*. (New York: Vintage, 2005) 541-542

¹⁶ Ross. *Missing Peace*, 100-136

¹⁷ Quandt. *Peace Process*. 328

¹⁸ Quandt, *Peace Process*. 325

¹⁹ Clinton. *My Life*. 672

²⁰ Quandt. *Peace Process*. 342

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try and forge a peace agreement between the parties.²¹

Natanyahu's tenure in office from 1996 to 1999 saw progress on moving towards a final status agreement as stipulated in the Oslo Accords, but every step forward was accompanied by an action by Netanyahu to appease his right wing base, with subsequent terrorism by the Palestinians in response.²² The Hebron protocol of 1997 saw the transfer of most of Hebron to the Palestinian authority, and the 1998 Wye River memorandum featured further Israeli withdrawals from the Palestinian territories. The main goal of the American negotiators was to keep the implementation of Oslo rolling.²³ An additional issue was the release of Palestinian prisoners, which had to be fought hard for and won by Clinton and the United States. The United States strongly deepened its role at this time as a negotiator between the parties, with all of the frustrations and setbacks that entailed. Netanyahu was defeated in 1999, after his coalition fell apart during the implementation of the Wye River Memorandum.²⁴

His successor, Ehud Barak, came to power and quickly began efforts to bring both the Syrian and Palestinian tracks to conclusion. The United States first sponsored talks at Shephardstown, but Ehud Barak was seen by the Syrians and the United States as stalling and not making proper concessions in response to bold Syrian proposals.²⁵ The disputes revolved around the Sea of Galilee, and the parties and the United States had severe difficulty in coming to an agreement because of tensions resulting from the Israeli desire to control land on all sides of the Galilee. The Syrians gave substantive moves, but after the United States produced a negotiating document that featured borders beyond the 1967 line, the Syrians walked out, unwilling to get anything less than 100% of their territory back. The Syrians felt vulnerable even agreeing to negotiations, and the American produced docu-

ment heralded the failure of the talks. Importantly, Assad was also determined to do better than Sadat had gotten, and likely wouldn't have settled for anything less. Assad additionally did not trust Dennis Ross to be an impartial negotiator, and this distrust damaged the American effort.²⁶ Syrian-Israeli peace talks stalled out, and they have not been picked up in a significant way since.

Barak then moved back to the Israel-Palestine talks, where there was much more hope for a deal on all sides. The United States sponsored talks at Camp David, and negotiations, much like at the first Camp David in 1978, would take place through the Americans. The events of Camp David hardly need to be recounted in detail; however the basic series of events are that after a series of Israeli and American proposals to the Palestinians, the Israelis offered what Bill Clinton, Dennis Ross, CIA Director Tenant, and the rest of the Americans considered to be an excellent proposal.²⁷ After Arafat rejected the proposal, the Clinton administration blamed Arafat for the failure of the talks. Though the Israelis and Palestinians would try to start negotiations again at Taba in 2001, but the United States did not attend. The election of Ariel Sharon and the Second Intifada would completely scuttle a peace deal. Much has been written about Camp David and the negotiations of the 90s, but many of the American negotiators, looking back, see the United States as having been naive and not understanding of both Palestinian and Syrian needs during both negotiations.²⁸ Arafat did not trust Dennis Ross and saw him primarily as a shill for the Israeli position. Though Clinton still holds the responsibility of failure on Arafat, the end of negotiations was not simply Palestinian rejectionism. The talks floundered on Jerusalem, but, the United States had not sponsored any negotiations about it nor prepared for the issue

²¹ Ross. *Missing Peace*. 266

²² Ross. *Missing Peace*. 266

²³ Clinton. *My Life*. 753

²⁴ Ross. *Missing Peace*. 338-357

²⁵ Ross. *Missing Peace*. 565-585

²⁶ Kurtzer, et al. *Peace Puzzle*. 82-103

²⁷ Clinton. *My Life*. 911-924, 936-938, 943-949

²⁸ Miller, Aaron David. "Wooing the Gods of the Peace Process". *Foreign Policy*. December 20th, 2010.

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in a serious way.²⁹ Additionally, many believe that the United States did not push the Israelis hard enough, and that the tensions between America's role as honest broker and Israeli ally were not properly managed. As well, the blaming of Arafat for the failure of the event killed the prospects for further progress on the issue, and may have pushed Arafat to violence.³⁰ In any case, with the elections of Ariel Sharon in Israel, George W. Bush in the United States, and the Second Intifada breaking out in Palestine with Arafat's support, the peace process completely collapsed. For the next eight years, American initiatives would be at the prerogative of a man who, seeing President Clinton's failure, would be much less ambitious in promoting the cause of Arab-Israeli peace.

George W. Bush: The Freedom Agenda is put into practice

In the last 50 years of American peacemaking, there has hardly been an administration less willing to take on the task of Middle East peace than the first administration of President George W. Bush. With a violent intifada raging and Clinton's failures still fresh in his mind, President Bush had little taste for taking on the task of Middle East peace. After 9/11, this feeling only intensified, as the United States relegated the peace process to second tier status under Iraq, Afghanistan, and the rest of the Global War on Terror. President Bush saw the extensive negotiations of the 90s with al-Asad in Syria and Arafat in the Palestinian Territories as legitimizing dictators, and in his mind these men had no place in the new Middle East he intended to create. President Bush did, however, become the first U.S. President to openly embrace the idea of a Palestinian state, and he offered strong support to Palestinian aspirations. However, he completely refused to negotiate with Arafat, and never met with him while in office.³¹ The United States barely restrained Israel in responding to the Inti-

fada, only objecting to threatening the life of Arafat himself. He did, however, under pressure from Tony Blair and the Saudis in 2003, and wanting to provide cover for his coalition building for the Iraq War, use the new Middle East Quartet to propose the "Road Map to Peace". It called for security and reform from the Palestinians, and freezing settlements and a withdrawal from the Israelis.³² The Palestinians and Israelis both accepted, but the U.S. did not strongly follow up on this in order to create a real chance for peace, which has been a theme throughout the Bush and first Obama administrations. There was one good outcome from the Road Map though, which was the creation of the Prime Minister's position. Filled by Abu Mazen/Mahmoud Abbas, this position somewhat limited Arafat's power and helped accelerate police and other reform in the Palestinian territories.³³ The second term of President Bush would feature a new, albeit still unfocused, effort to finding a solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.³⁴

After the 2004 elections, Bush reshuffled his cabinet in a way that would benefit the cause of Middle East peace. Condoleezza Rice would become Secretary of State, Robert Gates as Secretary of Defense, with Stephen Hadley as National Security Advisor, with Secretary Rice being especially committed to peace. Though Arafat died in 2004 and the intifada ended the following year, fulfilling a U.S. precondition for jumping back into the peace process, initiative was not taken when power moved from Arafat to the moderate Abbas. The Palestinian elections of 2006, which Bush and Abbas allowed to go forward out of a combination of ideology and hubris, ended in a resounding victory for Hamas. Shocked, the United States cut off all aid to the PA in an effort to undermine the new Hamas government. After the 2007 conflict in Gaza and the separation of Hamas into Gaza and Fatah in the West Bank, the United States resumed aid flows to the PA in the West Bank. Around this time, due to American

²⁹ Kurtzer, et al. *Peace Puzzle*, 136

³⁰ Kurtzer, et al. *Peace Puzzle*, 153

³¹ Abrams, Elliot. "Tested By Zion" (New York: Cambridge Univesrity Press. 2013) 1-4

³² Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, 33, 52

³³ Abrams, *Tested by Zion* 38, 62

³⁴ Kurtzer, et al. *Peace Puzzle*. 155-186

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inaction, the Israelis asked Turkey to mediate talks between Israel and Syria, though these talks did not lead anywhere. The United States did however in 2007-2008 sponsor the Annapolis peace conference, to finally try and move on the peace process after 7 years of deterioration. The United States hosted the parties at Annapolis, additionally managing to achieve the attendance of sixteen other Arab nations, to line up regional support behind the event. The Americans were careful not to build up the event like Madrid or Geneva, wanting the proceedings to be relatively low key and to not raise expectations. Olmert offered parts of East Jerusalem and land swaps equal to 100% of the West Bank and Gaza, but, Abbas, cautious by nature and suspicious of Olmert's ability to follow through on his promises given his political weakness, turned him down. The subsequent Gaza War of 2008-2009 would fully kill this process. With the Bush administration coming to a close, the incoming Obama administration would chose not to further pursue the progress made at Annapolis. The Bush administration through both terms was largely unmotivated, and only decided to get into the game much too late. Though they made progress near the end, it was squandered by the Obama administration. Whilst the Obama administration would come into office with high hopes, this initial motivation would translate poorly into action.³⁵

Barack Obama: Hope and Change lead to Failure and the Status Quo

President Obama came into his first term of office with high hopes of pursuing Middle East peace, much like Presidents Clinton and Carter. Coming into office with an intense determination and the hope of many behind him, Obama and his supporters around the world hoped he could sponsor a breakthrough in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, similarly to President Bush, other priorities, lackluster execution, and a lack of commitment would damage his chances of achieving substantive developments in the peace process. He focused first on "confidence building measures" that

would help bring both sides to the table. However, with the Israelis unwilling to impart a settlement freeze without Palestinian reciprocity, which was refused on the grounds of the illegality of the settlements, the confidence building measures bogged down. And when Netanyahu did agree to a partial settlement freeze, it failed to lead to anything substantive, strengthening Netanyahu's position. Obama furthermore did not press on settlements in a way that was strong enough to make a difference, despite criticizing them heavily, which weakened the U.S. on the issue. Failing to use either the Arab Peace Initiative or the progress made at Annapolis, the Obama administration was stuck and ineffective. Additionally, Obama was spending a great deal of time and political capital on his domestic priorities, as well as on Iraq and Afghanistan. He was unable to sustain a concerted peace effort that would have required great expenditure of both domestic and foreign political capital to complete. Syrian negotiations stalled out almost immediately, and were completely killed by the eruption of civil war. Netanyahu, during Obama's first term, did accept the idea of a two-state solution openly for the first time; however, talks did not progress for the rest of Obama's first term.³⁶

John Kerry: The Last Hope for Peace?

This brings us to the most recent visit of Secretary John Kerry. Representing for the first time in the last 13 years that a concerted, dedicated effort has been made by the United States, this may be the last great hope for Israeli-Palestinian peace. Kerry has taken bits and pieces of many of the American negotiators of the last 50 years. Kerry has chosen secretive Kissingerian shuttle diplomacy over open Carter or Clinton style public initiatives. Kerry, like Clinton during negotiations during the 90s, achieved the release of 104 Palestinian prisoners, in order to build confidence in the negotiations. Similar to many previous Secretaries, Kerry has sponsored 4 billion dollars in economic development to the Palestinian Authority in order to incentivize

³⁵ Kurtzer, et al. *Peace Puzzle*. 186-238

³⁶ Kurtzer, et al. *Peace Puzzle*. 241-267

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their involvement in the peace process. However, unlike the extremely successful James Baker, Kerry has not taken a hard line on settlements, nor has he been willing to use American aid in exacting leverage over the Israelis. And he, like many unsuccessful negotiators before him, has chosen not to talk about Jerusalem or 1967 in a significant way before the negotiations, raising the risk of an extremely high profile failure. Jerusalem was the city upon which the Clinton talks broke, and no American president or secretary has quite come up with a satisfying answer to the problem.

Kerry and Obama have invited the parties to Washington, a classic in the Washington peace process playbook. To succeed, Kerry will have to avoid the failures of both President Bush, and Obama himself in his first term. Sustained and painful negotiations will be required. Kerry has played many of his initiatives close to the chest, but we can only hope that he has something brilliant in mind, because the stakes could not be higher. Until now there has not been a more helpful Palestinian partner for Israel than the current government in the West Bank. The ability of Hamas and Hezbollah to spoil negotiations through terrorism has been curtailed for the former by the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and for the latter via its involvement in the Syrian civil war. Additionally, the Gulf States have retooled the Arab Peace Initiative for greater flexibility and added their own pressure in order to help bring about a peace settlement. Palestinian moderates have seldom been stronger, the terrorists have seldom been weaker, and regional support has rarely been so helpful in attempting to forge a peace deal. At the time of writing, Secretary Kerry has pledged the parties to seek a final deal in the next 9 months, with the negotiations being kept confidential. This is critical because leaks undermined negotiations, especially on the Syrian track, during the 90s.³⁷ The United States has been essential in negotiating Middle East peace agreements for the last 50 years, and if the United States does not succeed now, the consequences will be dire as the

possibility of a two-state solution is foreclosed and the specter of violence rises again. The further expansion of settlements, especially geographically isolated, high population settlements threaten to permanently kill any chance of a two-state solution, which in turn could undermine even existing treaties with Egypt and Jordan. Both Israeli and Palestinian youth are much more skeptical about the peace process than their elders. Young Israelis and Palestinians are both spoiling for a fight, and it will be up to their elders, with the critical help of the United States, to prevent disaster.

³⁷ Kurtzer, et al. *Peace Puzzle*. 93