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## Effect of Donald Trump Foreign Policy Toward The Muslim World: The Israeli-Palestinian Issues

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**Abstract:** The current President of the United States Donald Trump represents a new dimension of US foreign policy after eight years of the Obama administration that sought equal partners around the globe. Prior to his emergence as a Republican Party nominee, little was known about Trump in the Muslim and Arab world as an anti-Islamic figure. His nomination exposed his stand as an enemy to Muslims, with suggestions that his first priority as President will be to attack Arabs and Muslims. His victory has resulted in massive political implications for Arab and Muslim societies. Besides, Trump has been widely criticised locally and internationally for discrimination and bias against religion and invulnerable people on most of his foreign policy. Despite Trump's open approval from Arab leaders for his willingness to fight ISIL, the issue of Israel and Palestine remain a public criticism. If Trump determines to fight terrorists and enjoy Arab leaders' support, will the Muslim society then turn their backs to Palestine issues? Although, Trump represents a series of contradictions that make Middle Eastern politics seem more complicated, his close relations with Israel can result in finding an unexpected solution to the Israel and Palestine crises. The paper deliberates on the Trump policy toward Israel and Palestine and its propensity to reach a long-awaited solution. The research is analytical in nature; it will heavily rely on materials on US foreign policy toward Arabs and Muslims and Israel and Palestine from scholarly works, expert opinions and other reliable sources to reach a credible conclusion.

**Key words:** Foreign • Policy • U.S • Discrimination • Muslim • Israel • Palestine

### INTRODUCTION

The Israel-Palestine crisis emerged in the 1880s with the increase in the immigration of European Jews to Palestine. The Jewish communities in Palestine at that time through the acquisition of land from the Ottomans and individual Arab landholders were known as effendis, established Jewish agricultural settlements. At the time, Arabs lived in an almost feudal existence on the effendis' land. The population of Palestine in 1882–3 was about 468,000, consisting of 408,000 Muslims, 44,000 Christians and 15,000 Jews. During World War I, the number had increased to 602,000 Muslims, 81,000 Christians and 39,000 Jews, plus a similar but uncertain number of Jews who were not Ottoman citizens. The first Statistician General of Israel, Roberto Bachi, gives similar numbers except for a lower count (525,000) of Muslims in 1914 [1]. According to the Balfour Declaration of 1917, the government of Great Britain supported the establishment

of a Jewish national home in Palestine. This exacerbated tensions between the Arabs living in Mandate Palestine and the Jews who emigrated there during the Ottoman period. Another Agreement was signed in January 1919 known as the Faisal–Weizmann Agreement; it promoted Arab-Jewish cooperation on the development of a Jewish national homeland in Palestine and an Arab nation in a large part of the Middle East.

The British were in a situation that could neither resolve nor extricate themselves. There was increasingly fierce Arab resistance and attacks against the Jewish population. The British-appointed Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, led the opposition to the idea of turning part of Palestine into a Jewish state. The 1948 Arab-Israeli War (1948–49), known as the War of Independence by Israelis and al-Nakba (the Catastrophe) by Palestinians, began after the UN Partition Plan and the subsequent 1947–48 Civil War in Mandatory Palestine in November 1947. The plan proposed the establishment of

Arab and Jewish states in Palestine. The Arabs rejected the plan while the Jews accepted it. For four months, under continuous Arab provocation and attack, the Yishuv were usually on the defensive while occasionally retaliating. By March 1948, the United States was actively seeking a temporary UN approved trusteeship rather than immediate partition, known as the Truman trusteeship proposal. However, the Jewish leadership rejected it. As a result, both Jewish and Arab militias commenced campaigns to control territory inside and outside the designated borders and an open war between the two populations emerged [2].

Since then, Israel continues to occupy Palestinian land with tension rife on both sides. Due to the US position on Israel, it seems impossible to mediate fairly between the parties meaning the crisis cannot be resolved. Also, Arab and Muslim leaders are unfit to resolve the issue due to their various stands and disunity. For instance, the last five years has seen the greatest geopolitical change in the Arab world for a century. Iraq, Yemen and Syria are no longer territorially coherent functioning states, with the civil war in the latter a stain on humanity. Egypt has had a revolution, democracy, theocracy and a coup, while the West's nearly 40 year-long cold war with Iran has begun to thaw, just as the whole region is engulfed in a Sunni-Shia/Saudi-Iranian proxy war. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict on which the rest of the region used to swing has been strangely static. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu heads a right-wing coalition with no real interest in pursuing a two-state solution, while President Mahmoud Abbas oversees a fractured and corrupt Palestinian Authority with no ability to deliver a deal, nor even to visit Gaza, where Hamas' continued administration prevails. Just as history is being written and re-written all around them, Israelis and Palestinians remain submerged in a decade-long status quo of creeping settlement growth and sporadic violence.

Looking at US attitudes toward the Arab and Israel-Palestine conflict, the UN list of vetoed draft resolutions shows that up until the end of 2012, the Arab world has been the target of 36% of such vetoes. The United States alone is responsible for a whopping 58% of those vetoes cast, almost all in support of Israel. Russia comes a distant second at 26%. Overall, this means that just two countries account for 84% of draft resolution vetoes in the history of the Security Council in relation to Arab issues. This indicates the position of US toward Israel-Palestine crisis [3]. Referencing the account of US using the veto to block resolutions on Palestine's right to occupied land indicates that the US' chance of offering any significant

role in resolving the issue is unthinkable. However, a surprise is possible. In other words, a friend of your enemy can resolve your differences with your enemy, or at least mediate to manage your relations.

#### **Historical Background of Arab-Israel Crises:**

Historically, the ancient Jews from Biblical times called their land Israel, Canaan, Judea, Samaria, Galilee, while the modern Jews and few Christians believed that in the days of the Bible and the Torah, God bestowed the land to the ancient Jews led by men such as Abraham, Moses, David and others. According to the Jews, about 2,000 years ago, the Roman Empire ruled this area and in suppressing several Jewish rebellions, the Romans destroyed the Jewish temple in the city of Jerusalem, killed large numbers of Jews and forced many others to leave their homeland in an exodus called The Diaspora. Some Jews remained in the area, but large numbers of Jews did not return until the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century, especially after World War Two and the Holocaust [4].

The trouble began when the Jews calling themselves Israelis after their old name sought to make a homeland for the Arab population of the area who came to be known as Palestinians, after the old Roman and the Greek name for the area. In the two thousand years after most of the Jewish population was killed off by the Romans or forced to leave, Arabic-speaking Muslims became the dominant ethnic group. The Ottoman Empire ruled Palestine for several centuries. In the year 1900, the population of Palestine was 600,000, of which 94% were Arabs. Several Arab inhabitants sold their land to the incoming Jews, while other Palestinian Arabs were worried about becoming a minority in a country they considered their own. In 1948, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the British left and the Jews in Palestine declared the independence of the new State of Israel [5]. The neighbouring Arab nations of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Transjordan (Now Jordan), Syria, Lebanon and Iraq invaded Israel to aid the Palestinian Arabs who were fighting to create their own nation. The Arabs lost that war and the Palestinians migrated with thousands of Arabs fleeing the new nation of Israel and moving to neighbouring Arab nations such as Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt to live as refugees.

This loss and the exile of these Palestinians is known in the Arabic world as al-Nakba or The Cataclysm. The ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is both simple and complex to understand. The conflict is a basic idea that both sides believe the territory belongs to them. The belief is deeper still, for both sides believe

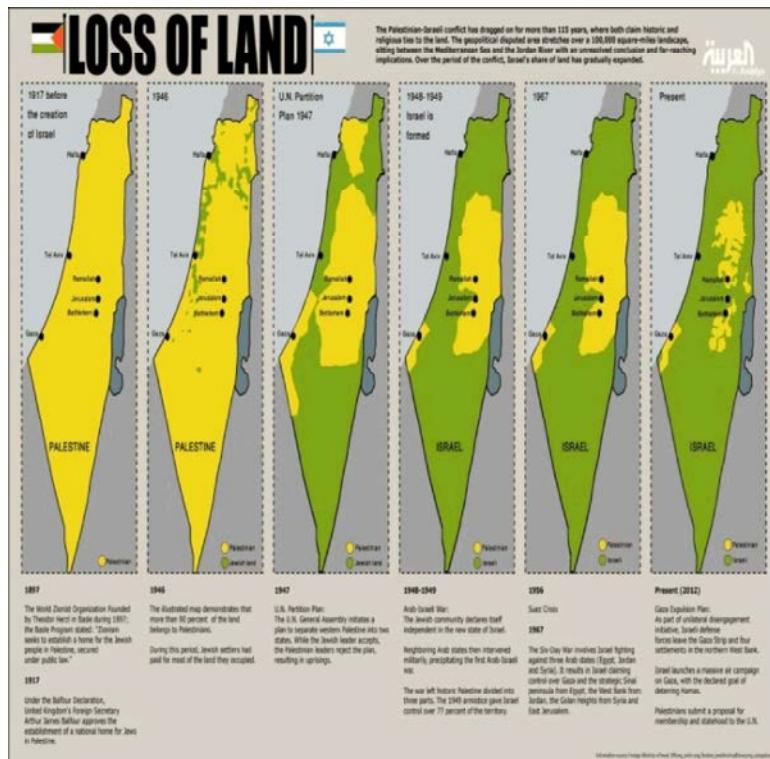


Fig. 1: Ethnic Cleansing Of Palestine: The Map 1897 -2012

that God (called Jehovah by the Jews and Allah by the Muslims) gave them the land and that to give it away or to give it up to another people is an insult to God and a sin.

As a result, the above Figure 1 shows how the claimed Palestinian land had been occupied by Israel since 1897 till 2012. The two parties have been fighting since 1948 which has deepened and enmity between them. The Muslim world is hardly able to play an arbitrator's role since they lost the opportunity to uphold the power and unity in their region. Even the Arab League and the OIC did not have clear plans nor the intention to solve the crisis due to their differences. This has left Washington, since the Second World War, playing an active role in most of the issues pertaining to the Arab and the Muslim world [4].

Two significant parts of the old Palestine did not become part of the new Israel, namely a small, crowded coastal area around the city of Gaza, later known as the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, a section of the old Palestine on the West side, or bank of the Jordan River. After the war ended in 1949, Egypt took over the Gaza Strip, while Jordan took control of the West Bank. In the 1950s and 1960s, Palestinians conducted cross-border raids into Israel, often with the aid of Egypt, Jordan and

Syria. These attacks prompted Israeli military reactions and the entire border area, especially around Gaza and the West Bank, was often the scene of violent warfare. The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians reached a new level of intensity and complexity on December 31, 1964, with the first al-Fatah raid into Israel from Lebanon after it joined the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in June 1964. Al-Fatah became the Palestinian political and military group formed in the late 1950s with the aim of retaking Palestinian land from Israel. As at present, the land is occupied by Israel and the world body is powerless to find any solution for a two states solution. While high expectation is placed on the US as a potential mediator between the two parties.

**US Policy Toward the Arab and Muslim World Prior to the Trump Administration:** President Andrew Jackson established formal ties with the Sultan of Muscat and Oman in 1833. The Sultan saw the US as a potential balance to Britain's overwhelming regional influence. Commercial relations opened between the US and Persia in 1857, after Britain persuaded the Persian government not to ratify a similar agreement in 1851 [6]. Saudi Arabia and many other Arab countries exported crude oil to the US and imported various goods and services from the US.

Hence, the level of investment and types of economic content of each Arab nation involved with America is different to other Muslim countries as the US foreign policy has various economic goods and services, political, social or military defence systems, etc. For instance, oil exploration is a unique source of imports that facilitates foreign reserve and economic prospects for most Arab states toward the US while military hardware represents the major terms of trade by the USA toward the Arab nations.

Beaver *et al.* [7], Posited that the US has both real and perceived interests in the Middle East. These include economic, political and military concerns that are vital to its interests. The most blatant tangible interest is oil. Pure and simply oil is beyond plentiful in the region. Underneath the desert sands of Iraq, Kuwait, Iran, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and much more lies the largest concentration of oil. Hence, Persian Gulf states in the 1960s and 1970s worked to ensure Western access to Gulf oil.

According to Khan Muqtadar [8], the government has now reoriented its foreign policy approach, from one that was essentially geo-economic to one that is quintessentially geopolitical. Under President Clinton, the United States focused primarily on advancing the so-called Washington consensus (World Bank, IMF and the White House) on globalisation and tried its best to make the global economy a reality. Israel has allied with the United States from its inception and benefited the most from this union [7]. After the cold war, US foreign policy was finding an effective way to check Soviet expansion and influence throughout the world. In the Middle East, this meant preventing the Soviets from filling the void left by the end of British and French colonialism and secondly to maintain and strengthen access to facilities and resources in the Middle East [7].

However, a series of issues arose in the West regarding Islamic ideologies such as the belief in carrying out Jihad against perceived enemies of Islam if the freedom of practising Islam is threatened such as the mode of dressing of the Muslims, calling people to prayer, and wearing the Hijab and veil. These issues have become a basis of concern and conflict and represent a turning point in the American-Arab/Muslim relations. In addition, the re-emergence of Islam as a vital socio-political and cultural force and dynamic and its domestic and international role and impact in ex-Soviet Central Asia as apart of the Islamic world has attracted the US policymakers' attention [9]. In Tajikistan, for instance, the US has allied with old-line Communist Party leaders as a

means of countering the growth of Islamic movements. In effect, to keep these states away from the political Islam, the US policy has discouraged them from adopting the Iranian model of the Islamic regime and has led them toward the Turkish secular model [9].

According to Fawcett (2005) [10], there was a limited relationship between the US and the Arab League prior to the Second World War while Morocco was the first country to officially recognise the US. He noted that European powers such as Britain and France managed to colonise almost the entire Arab world after defeating the Ottoman Empire in 1918. However, the United States was popular and respected throughout the region. In the same vein, Ezell (2008) posits that over the last decade, carelessness has resulted in many US foreign policy and intelligence setbacks, indicating the need for a new approach.

"Before 11 September, the United States had a segmented policy toward the Muslim world. The fact that Indonesia and Malaysia are predominantly Muslim nations was irrelevant to U.S. policy in the region. Indonesia was a major military ally and an important cog in the potential coalition against China, as well as the guardian of trading lanes in the Far East. On the other hand, Malaysia was important to the United States as a trading partner. However, now both the Muslim Malay nations are seen as potential havens for anti-U.S. terrorists and are important stops on the anti-terrorism trail" [8].

**Trump Foreign Policy Directions and International Relations Theories:** Trump never spelt out his foreign policy agenda. In the pre-election phase, his ramblings on the topic ranged from isolationism and trade protectionism to the possibility of all-out war with China, the Islamic and Arab world, North Korea and Iranian nuclear deals. Having been elected as the 45<sup>th</sup> President, the question is, how many of America's current foreign policies can he actually change and to what extent? A response to his method invites realism and constructivism theories. To realists, Trump would not be able to change much in US foreign policy, because relations among states are determined and influenced by structural issues beyond the control of any individual or even groups of individuals. Hence, national interests are paramount to the foreign policy and national interests are influenced by global power constellations in the international system. Realists will contend that anarchy marks the system and states must do whatever they can to ensure their survival, which usually means accumulating more power. Since the

US is already the most powerful player in the system, it will have to continue to exhibit the kinds of foreign policies that allow it to maintain the status quo and its pre-eminent position in global affairs. That is, application of both soft and hard power that results in smart power in the country's foreign policy will stay more or less the same [11]. First, realists believe that Trump's policy will serve US national interests and international power to remain actively engaged globally, interfering in others' affairs to shape the global environment to its advantage. Secondly, the fact that the US is no longer competitive at producing certain kinds of goods and raising import tariffs will harm its economy in the short-term more than it will benefit it in the long-term. Furthermore, because it is unclear how and highly unlikely that, provoking an open military (or even trade) conflict with China will help boost US power and dominance globally.

Constructivists, on the other hand, will argue that Trump will change quite a lot in US foreign policy history. The argument is based on the fact that individuals and ideas do matter and help shape and influence foreign policy. Trump's very existence as the US President will have important implications on the global affairs. Constructivists would contend that concepts like anarchy and power are what we make of them, a result of why a nuclear North Korea represents a threat to US policymakers, while the nuclear UK or Israel does not. Since national interests are at the end determined and framed by individuals representing states, therefore, America's foreign policy might change significantly [11].

On the other hand, a constructivist will take Trump's musings on US isolationism, protectionism and conflict with China very seriously. In short, those who believed that Trump's presidency would hope that constructivists are right and Trump will change everything he promised. Those who are against Trump's presidency will hope that realists are right and Trump would not be able to change much. Either way, Donald Trump's foreign policy will offer important insights into the value of international relations theory in understanding and predict global politics in the future.

**Trump Foreign Policy Toward the Arab and Muslim World:** The present US President has expressed enmity against Islam and possibly the entire Muslim world. In his first week in office, Donald Trump signed an executive order halting all refugee admissions and temporarily barring people from seven Muslim-majority countries, namely Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somali, Sudan Syria and Yemen. The policy of the present US government led by President

Trump is a new phenomenon and serious security concern against international relations between the Arab/Muslim countries and the United States of America [12].

Donald Trump's foreign policy has been an issue of observation by various scholars of history and politics as his recent political decision-makings taunted the Muslim world and the Arabs with discrimination and hate. On the other hand, it has created setbacks for the lack of continuity with his predecessor on several global issues from environmental issues to a trade agreement, security and relation with major powers such as China, Russia and European allies.

During his presidential campaign, he had successfully spoken the language many American youths like to hear regarding the effort and promises to regain the power of self-dependence regarding work sufficiency and making America great again. He was able to gain the upper hand in the ordinary electorates and super delegate electorates across the US. In pursuance of fulfilling the campaign promises, President Trump signed an executive order halting refugees from seven Muslim countries and temporarily barring people from seven Muslim-majority countries. The details of the Trump's executive order stated thus:

- It brings in a suspension of the US Refugee Admissions Programme for 120 days
- There is also an indefinite ban on Syrian refugees
- Anyone arriving from seven Muslim-majority countries - Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen - faces a 90-day visa suspension
- Some visa categories, such as diplomats and the UN, are not included in the suspension.
- The order also introduces a cap of 50,000 refugees to be accepted in 2017, against a limit of 110,000 set by former President Barack Obama
- Priority will be given to religious minorities facing persecution in their countries. In an interview, Mr Trump singled out Christians in Syria
- Exceptions could be made on a case-by-case basis [12].

President Trump has shown a clear departure from the previous American foreign policy toward the Muslims and the Arabs, a move that is likely to cause the US a deepening reduction in the small and medium enterprises who are the prominent employers of labour and labour reduction for most mega-companies who have workers from these various nations under the barring policy of his administration. Google announced that it would lose 197

workers as a result of the temporary bar on nationals from the countries under immigration restriction of the executive order. OECD notes that SMEs makeup over 95% of enterprises and account for 60 to 70% of jobs in most OECD countries (OECD). Therefore, Trump's policy may have serious negative impact on the survival of the economy of the United States if many of the SMEs workers are barred from entering the country. It may also see a reduction in foreign investment in the US if the ban continues unchecked [13].

**Trump's Chance for a Peaceful Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Crises:** In the post-Ottoman era, Muslim communities became weak due to colonialism and the formation of nation-states. As a result, the common term Ummah or Islamic Empire has disappeared. The first significant event that followed was the oil crisis of 1973, followed by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian revolution in 1979. Apart from the Israel-Palestine issue that has been going on for decades, no significant event occurred until the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 and a series of other attacks that followed in various parts of the world under the context of Islamic terrorism. Such attacks painted the Arab and Islamic world in a negative light the eyes of the rest of the world, most importantly the United States and her alliances in Europe. As a consequence, almost every nation passed a terrorist act in their domestic law to suit the Global War on Terrorism. The second phase can be traced to the event of the 2010 Arab awakening, starting from Tunisia via Libya, Egypt and Yemen that had ideological repercussions in Syria. The Arab and Muslim world are occupied with several violent crises and instability starting from Syria, Iraq and Yemen, to that of India-Pakistan, Israel-Palestine, ISIS, ISIL and Iranian Nuclear issue. All these issues directly affect the Muslim world, but the Syrian crisis has also affected major global players. The third phase of this challenge is the emergence of Donald Trump as the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States.

The 2010 Arab awakening resulted in massive loss of human life, migration of people and widespread suffering. It is estimated that over 300,000 people have been killed in Syria alone since the conflict began with anti-government protests in 2011. Cities like Damascus, Homs, Hamas and Aleppo have become the debris of destruction in West Asia. Assad's old friends Iran, the Shia group Hezbollah of Lebanon and Russia support the Assad regime while Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar support the opposition. The US is also involved in the Syrian crisis, but it has its

agenda, which is still not visible for the pro-Assad and anti-Assad camp. One may further suggest that the US restraint in the Syrian conflicts was also a fear of US-Russia coalition in the conflict [4].

The Arab and the larger Muslim world witnessed the US interventions that can be traced back to the Second World War. Pakistan is unstable, the proxy war with India goes on and there is internal rift with the FATA region, while the relationship between Afghanistan and Iran is another issue. Regarding the Israel-Palestine crises, the Carter and Clinton administrations failed in their efforts. The Obama administration made some progress, especially during his first tenure, while a series of events has led to a deadlock.

For the past few years, peace talks between Israel and Palestine for a two states solution have not been encouraging as each party occasionally carries out military strikes against the other. These intimidations have stalled a sustainable peace agreement. On several occasions, the US has shown its support for the existence of Israel as a state through economic, diplomatic and military support. Besides, Israel has always been identified as a powerful lobbyist in the American Congress. This is one of the greatest influences that win American government support for the state of Israel.

The emergence of Donald Trump as the new US President has critically questioned the future of peace negotiations between the two parties. Trump may have welcomed the Arab-Israel crises and his affirmation that there is no alternative to peace between the two parties. Although Netanyahu, with broad support within his coalition government, rejects peace, to avoid a direct clash with Netanyahu, Trump avoids rejecting Israel policy. He promised to support a one-state or a two-state solution, whichever was agreed to by both Israelis and Palestinians. By this simple statement, the White House excluded the option of managing the conflict, while transforming the one-state solution some arrangement by which Palestinians and Israelis can participate equally to rule themselves within one political arena from a nightmare or utopian vision into a framework that is no less imaginable and no less deserving of consideration, than a framework featuring two separate arenas.

The Israel Prime Minister is the first leader to visit Donald Trump in the aftermath of his swearing as the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. In his press conference with the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, he said that the two-state solution used to be the easier route to peace between Israelis and Palestinians and that it is up to Israelis and Palestinians to decide whether they want

to live in peace in two states or one [14]. Upon his 50 days in office, Donald Trump has extended an invitation to the Palestinian Authority, President Mahmoud Abbas to visit the White House. The invitation came during the first conversation between the two leaders since Trump entered the office. For instance, Al Jazeera [15] notes that while Trump's talk of a ban on Muslim into the US has undoubtedly angered Muslims, could his promise of neutrality on Israeli-Arab relations be enough to off-set this ban? However, to Arab-Muslim Americans who have never experienced the US that seemed fair or balanced in its dealings with Israel, it could help to ameliorate some of that anger. Israel-US relations under the eight years of the Obama administration was regarded as cold and even arctic due to lack of tangible solution to Israel-Palestine crisis [14].

The enraged situation manifested when the White House did not veto the UN resolution condemning Israel's settlement activities. The visit of Israeli Prime Minister and his statement that tomorrow's world will be different is a clear indication of a future change in the political prospects of Israel toward both America and the Palestine [16].

The action is aimed at fulfilling the promise made in the election campaign when it is well known that both Israel and Palestine contested for Jerusalem as their capital. This move would have a great impact on American foreign relations with the Muslim and Arab world. It shows that the American foreign policy with the Muslim world from previous US administrations will see diversification under the Trump regime irrespective of the warning from many political observers. Trump insisted that any Israeli-Palestinian agreement is through direct negotiations, according to the White House. The President emphasised his personal belief that peace is possible and that the time has come to make a deal. The President noted that such a deal would not only give Israelis and Palestinians the peace and security they deserve but that it would reverberate positively throughout the region and the world. The President noted that the United States could not impose a solution on the Israelis and Palestinians, nor can one side impose an agreement on the other. Trump only called Abbas after his 50<sup>th</sup> day in office, while he has spoken with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on the phone at least twice during that time. Netanyahu visited the White House in mid-February. Trump caused concern among Palestinians during Netanyahu's visit, when he appeared open to a one-state solution, in opposition to decades of US foreign policy:

*"I'm looking at two-state and one-state and I like the one that both parties like" Trump said during a joint press conference with Netanyahu. "I'm very happy with the one that both parties like. I can live with either one".*

Palestine's official position calls for the establishment of an independent state within the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, but rampant Israeli settlement expansion has virtually rendered this dream unviable. Although, "Abbas stressed the commitment to peace as a strategic choice to establish a Palestinian State alongside the state of Israel," Abu Rdainah said the Palestinian leader was "convinced that President Trump is serious about achieving peace and is looking for a deal to achieve long-awaited peace". However, it remains a question as to whether President Trump can make peace between Israel and Palestine and how?

It has to be recalled that during the Obama administration, the last peace effort to reconcile the Israelis and Palestinians, brokered by then-Secretary of State John Kerry, collapsed in April 2014 [17]. Although Trump said during the presidential campaign that he did not see settlements as an impediment to peace when he met with Netanyahu, he asked the Israelis to "hold back on settlements for a little bit," a position that surprised the Prime Minister [18].

"Both sides will have to make compromises," Trump said. Israelis will have to show some flexibility and signal they want to make a deal, while Palestinians have to give up some of the hate they've been taught from a very young age. Although Palestinians support Trump's request on Israeli settlements, his remarks about a potential one-state solution are not the only sticking point between them and the new US administration. Moving the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem is another confusing policy. Friedman's nomination was approved by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and moves to the full Senate for confirmation. He has said he plans to work at least some of the time in Jerusalem. Israel declared Jerusalem as its capital in 1950, although it is not formally recognised as such by the international community, which maintains foreign embassies in Tel Aviv.

## CONCLUSION

US President Donald Trump invited Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to the White House after the two leaders spoke by phone for the first time since Trump took office. President Trump's official invitation to

President Abbas to visit the White House aimed at discussing ways to resume the political process, stressing his commitment to a peace process that will lead to a real peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Although, Palestinians are concerned at the more favourable approach shown by Washington toward Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu since Trump came to power such as; Netanyahu and Trump have spoken on the phone at least twice since his inauguration and Netanyahu became the first leader to visit Washington in February 2017. Palestinian officials indicated Abbas would emphasise his concern about Israeli settlement-building on occupied land and the need for a two-state solution to the conflict. President Abbas stressed the commitment to peace as a strategic choice to establish a Palestinian State alongside the state of Israel (The official Palestinian WAFA news agency, 2017).

During a media conference after meeting, Trump was ambivalent about a two-state solution, the mainstay of US policy in the region for the past two decades. He stated that he is looking at two-state and one-state and he will be satisfied with any of the two. The White House has since been more cautious on the issue and there has been less talk of moving the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, a promise Trump made during the campaign but a move that would provoke anger across the Muslim world. David Friedman, Trump's nominee for ambassador to Israel, who was approved by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has said he wants to see the embassy move to Jerusalem and expects to work from the city at least some of the time. While one of the first calls to a foreign leader made by Trump's predecessor Barack Obama was to Abbas, Trump has been cautious in his contacts with the Arab world. He has spoken to Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi and met Jordan's King Abdullah, who took the initiative and flew to Washington for an impromptu visit. One of the most heated issues between Israel and the Palestinians is Israel's building of settlements in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, territory the Palestinians want for their own state along with Gaza.

Immediately after Trump's inauguration, Israel announced plans to build at least 6,000 more settler homes, a substantial increase and an indication that Israel took Trump's softer language as a green light. Although during Netanyahu's visit, Trump advised the Israeli Prime Minister to hold back on settlements for a little bit. Israeli and American officials are now discussing what the parameters are on settlements. However, according to

Palestine officers, although Trump may have underscored that such a peace agreement must be negotiated directly between the two parties and that the United States will work closely with Palestinian and Israeli leadership to make progress toward that goal. The current US Middle East visit by Trump has derived a number of positive promises; assurance with Arab-Muslim leaders to tackle terrorism, security cooperation, arms deals in the billions of dollars to boost domestic economy and the peace negotiation on the Israel-Palestinian crises. Most importantly, he has been able to secure similar promises from Israel's counterpart, while meeting Mahmoud Abbas in the Gaza territory is a sign of possible peace negotiation in the region. The interesting part of this development is that the Palestinian counterpart has indicated readiness for the negotiation regardless of unfavourable signals portrayed by Trump's administration since he assumed office (Palestinian leader invited to White House in Trump call, 2017).

Although Trump is unpopular among Palestinians because he appeared to break from his predecessor and adopt friendlier positions toward the Israeli government, ambivalence has marked his position toward a two-state solution to the conflict. In his conflicting policy, the same Trump administration has also warned Israel against annexing parts of the occupied West Bank, saying it would trigger an immediate crisis between the two allies. The move suggested Trump may be returning to more traditional US policy and will not give Israel free rein to expand its control over the West Bank and side-line the Palestinians, as Israeli nationalists had hoped. To Palestine, it is widely believed that Palestinian leaders have only one option; that is to work closely with the Trump administration, try their best and cease the opportunity of the closeness tied that Trump and Netanyahu are forging, as a key to pressure Trump to convince Netanyahu to a possible peace deal. Trump, on the other hand, has embarked on a number of questionable policies that make him suspicious of being biased, discriminatory and in violation of US values and fundamental human rights will likely choose to protect or at least prove his critics wrong. He may choose to shape his reputation through success and resolving the Israel and Palestine issue may be one of his goals. Finally, the warm welcome received from Arab-Muslim leaders in Saudi Arabia may change Trump's perception in dealing with Israel-Palestine issues. On the contrary, if Trump insists on categorising Hamas as terrorists, it may backfire on the possible negotiation and increase tension in the region.

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