



POLITICS & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS | RESEARCH ARTICLE

The inevitable dead end of the Arab-Israeli conflict

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Abstract: Focusing on one historic but unsuccessful effort to achieve peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the 2000 Camp David summit, this paper presents a systematic framework for future analyses of the conflict. An analysis of the failure of the Camp David summit enables us to spotlight some of the deep-seated essential problems of war and peace in the Middle East. An inquiry into the substance of the summit reveals how, all in all, the conflict is based on six major issues: (1) the establishment of a Palestinian state, (2) the location of land for the Palestinian state, (3) the evacuation of Israeli settlements, (4) the partition of Jerusalem, (5) Palestinian custodianship over the Temple Mount, and (6) the refugee problem. Emphasizing the importance of national ethos, this paper defines the above mentioned six major issues in dispute that constitute the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by viewing them through the eyes of each of the rival parties. This article explains the causes of the conflict, relying on national forms of ethos that are rooted in narratives and collective identity. By establishing a profound comprehension of each of the six topics, this paper also creates the platform for possible future analyses of the conflict.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This paper presents a systematic framework for future analyses of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Through an analysis of the failure of the 2000 Camp David summit, it enables us to spotlight some of the deep-seated essential problems of war and peace in the Middle East.

An inquiry into the substance of the summit reveals that the conflict is based on six major issues: (1) a Palestinian state, (2) land, (3) Israeli settlements, (4) Jerusalem, (5) the Temple Mount, and (6) the refugee problem.

This paper gives the different points of view, of the Arab party and the Israeli party, and therefore initially creates the platform for possible future analyses of the conflict. This paper offers also an explanation for the causes of the conflict, relying on national forms of ethos that are rooted in narratives and collective identity.

1. The Camp David Summit as a case study

Seven years after he steered Yasser Arafat and Yizhak Rabin into a form of reconciliation, President Bill Clinton intended to complete the mission and accomplish peace in the Middle East—and he had good reason to be optimistic. On June 27, 2000, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright arrived in Israel to meet with, now prime minister, Ehud Barak and Arafat to assess the possibility for having a summit meeting. Palestinian Authority officials asserted that the sides needed more time to prepare for such summit but the Israelis strongly supported the idea of an immediate peace conference (Kjorlien, 2000).

Israel was led by Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who proved to be a man of his word and a creative leader. Barak, whose personal biography was one of bravery and ingenuity in battlefields, had, just two months earlier in May 2000, demonstrated how, against all expectations to the contrary, he was willing to take brave political steps and pull Israeli forces out of Lebanon. After fifteen years of regarding South Lebanon as a security zone where Israeli soldiers were constantly being killed Barak, in total disagreement with the common concept of most of his military high ranks, ordered a unilateral withdrawal (Kaye, 2003). Hence President Clinton understood that, if Barak promised far-reaching compromises in order to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he was capable of keeping his word.

The ensuing Camp David summit, attended by President Bill Clinton, Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Chairman Yasser Arafat, took place between July 11, 2000 and July 25, 2000. The Israeli and Palestinian delegations and the American facilitating team dealt with the most volatile issues of the conflict and, since the object of the leaders' meeting was to reach a final agreement and to put an end, once and for all, to the conflict in the Middle East, negotiations were founded on an all or nothing approach. It was, no doubt, a gamble—apparently a mistaken one—because the summit ended with no agreement. Clinton, Barak and Arafat failed in their historic mission and the whole region would soon be in flames with another vicious cycle of violence that began in the form of the *al-Aqsa Intifada* (Pressman, 2003a; Ross, 2004).

Taking the Camp David summit as a case study for this matter is as good a choice to investigate this problem as the 1936 Peel Commission and the reactions that followed its recommendations,¹ or the 1947 UN Partition Plan and the war that ensued.² Each of these events reveals the same patterns and inherently encapsulates the fundamental problems of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The choice of a sole case study is obviously not enough from a quantitative point of view, but this research implements a qualitative approach. The chosen case study, the 2000 Camp David summit was a major watershed in the attempts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; it was therefore emblematic of the intractable problems.

An inquiry into the substance of the summit reveals how, all in all, the conflict is based on six major issues: (1) the establishment of a Palestinian state, (2) the location of land for the Palestinian state, (3) the evacuation of Israeli settlements, (4) the partition of Jerusalem, (5) Palestinian custodianship over the Temple Mount, and (6) the refugee problem. The summit's breakdown leaves us with the great question: if everything was set for success why did the Camp David summit fail? This question is only part of the larger question of what makes the protracted Arab-Israeli conflict intractable (Bar-Tal, 2013).

The answer, perhaps, is that none of the six issues that were at the core of the summit was based on objective reasoning or solid historical evidence by any of the rival parties. None of us can really figure out which historians are more accurate about each of the six issues—those who justify the Israeli version or those who support the Palestinian one. Most of us create interpretations of reality and eventually make up our minds according to the guidelines of our national ethos which is the array of the particular shared values and traditions from which a people's image of its future and of its past is envisioned. The ethos integrates the community into feeling a common mutual destiny and forms the foundations for its unique identity as a distinctive social, often—national group (Etzioni, 2009).

The ethos, along with the goals and aspirations of the nation is what gives meaning to societal life and provides legitimacy to the social order. The societal beliefs which make up the ethos appear as central topics on the public agenda, are frequently discussed in public discourse, are expressed in the presence of cultural products, are transmitted through the educational system, serve as relevant references in decisions made by the leaders and influence the choices regarding courses of action (Bar-Tal, 2000; McClosky & Zaller, 1984).

Emphasizing the importance of national ethos, this paper defines the above mentioned six major issues in dispute that constitute the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by viewing them through the eyes of each of the rival parties. It does so by relying on secondary sources and reviewing them thoroughly, highlighting the essential differences of narratives that are held by Israelis and Palestinians.

This article explains the causes of the conflict, relying on national forms of ethos that are rooted in narratives and collective identity. By establishing a profound comprehension of each of the six topics, this paper also creates the platform for possible future analyses of the conflict.

2. Analyzing the failure from an Israeli point of view

2.1. The establishment of a Palestinian state

Both the Jewish and Palestinian national movements materialized at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century respectively, inspired by a mixture of modern European nationalism and religious, historical roots. As part of their consolidation both movements claimed full legitimate rights over the entire land under dispute; both movements denied each other's legitimate rights for national self-determination and, most importantly, each of the rival movements rejected the other's right to become a political entity within the boundaries of the disputed land (Maoz, 2013).

On November 29, 1947 the UN voted in favor of resolution 181 to put an end to the British mandate and to divide the country into an independent Arab state and an independent Jewish state. The exact call for the establishment of a Palestinian state was phrased in UN Resolution 181:

Independent Arab and Jewish States and the Special International Regime for the City of Jerusalem, set forth in part III of this plan, shall come into existence in Palestine two months after the evacuation of the armed forces of the mandatory power has been completed but in any case not later than 1 October 1948. The boundaries of the Arab State, the Jewish State, and the City of Jerusalem shall be as described in parts II and III [...]. (Plan of partition with economic union, part 1: future constitution and government of Palestine: A. Termination of mandate, partition and independence—paragraph no. 3).

While the Arabs rejected the partition plan the Jews accepted it *de-jure* and agreed to establish their state in only a small portion of the land they considered to be theirs. Ever since its foundation, however, the State of Israel has *de facto* rejected the part of the partition plan that referred to a Palestinian state (Maoz, 2002).

The results of the war in 1948 enabled Israel to prevent the creation of another neighboring Arab state because the Palestinian national community practically disintegrated. The Palestinian elite were dispersed with a large portion of the Palestinian population becoming refugees while those who remained in the West Bank came under Jordanian occupation and those in the Gaza Strip came under Egyptian control. It was easy for Israeli governments to ignore Palestinian nationalism and, consequently, to reject Palestinian demands for a state of their own since many Palestinians, due to their circumstances, tended to identify with Pan-Arabism or even with Jordan but not with Palestine. Thus, for the following decades, Israeli agreement to a Palestinian state only remained a matter of interest for the small Communist party and a few liberal intellectuals (Maoz, 2013).

After the 1967 war Prime Minister Golda Meir explicitly announced: “There is no such thing as a Palestinian people” (*The Sunday Times*, June 15, 1969, quoted from Shindler, 2013, p. 153). Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, one of the most dominant figures in Israeli politics until the 1973 war, opposed granting the Palestinians any rights for self-determination and, like other Labor leaders, sought a solution for the vast Arab population of the territories within the framework of the neighboring state of Jordan. The ruling Labor party adopted what it called “the Jordanian option”. The idea of a Jordanian option was that, since there was no room for a Palestinian state west of the Jordan River, a settlement ought to be reached with King Hussein of Jordan, based on territorial compromise through which most of the West Bank would be returned to the Hashemite Kingdom (Ran, 1991; Shindler, 2013; Shlaim, 1994).

The argument for Israel’s objection to any form of Palestinian state was based upon the issue of security since it was believed that such a state could turn the critical area of the West Bank into a springboard for the invasion of Israel by the other Arab States individually or in alliance. Israel feared an eastern front attack from Iraq, Syria, Jordan and possibly Iran on Israel’s most vulnerable border once a withdrawal from the West Bank was completed and a Palestinian state established (Slater, 1991).

When Menachem Begin took office he immediately rebuffed any idea of a Palestinian state and, during the Camp David talks with Anwar Sadat, his proposals led to a regime of autonomous administration for the Arab population of the occupied territories. The plan’s purpose was to deny the establishment of any form of Palestinian state but granted administrative authority to local Palestinians (Maoz, 2013; Shindler, 2013).

During the 1980s, as opposition leaders who joined the national unity government, both Yitzhak Rabin as Defense Minister and Shimon Peres as Foreign Minister strongly opposed the option of a Palestinian state. As late as the 1992 election campaign the political platform of the Labor party pledged to make peace but also promised never to negotiate with the PLO and never to permit the creation of a Palestinian state (Feith, 1996).

Even with the breakthrough made during the 1993 peace process with Arafat, Yizhak Rabin totally rejected a Palestinian state alongside Israel. Thus, the Oslo accords, according to the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, of September 13, 1993, never promised Palestinian statehood and explicitly insisted on no more than a form of national authority limited to the autonomous control of local and domestic matters (Stav, 2001). Evidently, it thus seems, Ehud Barak agreed, at Camp David, to what his political predecessors throughout generations had viewed as unthinkable.³

2.2. Locating land for the Palestinian state

Barak offered the Palestinians the possibility of establishing a state in 92% of the West Bank and in the entire Gaza Strip. On a personal level this meant that Prime Minister Barak had a good chance of losing his public popularity entirely. Israeli voters are systematically non-supporters of a full retreat to the pre-1967 borders. *Meretz* is the only Zionist party that advocates such a withdrawal and fell from its 12 Knesset seats in the 1992 elections that preceded the Oslo peace process to 9 seats in the 1996 elections and 10 seats in the 1999 campaign. The phenomenon of the development of clearly right-wing public tendencies in Israeli society is indicated as a systematic one (Lewin, 2013).

More importantly, however, on a national level establishing a Palestinian state in 92% of the West Bank and in the entire Gaza Strip meant surrendering what had been consensually perceived for decades as an area that represented Israel’s essential national and strategic assets.⁴

In order to explain the Israeli approach to the territories acquired in 1967 three factors will be reviewed here: (a) the historic Jewish connection to the region; (b) the legal aspects involved; (c) the strategic approach.

2.2.1. *The historic Jewish connection*

The districts of Judea and Samaria constitute the biblical, ancestral and indigenous heartland of Jewish heritage going all the way back, not only to as far as Joshua's conquest of the country, but also to the days of Judaism's forefathers Abraham, Yitzhak and Jacob who are buried in Hebron—the city that would later become King David's first capital. Judea forms the part of the country where the dominant tribe of Judah consolidated its biblical monarchy, and Samaria covers much of the area of the ancient Kingdom of Israel (Sharpe, 2011). It was, therefore, only natural for the national movement of Modern Zionism, starting at the end of the nineteenth century, to renew the Jewish presence in Judea and Samaria and to target the Land of Israel as its destined homeland. Permanent settlements were created in Shechem, Atarot, and Hebron. A well known example is the family of Moshe Sharett, Israel's second Prime Minister, who in 1906 arrived at Ein Sinya, a tiny village between Ramallah and Shechem, to build a community. Another example is Gush Etzion, a piece of land located between Hebron and Bethlehem that was purchased by Jews during the first decades of the Twentieth century, where four kibbutzim were established. These villages were wiped out with the Jordanian conquest of this area in 1948 (Collins & Lapierre, 1972, pp. 298–388; Yesha Council, 2013).

2.2.2. *The legal aspects involved*

The initial legal act that started the process of internationally authorizing the establishment of a Jewish state was the 1917 Balfour Declaration which was made in a letter sent from UK Minister of Foreign Affairs Arthur James Balfour to the informal head of British Jewry Lord Walter Rothschild, stating that: "His Majesty's government views with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people [...]" (Sneer, 2010, p. 342). The name of the country, Palestine, at no point in time, meant anything else than the entire stretch of land on both banks of the Jordan River. Palestine and the Jewish National Home were hence to become practically synonyms (Grief, 2004).

The aftermath of World War I saw new global political and legal settlements in the Middle East in areas lost by Turkey as a result of the war. The Arabs received most of the lands formerly under Turkish sovereignty while the entire area of Palestine was reserved exclusively for the Jewish people as their national home and future independent state. The terms of this settlement were made by the Principal Allied Powers consisting of Britain, France, Italy and Japan. According to the settlement all the territories formerly under the control of the Ottoman Empire would be placed under the Mandate System and administered by an advanced nation until they were ready to be independent. This Mandate System was established and governed by Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, contained in the 1919 Treaty of Versailles and based on US President Woodrow Wilson's program of Fourteen Points (Grief, 2004).

The 1920 San Remo Resolution adopted by the leading allied powers transformed the Balfour Declaration from being a mere statement into a legal obligation whose purpose was to put the Balfour Declaration into effect. Additionally, in contrast to popular belief, the 1947 UN resolution for the partition of Palestine that eventually led to the foundation of the State of Israel was not an affirmation of the Jews' legal rights for the whole country, but rather an unlawful abrogation of their legal rights and denial of their legal sovereignty over the whole of Palestine (Grief, 2004).

The sequence of the above legal acts leads to the conclusion that Palestine, from the very beginning was legally recognized as a Jewish state in theory that was to be guided towards independence by the British trustee acting as a mentor who would take the necessary political, administrative and economic measures to establish the Jewish National Home. The chief means for accomplishing this was the encouragement of large-scale Jewish immigration to Palestine that would enable them to establish settlements all over the country, all of which would eventually result in making Palestine a completely independent Jewish state (Blum, 2012).

Later British policy deviated from the international charter for a Jewish state, with no appropriate worldwide legal authority to do so when, in 1922, Winston Churchill, the Colonial Secretary placed in

charge of the affairs of Palestine, changed the character of the British Mandate by administratively separating what came to be known as Transjordan from the rest of the land and by redefining the Jewish National Home as no more than a cultural center for the Jewish people. These radical changes were officially introduced in the 1922 White Paper and, thereafter, the British never departed from the false new interpretation they gave to the Jewish National Home (Grief, 2004).

From then until 1948, a legal absurdity existed in Palestine in which the British super power that had, under international law, been appointed to facilitate the establishment of a Jewish state in the whole country of Palestine used its forces to deny Jews both sovereignty and land in total contradiction of its original mandate. When David Ben Gurion proclaimed independence on May 14, 1948 most of the original land that had, under international agreement, been destined for the establishment of the new Jewish state was now in the illegal possession of the Arab states who had, in the meantime, invaded it. The tiny stretch of land that was eventually spared for the State of Israel, after surviving a vicious war with all its aggressive surrounding Arab neighbors, was merely a small portion of the territory that had originally been allocated for the Jewish state by the international community (Grief, 2004).

It was during this war in 1948 that Judea and Samaria came under Jordanian control and for 19 years, until the 1967 war, Jordan attempted to annex the area and bring it under Hashemite rule. This attempt at annexation was, however, considered to be illegal by the international community and was only recognized by Great Britain and Pakistan (Yesha Council, 2013). Hence the so-called occupied territories of the West Bank that were liberated by the IDF in 1967 were not territories newly acquired by means of force but rather the correction of a historic distortion. It is in this historical perspective, that one should not be overwhelmingly surprised that a special commission was created by Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to examine the legality of Israeli settlements in the territories. This commission was led by former Supreme Court Judge Edmond Levy, Judge Tchiya Shapiro and international law expert attorney Alan Baker. Their conclusion was that Israel had never been an occupying force in the region and that Israelis have therefore the lawful right to settle in Judea and Samaria (Levy, Shapiro, & Baker, 2012). One must bear in mind, however, that the special commission had also its critics (Bell, 2012).

Even the UN resolutions 242 and 338 UN that call for a peace building process between the parties and allegedly determine that Judea and Samaria are destined to return to Arab ownership refer to an Israeli withdrawal from territories, not from *the* territories thus implying that only a part of the biblical Jewish country should cease to be under Israeli control. The wording was not coincidental since it resulted from numerous debates that took place throughout UN institutions. Indeed, once agreed upon, US Ambassador to the UN, Arthur Goldberg clearly noted that resolution 242 did not explicitly require that Israel withdraw to the pre-1967 lines and that the terminology of retreat did not receive the requisite support either in the Security Council or in the General Assembly (Gold, 2012; Lapidot, 2012; Yesha Council, 2013).

2.2.3. *The strategic approach*

From the very beginning the geographical starting point of Israel was its being a tiny country, no larger than New Jersey and smaller than Belgium. Before 1967 Israel did not possess borders that made it possible to halt military assaults nor provided any territorial depth that would allow a retreat for regrouping and driving back attacking armies. Historian David Vital distinguishes between small states that have an exceptionally slim margin of safety or security in terms of space and time for war preparations and large states that possess higher physical abilities to maneuver their forces. For a small state the loss of a major battle means, at times, the loss of the whole war, whereas a large state can afford to retreat and organize its forces for repeated efforts to defend the country. In this sense Israel definitely falls within the parameters of a small state (Vital, 1967, 1971).

Israel emerged from the 1948 war with very problematic borders since its borders were very long and largely flat on the Israeli side making them very difficult to defend and, in fact, during the early

years of statehood they were almost constantly infiltrated by Arab terrorists. The pre-1967 borders provided Israel with a “waistline” as narrow as thirteen kilometers (eight miles) between the major coastal cities and the West Bank which, at the time was occupied by Israel’s enemies. The country was thus totally vulnerable with practically no strategic depth in case of invasion from its neighbors. It is within this strip, between the Mediterranean coast and the West Bank, that 70% of the Israeli population and 80% of its industry were concentrated. The essential national assets, as well as Israel’s largest population concentrations, were exposed to the topographic superiority of anyone who seized the hilltops of the West Bank. Consequently, from a strategic point of view, controlling the mountains of the West Bank meant, in fact being able to dominate Israel.

The outcome of the 1967 War entirely changed the territorial balance in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Not only had Israel smashed its enemies’ armies, but it had also captured significant parts of Egyptian, Jordanian, and Syrian territory. It conquered the Sinai and the Gaza Strip from Egypt, the West Bank from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria. Along the West Bank’s mountain ridge that stretches from Samaria to Judea, Israel placed early-warning stations facing east. Below it, very close to the steep eastern slopes of this mountain ridge, lies the low Jordan Valley—a virtually waterless region with a relatively small Palestinian population. Being situated below the early-warning stations the valley constitutes a natural physical barrier against any massive military attack.

Since its foundation, Israel has, apart from the danger of a conventional military assault, faced state supported terrorism emanating from the entire region. One of the most important preconditions for having a successful counterterrorism strategy is isolating the area of conflict in order to cut off any reinforcement of hostile forces with manpower and material. This is the major reason why, because of its presence along the Jordan Valley and by controlling the Judean Desert, Israel has been able to prevent the smuggling of weapons and the infiltration of hostile forces. As a result, the territories in the West bank have, at no stage, acted as battlefields for global terrorist forces as has been the case in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia.

The above are the main considerations for the importance of defensible borders and are based on Israel’s historical experience of confronting the Arab war coalitions of 1948, 1967, and 1973 (Dayan, 2011, 2014; Golan, 2008; Rodman, 2001; Saar, 2001; Schiff, 1991). Despite all this Barak, at Camp David, was willing to grant the Palestinians almost all the West Bank.

2.3. Evacuation of Israeli settlements

Barak offered the Palestinians the evacuation of most Israeli settlements from the territory that would be handed to them. Except for the traumatic removal of settlements that had taken place in the Sinai Peninsula within the framework of the 1979 peace treaty with Egypt 28 years before the 2000 Camp David summit, there had been no previous evacuation of Jewish settlements. Noteworthy, the dismantling of entire communities in the Gaza Strip, within the framework of the Disengagement Plan, did not take place until 2005 and even when it was first mentioned in 2003 few people, even those who were in government, believed that it would be implemented. Although, to be honest, in spite of the one-sided policy of expansion and annexation through settlements, as shall henceforth be reviewed, the Israeli government did admit that the possibility of dismantling settlements existed: Israelis who bought their houses in the territories had to sign a clause promising that should government policy concerning Judea and Samaria change, they would not seek compensation beyond the value of their houses (Taylor & Rosenbluth, 1991).

The idea of establishing Jewish settlements as an important factor that could change social and security realities in Israel goes way back to the formation of modern Zionism. The founding fathers created the ideological connection between the revival of the nation, building settlements and collective self redemption (Allon, 1968). All the Israeli governments, including the one led by Ehud Barak in 2000, never ceased to found new Settlements and expand existing communities in the West Bank. Regardless of the ideological differences one strategic concept proved consistent: The premise that settlements created facts on the ground and any political future arrangement with any

Arab partner would inevitably rely on the new demographic and security borderlines created by the settlements (Arieli, Nathanson, Rubin, & Tzameret-Kertcher, 2009; Halkin, 2007; Spencer, 2009). Meron Benvenisti, who was Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem in the formative years during the 1970s, asserted in the early 1980s that already by that time the settlement process had become irreversible and that Israel's grip on the territories through Jewish settlements was constantly increasing (Benvenisti, 1984).

2.4. The partition of Jerusalem

Until the Camp David summit, any willingness to divide Jerusalem and to acknowledge the Arab part, *al-Quds*, as the Palestinian capital was unmentionable since Israel had always envisaged the entire Jerusalem zone as an integral part of the state.

Jerusalem has been the essential focus of Jewish worship throughout thousands of years of Jewish exile with daily prayers and annual rituals making frequent reference to the holy city. For example, the *amidah* [standing] prayer, the central prayer of the Jewish liturgy recited thrice a day, must be declaimed facing Jerusalem, and it contains the plea: "And to Jerusalem, Your city, may you return in compassion [...]. May you rebuild it soon in our days [...]. Blessed are you God, who restores His presence to Zion." (The fourteenth out of nineteen blessings that form the *Amidah* prayer, also known as *Tfilat Shmoneh-Esreh*—the Hebrew for prayer of eighteen. Similarly, Jerusalem is mentioned daily in the grace after meals and more so in important annual rituals—the conclusion of the Yom Kippur service or the termination of the Passover Seder, with the exclamation: "Next year in the rebuilt Jerusalem." This is the last sentence of the Passover *Haggadah*, a prayer book compiled by Sa'adia Gaon during the Tenth century. Unlike the *Amidah* prayer, however, the Passover *Haggadah* does not date as early as the days of the destruction of the Second Temple, and the specific sentence about Jerusalem was probably added relatively late—around the Fifteenth century (Yerushalmi, 1974). The exact timing of the complete expression, referring to "the rebuilt Jerusalem," is not entirely clear, though the suffix is probably relatively modern. There is evidence that when the Rav Kook visited the US in 1924 he was asked why Jews also say "next year in Jerusalem" if they are residents of the holy city. The Rav Kook answered that indeed in Jerusalem the custom is different and the Passover Seder there ends with the extended sentence "next year in the rebuilt Jerusalem," referring to rebuilding in its full sense—physically as well as spiritually (Raz & Lichtman trans, 2003, p. 253–254). One should also bear in mind how under the bridal canopy the groom swears:

If I forget thee O' Jerusalem, let my right hand forget [...]. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy (Psalms 137; 5, King James Version).

One should also mention how, over two thousand years now, Jews recite: "may God comfort you among all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem" when consoling a mourner. The exact origin of the custom using this sentence is not clear but its traditional sources are definitely archaic. The words resemble the sentence already mentioned in *Isaiah*: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem." (*Isaiah* 66; 13, King James Version):

It was only natural, then, for Jewish modern nationalism to be called Zionism and adopt its very name from the synonym for Jerusalem, thus, not only binding its essence to the Land of Israel, but, above all, specifically with the biblical Jewish capital. The longing of Jews for Israel, both in modern Zionism and in Jewish millennia-long tradition, was first and foremost identified with a longing for Jerusalem represented by the concluding words of the national anthem:⁵ "[...] to be a free people in our land, the land of Zion and Jerusalem."

Beyond the inherent religious and national importance of Jerusalem to the Jewish people, the State of Israel's attitude towards Jerusalem dates back to the trauma of the 1948 war. Jordan won some of the battles over the city and established control over the entire Old City and, by the end of the war, Jerusalem was left divided between the two countries. The 1949 armistice agreements left

East Jerusalem under Jordanian occupation and the Jewish residents were forced to leave. 58 synagogues were demolished and the Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives was robbed of its tombstones that were subsequently used by the Arabs as paving stones and raw materials for building. From the Israeli point of view this shameful sequence of events was historically corrected only as a result of the 1967 war when the national assets conquered in 1948 by the Jordanians were liberated by the IDF (Dershowitz, 2003, p. 91–99).

Following the capture of East Jerusalem in the 1967 war Israel completely altered the municipal borders of Jerusalem increasing it threefold and enlarging it by some 70 square kilometers. Unlike the rest of the territories acquired by war the geographical space of East Jerusalem was annexed by a cabinet decision and a Knesset vote as early as June 26, 1967. The fact that Israel treated the areas surrounding Jerusalem in a different manner than the rest of the West Bank was no coincidence because, immediately after the war, the main thinking in Israeli policy was that territories, including parts of the West Bank, would eventually be returned in exchange for peace and that the new borders of Jerusalem therefore offered an opportunity to determine how much of the West Bank Israel would retain in the future. Thus all the land surrounding Jerusalem, including the Arab villages, was incorporated into West Jerusalem and consequently into the State of Israel. Accordingly the extension of Jerusalem was referred to as a historic unification and large Jewish neighborhoods were set up with the clear political intention of ensuring that the enlargement of the city would be final and irreversible. There are also annual Jerusalem Day ceremonies celebrated all over the country to demonstrate the important role that the expansion of the city plays in the national ethos and within the Israeli public consensus. Jerusalem Day is celebrated as a semi-religious national holiday, proclaimed by the government and by the Chief Rabbinate in 1968, to commemorate the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967 (Abu Zayda, 2007, p. 64–67; Amirav, 2009; Golan, 2011).

The June 26, 1967 Knesset vote was reaffirmed on July 30, 1980 when a bill was passed that once again proclaimed Israeli sovereignty over the now greater Jerusalem. The bill was called “Basic Law: Jerusalem the Capital of Israel.” As a basic law, any future change to this law requires a Knesset majority. Noteworthy, however, some skeptics have asserted that the new law made no difference to the Israeli demand for a greater Jerusalem because: (a) in order to attain the majority needed for the vote on the bill the Knesset omitted any definitions of the specific boundaries of Jerusalem so that, at any future point in time, areas of Jerusalem could be designated for transfer to non-Israeli sovereignty based on the claim that they had not been part of Jerusalem in the first place; (b) Legal scholars have asserted that the bill cannot change the status of Jerusalem as far as international law is concerned. For example, in response to the 1980 vote in the Knesset, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 478 which declared the annexation of East Jerusalem to Israel to be in violation of international law (Jabareen, 2010; Lustick, 1997).

The 1993 Oslo accord barred any discussion over the fate of Jerusalem, postponing it to later negotiations. Accordingly, one of the prominent supporters of negotiations with the Palestinians and the chief architect of the Oslo process, President Shimon Peres, has, from time to time, expressed the traditional Israeli policy that the holy sites should remain under Israeli control and Jerusalem should continue to be unified forever. For example, in his address to the annual Jerusalem Day state ceremony marking 44 years since the reunification of the capital, he said:

[...] Jerusalem, as you celebrate your freedom today, we stand in your gates, and bemoan the sons that have fallen on your walls, for bringing our historical capital to life, the eternal capital of our people (*Ha'aretz*, June 1, 2011).

In these words Peres was paraphrasing the words of psalms that are commonly read out particularly during Jerusalem Day ceremonies:

Now our feet are standing in your gates, Jerusalem! Jerusalem is built like a city joined together in unity. [...] Let there be peace on your walls; let there be rest on your fortifications [...]; peace be with you, Jerusalem [...] (Book of Psalms 122:2, *Common English Bible*, version 2011).

Peres then went on and said:

[...] Israel has replaced [in 1967] the divisions that once wrecked the holy city by offering freedom to all faiths and creeds. [...] For 44 years there have been no barbed-wire fences in the heart of Jerusalem. Minefields were replaced with open gates. The shooting slits in its walls and towers were replaced with prayer houses. [...] From a divided, wounded, somber city Jerusalem became a bustling metropolis, picturesque and thriving, open to all believers. Israel reopened the capital [since it was reunited in 1967] breathing the air of freedom. Jerusalem's uniqueness was restored and it again became the center of the Jewish nation (*Ha'aretz*, June 1, 2011).

Hence in every scenario described by every Israeli government prior to the Barak government, the city and its surroundings were to remain within the overall political and military jurisdiction of Israel. Israel, until the Camp David summit, had never modified this approach either in substance or in concept (Hirsch, Housen-Courier, & Lapidoth-Eschelbacher, 1955).

2.5. Palestinian custodianship over the Temple Mount

Granting permanent custodianship of the Temple Mount to Palestinians was perhaps the most surprising, non-conventional Israeli Camp David concession made by the Israelis. The Temple Mount, a 140 dunam (35 acres) piece of land that forms the most contested piece of real estate in the world, consists of a flat raised area, the plateau, bordered by the eastern wall of the old city of Jerusalem and faces the Mount of Olives.

The Temple Mount is Mount Moriah, the holiest of all places for Judaism. It is considered to be the spot where Abraham nearly sacrificed Yitzhak and where, according to a rabbinic tradition, God created Adam. It is where King Solomon erected the First Temple that was destroyed by the Babylonians and where, in 520 BC, the Second Temple was built at the same location on the plateau. The Wailing Wall, for thousands of years the focus of Jewish worship, is the western part of a massive retaining wall holding up the tons of earth and stone of the plateau. Up on the plateau, on the floor of the mosque of the Dome of the Rock, lies the Foundation Stone (in Hebrew: *Even ha-Shetiya*). According to Judaism this is the rock around which the earth was created. This was one of the reasons why ever since the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, despite the obstacles and decrees that were meant to prevent Jews from coming to this place they continued to ascend and pray as close as they could to where the temple once stood (Armstrong, 2005; Berkovits, 2000, 2006; Burgess, 2004; Gorenberg, 2000; Loewenberg, 2013).

This being said, however, it is also important to bear in mind that the Jewish attitude towards the Temple Mount is somewhat ambivalent. The place is sacred but ever since its destruction any religious ritual has been prohibited by *Halacha* for fear of impurity from as early as medieval times, particularly according to Maimonides' directives. According to Maimonides [Rambam]:

[...] Even with Beit Hamikdash destroyed, it is still a mitzvah to go up to those portions of the Temple Mount permitted to us and pray (Maimonides, *Hilchot Beit Habechira*, 7:7).

At most Jews are encouraged to visit the place but are obligated to respect it like in days of yore, which means avoiding access to the inner courtyards of the ancient temple, where the Holy of Holies once resided. Thus observant Jews yearn for the Temple Mount but refrain from entering the place or coming any closer than the Wailing Wall (Meyer & Messner, 2010).

The Temple Mount was liberated in 1967 by Israeli paratroopers who fought their way to the Wailing Wall through the narrow streets of the old city with 97 of them killed and many others wounded. Once liberated, the Israeli flag was immediately raised to the top of the Dome of the Rock. The then IDF Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren arrived at the place with the first soldiers, blew a *shofar*, and entered the Omar Mosque, together with some soldiers, holding a *Torah* scroll in his hands. This was probably the first time since the legions of Titus destroyed the temple that Jewish prayers were held by Hebrew warriors next to the Foundation Stone.

This, however, was also about to be the last one. Within hours the Defense Minister Moshe Dayan ordered the flag to be taken down and, in spite of an official declaration that from now on Jewish access to the Temple Mount would be unrestricted, Israel refrained from any Jewish religious activity at the holy site; Jews were allowed to visit the place, but not to pray there. The Chief Rabbis of Israel, together with other leading orthodox rabbis, declared that, for generations, the religious Jewish leadership had warned against entering any part of the Temple Mount and, therefore, the rabbinical ruling would remain unchanged. This attitude was also adopted by Mercaz Harav yeshiva, one of the prominent educational centers of religious Zionism (Inbari, 2007).

By opposing Jewish pilgrimage to the al-Aqsa compound the rabbis prevented the development of explosive religious Israeli-Palestinian friction on the Mount. Correspondingly, on the political level, the Israeli government has left the Islamic *Waqf* in control of the site ever since 1967 (Ramon, 2002; Reiter, 2002).

At the 2000 Camp David summit, then, the most unusual concession made by Israel was a complete withdrawal from any demands for sovereignty over the Temple Mount. Originally the offer seems to have been proposed by President Clinton, who had the innovative idea of dividing the Temple Mount horizontally rather than vertically, granting the Palestinians the top of the mount, where the mosques stand, and the Israelis the bottom of the site where the Wailing Wall is situated. At first glance this solution could have granted each party what it needed most. The Palestinians could control the platform where Muslim shrines are active, and the Jews would have the part under the platform, where remnants of their temple are located. The shared sovereignty of Palestinians on the top and Israelis on the bottom of the holy site would also be accompanied by commitments made by the two sides not to allow archeological excavations unless this is agreed upon by both parties (Golan, 2011; Hassner, 2009).

President Clinton's idea was accepted by Prime Minister Barak. Remarkably, however, by consenting to the new horizontal partition, Barak proved to be just as ignorant as Clinton since, according to Jewish Halacha, the air above the remnants of the Temple is as holy as the ground below it and this fact alone was bound to jeopardize any such future arrangement. Ehud Barak may have had second thoughts about the horizontal partition because, when George W. Bush succeeded Clinton, Barak told him that since the Temple Mount was the cradle of Jewish history there was absolutely no way that he would agree to a settlement over the holy site. In real time, however, it was not Barak who rejected Clinton's offer but Yasser Arafat (Hassner, 2009).

2.6. Solving the refugee problem

During the Camp David summit of July 2000 Barak agreed to express Israel's regret over the suffering of the refugees, to absorb tens of thousands of refugees under the family reunification plan and to make a financial contribution to an international organization that would be established for the rehabilitation of the refugees outside of Israel (Tovy, 2003). This was no minor concession and, in an opinion poll conducted among Israeli Jews during the week following the failure at Camp David, it became clear that Barak's tentative move on the refugee question met with the greatest public resistance of all the compromises made at Camp David. A public survey held on August 2000 showed that 76% of Israeli Jews rejected the possibility of Israel accepting 100,000 Palestinians within its borders. In fact there was a greater readiness to transfer East Jerusalem to Palestinian sovereignty and to turn over most of the territories than to accept any repatriation of Palestinian refugees

(*Haaretz*, August 7, 2000). This data corresponds to the consensual assessment that an overwhelming majority of Israelis, even extreme left-wing supporters, perceive the repatriation of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees to Israel as a direct existential threat to the survival of the state as the Jewish homeland (Shuval, 2002).

The Palestinian refugee problem came into being during the 1948 war when 726,000 Arabs fled the country (UN Economic Survey Mission for the Middle East, 1949). According to UN definitions the official status of refugees applies to all the descendants of those who left Israel so that, today, the number of Palestinian refugees amounts roughly to 5 million. There are no official numbers that can be accounted for, and the figures are controversial (Goldberg, 2012).

Because the Palestinian refugee problem is so central to the conflict, it is important to analyze its evolution by noting four sequential developments from the Israeli point of view: (a) the narrative of Jewish good-will vs. Arab viciousness; (b) the historic circumstances of the 1948 war; (c) the invention of the Palestinian refugee problem; (d) the real facts and figures of the Palestinian refugee problem.

2.6.1. The narrative of Jewish good-will vs. Arab viciousness

The history of Israel's national revival is replete with thousands of cases where Jews were brutally murdered beginning with their arrival to nineteenth century Palestine. In fact one can almost understand the history of Zionism as the history of the Jews' murderous encounter with the country's Arab inhabitants. War has been modern Zionism's devastating companion from its very start. The drive for Jewish settlement and for Hebrew labor and immigration has never met with Arab consent and the Jews who built their villages all over the country have always encountered Arab violence and, as a rule, have had to defend themselves physically. The many local incidents throughout the centuries have to be added to larger ones such as the 1929 Hebron massacre where an Arab mob suddenly attacked the Jewish community. Sixty-seven Jews—men, women, and children—were killed in one day and their homes and synagogues were ransacked (Segev, 2000).

For over a century Jewish pioneers have had to cope with the hardships of an uncultivated land and at the same time protect their lives and their families from the merciless Arabs. Consistently, the ultimate symbol for Zionist activity in the Land of Israel has become the sword and the scythe and, according to this narrative, never, throughout the history of modern Zionism, has there been a time when Arabs did not kill unarmed and vulnerable Jews. Yet this bitter experience of encountering the hostile attitudes of the local inhabitants of the country has done little to discourage the Zionist quest for peace. Symbolically, one of the dominant themes of the proclamation of the state was the declaration of an everlasting pursuit of peace even though the proclamation of the state was almost cancelled in face of the violent Arab attack that was to follow it and the slim chance of surviving the war.

2.6.2. The historic circumstances of the 1948 war

Taking into account the above background of Jewish-Arab encounters, the large Arab attack upon Israel on November 29, 1947, the date of the UN's announcement of the partition of the country, was just one more confrontation between the two sides that was typical of the long term ongoing conflict between the pioneers and the local population. While Jews were putting all their energies into settling the land and building the country, their enemies had only violent actions in mind and, even before war was officially declared, over twelve hundred Jews had been killed, most of them civilians, over several months (Gilbert, 2008; Kurzman, 1992; Meir, 1976; Sachar, 2003).

The 1947 attack was far larger in scale than any before it because its goal was to totally crush Jewish settlement in Israel in order to prevent any realization of the United Nations' new international approval of the existence of a Jewish state alongside the Arab states. The war started with deadly Arab riots all over the country, followed by Jewish defensive counter-attacks, all of which caused the British army that was still occupying the country to gradually lose control. Within several

weeks, i.e. by January 1948, it had turned into a full-blown war. Arab forces blocked the major roads leading to Jewish towns and villages and Jewish convoys were sent in order to maintain supplies of food, medicine and ammunition. Jewish convoys were ambushed on their way to the villages, and Israeli soldiers, including nurses and doctors, were shot to death even when the convoys had run out of ammunition and surrendered (Gilbert, 2008; Kurzman, 1992; Meir, 1976; Sachar, 2003).

Despite their disadvantage in numbers, weapons, and supplies the Jews were successful in some military actions but as soon as the British evacuated their forces five Arab armies, from Lebanon and Syria in the north, Iraq and Jordan from the east and Egypt from the south, invaded Israel with the aim of annihilating it. Their intentions were clear and simple, as the Secretary-General of the Arab League Azzam Pasha declared loud and clear:

It will be a war of annihilation. It will be a momentous massacre in history, which will be talked about like the massacres of the Mongols or the Crusades! (*Akhbar al-Youm*, October 11, 1947).

International declarations backing the Israeli cause never went beyond vague and hollow statements. In practice the often questionable international neutrality strengthened the Arab side of the military conflict and the ultimate Israeli victory was gained despite international efforts to undermine Israel's military strength. Eventually the Jews had to win their independence with almost no aid from the West. For example, the American State Department refused to provide the Jews with arms for self-defense and imposed an arms embargo on the region (Slonim, 1979). Consequently, the Jews had to smuggle weapons into Israel and Czechoslovakia became their major supplier. At the same time, Britain did not suspend weapons shipments to Iraq and to Jordan. Moreover the Jordanian Legion, which had been trained and equipped by the British, was led by a British officer. During the war RAF planes flew alongside Egyptian squadrons over the border and, in January 1949 Israeli planes in fact shot down four British aircraft. The war ended with the Arabs failing to destroy Israel but the cost of victory to Israel was enormous. About 6,400 Israelis, almost 1% of the country's Jewish population at the time, were killed and Israel's economy and infrastructure were dealt devastating blows. Despite the signing of armistice agreements between Israel and almost every one of its enemy countries in 1949, no one in Israel had the illusion that more rounds of wars would not follow at one time or another (Gilbert, 2008; Kurzman, 1992; Meir, 1976; Sachar, 2003). It was, therefore, almost a miracle that the Jews managed to rebuff the Arab assault and achieved military success. This was a just war won against all odds mostly through moral strength alone.

2.6.3. *The invention of the Palestinian refugee problem*

The phenomenon of Palestinian refugees, an issue that became the most difficult moral problem arising from the Arab-Jewish confrontation, was, in fact, initiated and maintained for decades by the Arab leadership. There are five major arguments that are the basis for this assertion:

- (1) In 1948 Arab spokesmen called upon the local Arab population living in Palestine to leave the country in order to allow the advancing Arab armies to enter without accidentally harming them during the expected battles with the Jews. In response some Jewish leaders, most notably those of Haifa, even appealed to the Arab residents of their cities to forego the unnecessary evacuations (Collins & Lapierre, 1972; Katz, 1973; Kurzman, 1992; Syrkin, 1971).
- (2) Since the Arabs had justifiably earned their reputation for murdering Jews whenever possible, they believed that the Jews would act in the same way once they took control of the country. With the increasing number of Jewish combat successes the fear of Jewish revenge lit the fires of anxiety and drove the Arabs to flee (Collins & Lapierre, 1972; Katz, 1973; Kurzman, 1992; Syrkin, 1971).
- (3) The Arabs who left were not emigrating but merely moving eastward within the boundaries of Greater Palestine which stretched far to the eastern side of the Jordan River where they would

encounter the same climate, language, religion and ethnic community that they had left behind (Collins & Lapierre, 1972; Katz, 1973; Kurzman, 1992; Syrkin, 1971).

- (4) That the Palestinian refugee problem could have been solved long ago, and in real time, is evident from what was happening in the global context of the 1940s when tens of millions of people were uprooted from their homes (Ben-Meir, 2001). The only group of refugees who refused to recover and regenerate was the Palestinians who then bequeathed their homelessness to the next generations.
- (5) In spite of a shortage of appropriate economic resources Israel absorbed the Jews who had fled Arab countries and, in fact, numbered three times the number of Arabs who had left Israeli territory. Yet the Jewish refugees became an integral part of Israeli society whereas the Palestinian refugees were deliberately kept in camps and denied any possible restoration by the authorities in every Arab state. The Arab world preferred to maintain the Palestinian refugee problem as a permanent one, cynically using it as a political weapon against Israel (Collins & Lapierre, 1972; Katz, 1973; Kurzman, 1992; Syrkin, 1971).

For example, in 1965 the Arab League advised its members that, while it was necessary to grant Palestinian refugees full economic and social rights, they must not be allowed to become citizens so as to maintain their refugee status (Shiblaq, 2009).

2.6.4. *The real facts and figures of the Palestinian refugee problem*

The evolution of the historical accounts of the numbers of Palestinian refugees reveals them to be falsely presented because of a process of fabrication that has turned a problem that could have been coped with into a huge, insoluble one.⁶

A comprehensive report made by the *Hagana's* intelligence service set the number of Palestinian Arab evacuees in the six-month period between December 1947 and June 1948, at 391,000 while another meticulous Israeli study set the number of refugees at 460,000. At the end of the war, the Israeli government set the number of Palestinian refugees at 550,000–600,000 with the British Foreign Office leaning toward the higher end of this estimate. The Palestine Office in Amman, an organization operating under the auspices of the Transjordan government, evaluated the total number of refugees at 700,000 and other official Arab estimates ranged between 740,000 and 780,000.

Within a year the UN established its Relief and Works Agency [UNRWA], and an unprecedented influx of international funds to the area took place. Consequently, large masses of people who sought to benefit from the newly founded UNRWA joined the ranks of the refugees in the region and the number quickly mounted to at least a million by 1949.

More than a half-century later, the exaggerated initial numbers have swollen still further. In June 2000, according to UNRWA, the total number of Palestinian refugees had climbed close to 3.75 million. The PLO claims a still higher figure of 5 million refugees while Israel has unofficially estimated the current number of refugees and their families at closer to 2 million.

Current demographic evaluations are poles apart and are divided between those who diminish the numbers declared by the Palestinians and which are quoted and presented in this chapter that concentrates on the Israeli point of view (Zimmerman & DellaPergola, 2005) and those who predict Palestinian population expansion and growth (Bloom, 2004; Byrstov & Soffer, 2012).

The misrepresentation of historical numbers is, to a great measure, part of an overall distortion of the contemporary demographic reality within the country. The Palestinians purposely violate various international standards of enumeration. In their census they also count those who live abroad permanently and those residents of East Jerusalem who are already counted in the Israeli census as Israeli citizens. In addition they assume totally unrealistic annual growth rates and, in doing so the

Palestinians produce distorted data that, in practice, invents at least another million false Arab inhabitants in the country. The dubious data produced by the Palestinians are not the result of some innocent error or coincidental inaccuracy. The statistical results as well as the forecasts and estimations are invented to serve national and political interests and Palestinian demographers are recruited for this purpose. That Palestinian data has, in fact, been fraudulent can be proved, not only by examining the inconsistent results and the distorted assumptions, but also by examining the contradictions with the data produced by the Palestinian Ministry of Health. Moreover, an American-Israeli research team that investigated the issue revealed that in 2005 the whole Palestinian population in the territories counted less than 2.5 million people (Ettinger, 2009; Faitelson, 2010; Zimmerman, Sied, & Wise, 2006).

Even within the Oslo Accords, where, not coincidentally, no reference was made to the right of return (repatriation), the basic assumption was that the refugee problem would be discussed somewhere in the future when talks on a permanent settlement would take place (Ben-Meir, 2008; Gal, 2008).

3. Analyzing the failure from a Palestinian point of view

3.1. *The establishment of an independent Palestinian state*

The Palestinian right to political self-determination relies on five major premises: (a) the historical claim; (b) the religious claim; (c) the demographic claim; (d) the moral claim; (e) the legal claim (Finkelstein, 2007; Hanieh, 2001; Marley & Agha, 2001; Meital, 2006; Pressman, 2003b).

3.1.1. *The historical claim*

This claims that there has been a historical ethnic continuity of Palestinians in the Middle East because the Palestinians are the descendants of the ancient, original peoples of the country—Canaanites, Emorites, Hittites, Phoenicians, and Philistines, and that all of these nations not only preceded the Jews but continued to inhabit the land after the whole region was Islamized (Maoz, 2013). Jews, on the other hand, it is claimed, do not form a nation but are only a religion and Zionism was a movement that was formed to acquire land in the Orient during a period when most of Europe's overseas territorial acquisitions took place. Thus, it was the adoption of the theoretical concept of imperialism and the practice of colonialism that motivated Zionism to set out and turn the rural territories in the Middle East into urban versions of European metropolitan society (de Boer, 2006; Safty, 2012; Said, 1979).

3.1.2. *The religious claim*

Palestine is a sacred Islamic land and an integral part of the Muslim world with its most holy places in Jerusalem and Hebron (Maoz, 2013). These historical bonds correspond with the rise of a relatively new Islamic discourse that has, to a great measure, reconstructed, modern Arab nationalism and culture. The reflections of Islamic and Arab intellectuals on the meaning of the 1948 and 1967 Arab catastrophes have led to the conclusion that a structural failure of all the social strata, caused by a long period of Western colonial control, was to blame for the failures rather than any of the failures attributable to the Palestinian elite. According to this point of view, the continuous colonization of the Arab and Islamic world has driven Arab civilization into a state of collapse and has deformed its various structures leading to both an intellectual and moral paralysis. Western colonialism, a hostile agent in the history of Arab and Muslim societies, has eventually led to the colonization of the Arab psyche. Against this trend the new Islamic discourse emphasizes religious dogmas and integrates novel theological and political orientations in Islam. This new Islamic outlook was embraced by newly rising movements such as the *Front de Libération Nationale*, in Algeria, the *Hizbullah* in Lebanon and *Hamas* and *the Islamic Jihad* in Palestine. Contrary to fundamentalist and traditional forms of Islam these religious movements have a national conscious and the sacred sites and symbols of Islam are intertwined with their national politics (Da'na, 2009).

3.1.3. *The demographic claim*

In 1917 the Palestinians formed a majority of 90% of the population in the country and in 1947 they still formed a majority of some 66%. There was no reason, therefore, to agree to either the Balfour Declaration that stood in total contrast to the demographic situation in Palestine, nor to the 1947 partition plan (Maoz, 2013). The tragic result of the Palestinian insistence in 1948 to not give up their land in favor of a Jewish minority caused them to lose their demographic majority in the country, following the evacuation 900,000 refugees (Ju'beh, 2000). According to these estimates, with 6 million refugees in the Middle East (Shqaqi, 2000), the world population of Palestinians is almost 12 million. The birth rate of Palestinians and the large number of those waiting to be repatriated thus presents the possibility of once again turning them into a majority in Palestine (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics–PCBS, 2013). The *status-quo* as it is today thus leaves the larger part of the disputed land in the hands of a small minority (the Jews) that has viciously deprived the majority (the Palestinians) of its territorial possessions.

3.1.4. *The moral claim*

In matters concerning the question of justice, one needs to refer to the different conceptions of the term. Specifically there is a distinction between *corrective justice* and *distributive justice*.

Corrective justice aims to rectify and compensate one party for the harm or the loss that has been caused to another party. Corrective justice focuses on historical facts and on the question of who caused the harm and whether that party can be held responsible. Corrective justice is indifferent to power relations and to the relative wealth of the parties involved but only looks back, not forward to the future.⁷ Distributive justice, on the other hand, aims at achieving a just distribution of means and providing each person in society with a certain minimum. In many ways distributive justice is more inclusive and forward looking.

On moral grounds the Palestinians tend to formulate their demands in terms of both categories of justice: Corrective (since they used to own most of the land and the resources and as such can deploy the language of entitlements) and distributive (in the sense that they are at a disadvantage and dispossessed of resources, and as such can use the language of need) (Weinrib, 1991).

3.1.5. *The legal claim*

Ever since 1967, there has been growing international recognition of Palestinian rights by different institutions of the UN. Already in December 1969 the UN General Assembly recognized that the problem of the Palestinian refugees resulted from the denial of their inalienable rights under the Charter of the UN and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Another milestone worth mentioning is resolution 3236, adopted on November 22, 1974, where the General Assembly of the UN reaffirmed the rights of the Palestinian people. This statement explicitly included the Palestinians' right to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty, and their right to return to their homes and property. Ever since 1974, this resolution has been reaffirmed almost every year. Furthermore, recommendations deriving from this resolution have been positively discussed by the Security Council but, due to the negative vote of the US, a permanent member of the Security Council, any pro-Palestinian proposal has been technically rejected. In its resolution 43/177 from December 15, 1988, however, the General Assembly acknowledged the proclamation of a Palestinian state made by the Palestine National Council and also reaffirmed the need to enable the Palestinians to exercise sovereignty over the territories occupied by Israel since 1967 (Akasaga, 2008).

Israel, on its part, has violated scores of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, constantly violating international law with its illegal annexation of Jerusalem and its illegal settlement activity. These Israeli violations refer to UN Assembly resolutions 242 from 1967 and 338 from 1973 that call for the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from the 1967 occupied territories and repeat resolution 194 from 1948 calling for a just settlement of the refugee problem. Others violations are of resolutions 267, 271 and 298 that demand that Israel cancel its annexations in the Jerusalem district, and resolutions 446, 452 and 465 that require that Israel evacuate all the Jewish

settlements that were built on Arab territories (Zunes, 2002, p. 6–7). Although the Security Council has imposed sanctions on member states on some twenty different occasions since 1990, often for violations of international law identical to those committed by Israel, the U.S. veto has shielded Israel from any such sanctions (Cortright & Lopez, 2000; Finkelstein, 1996, p. 53–56).

3.2. Acquiring land for the Palestinian state

Any suggestion that is less than a termination of the Israeli military occupation of the entire West Bank ignores the fact that what the Israelis were now offering was, in the first place, stolen Palestinian territory. Palestine has always been an integral piece of the land that contains all the territory west of the Jordan River. This is the 100% of the Palestinian share of the country before historical circumstances would unlawfully reduce it. This is very clearly stated in the first two paragraphs of the 1968 Palestinian national covenant:

Article 1: Palestine is the homeland of the Arab Palestinian people; it is an indivisible part of the Arab homeland, and the Palestinian people are an integral part of the Arab nation.

Article 2: Palestine, with the boundaries it had during the British Mandate, is an indivisible territorial unit (Cobban, 1984, p. 267).

Through a violent process of historical injustice, the Palestinian motherland was divided and stolen from its legitimate inhabitants. The 1947 partition plan left the Palestinians with only 45% of the country (with the other 55% for the Jews). The results of the 1948 war further decreased their share to 22% of the country (leaving 78% for the Jews). Since the international community rendered *de facto* legitimacy to the Jewish state with its 1949 borders, the Palestinians, in the framework of the 1949 armistice agreement, actually surrendered an additional 23% of the land that they had lost in the war to the Jews—more than half of the portion of Palestine that had originally been intended for them even by the distorted 1947 UN Resolution 181. Altogether, the Palestinians were eventually left with the West Bank and the Gaza Strip that form no more than 22% of their original native soil. Historically, then, accepting the existence of the State of Israel, which Arafat did by signing the Oslo Accords, meant that, in practice, the Palestinians have already given up 78% of their land through peace treaties with Israel. This small slice that remained was now subject to negotiations and any Israeli offer, as generous as it pretended to be, left the Palestinians with barely a fifth of their legitimate homeland (Maoz, 2013).

Above all the Israeli offer was lacking in territorial contiguity for the future Palestinian state since it split the West Bank into three disconnected areas separated by two Israeli corridors. In practice Barak, at Camp David, offered a territorially fragmented group of over 60 isolated enclaves on less than 50% of the territory which, in historical terms, meant no more than 10% of the original Palestine. These encircled subdivisions would be cut off from each other and surrounded by Israeli settlements and military bases. Consequently, the scattered Palestinian cantons would have no control whatsoever over infrastructure, water resources, borders or air-space (Makdisi, 2005).

3.3. The evacuation of Israeli settlements

The creation of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state, and not one that is more like a non-contiguous set of cantons, requires the evacuation of almost all of the settlements. This essential constraint stands in total contradiction of the fact that Israel's settlement policy represents an over-kill of its 1967 victory through an incorporation of the Palestinians in the West Bank into Israel (Zreik, 2011). It is impossible to imagine how the political situation in Israel could make it possible for the government to evacuate the settlements and it is just as unimaginable that the Americans or the international community would be willing to exert sufficient pressure on Israel to force it to evacuate the settlements and withdraw from the occupied territories (Zreik, 2011).

Even the Oslo Accords did not lay foundations for the establishment of a Palestinian state. In fact just the opposite happened and, since the signing of the accords, Israeli settlements in the West

Bank have expanded exponentially, the West Bank has been severed from the Gaza Strip, bypass roads have been paved all over the land in dispute and water resources have been confiscated. All these developments have reduced any hope for an Israeli withdrawal (Zreik, 2011).

3.4. Al-Quds (Jerusalem)

As the starting point of any dialog about Jerusalem the Palestinians have already committed generous concessions by recognizing the existence of a Jewish Western Jerusalem. The western part of the whole region surrounding Jerusalem has become Jewish because, during the 1948 war, Arab inhabitants of villages all over the mountains surrounding the city were driven out of their homes. Within the city itself, just like everywhere else in Palestine, Israel took over Arab property and included it in its borders. Once Palestinians were driven out their neighborhoods were immediately taken over by Israel as an integral part of its capital (Jabareen, 2010).

In addition to this and, in spite of the Israeli claim of a reunification of the city in 1967, there is no reason to refer to the newly mapped Jerusalem as anything that has to do with a preexisting former Jewish entity. Only 8.5% of West Bank territories that were included under the municipal jurisdiction of the city after the 1967 war fell within the area of the previous Jordanian-ruled al-Quds, not to mention some twenty-eight Arab villages on the hills surrounding Jerusalem that were now annexed to Israel under the misleading term of “reunification.” Never in the long history of this city had the new 1967 municipal boundaries even been implied (Lustick, 2000, p. 5–21). Moreover, the Israeli offer to divide Jerusalem did not include real Palestinian sovereignty in any of the Arab neighborhoods and villages of East Jerusalem. In regard to some of the core Arab areas within Jerusalem the Israelis spoke about Palestinian functional autonomy and there does not seem to have been any intention to accept full Palestinian sovereignty over any part of the city.

The Israelis totally ignore the central assertion that Jerusalem and Palestine are one and the same, and that Jerusalem’s sanctity is a reflection of the sanctity of Palestine as a whole. In spite of long periods in which Jerusalem was relatively neglected by the central Muslim ruling authorities, any dispute within Islam over Jerusalem’s sanctity ended with the victory of those who identified al-Quds as third in importance after the holy places of Mecca and Medina. The voluminous traditional literature in praise of Jerusalem was placed, particularly during the Twentieth century, at the center of Arab public consciousness as part of restoring al-Quds within Muslim tradition to its former glory. Above all, the Arab narrative links the city to prominent historic Muslim figures and events, such as the Prophet Muhammad’s Night Journey which associated al-Aqsa with the Ka’ba Mosque in Mecca, the first Caliph Umar’s conquest of the city and its later liberation from the Crusaders by Saladin (Reiter, 2008, 2013).

3.5. Palestinian control over Haram al-Sharif

The Jewish Temple Mount is the exact site which is for Muslims Haram al-Sharif, the third most holy place in Islam after Mecca and Medina and thus one of the obligatory pilgrimages. This compound, called in the Qur’an—al-Aqsa, consists of a set of mosques located where the Prophet visited prior to his departure to heaven for his meeting with Allah, riding the winged stallion. Architecturally, it contains two immense structures, al-Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock itself built around the stone from which Muhammad is said to have departed.

The story of the Prophet Muhammad’s Night Journey to Jerusalem and his ascension to the Divine Throne from the Haram al-Sharif is above all a story of pluralism. On his way through the seven heavens he met his profound prophetic predecessors: Moses, Aaron, Jesus, John the Baptist, Enoch, and, at the threshold of the divine sphere, Abraham. Muhammad talked with them and took their advice. It is, therefore, a story of religious unity, dialog, and respect for other traditions. This pluralistic vision was preserved in the devotion on the Haram al-Sharif where, by the ninth century, there were shrines dedicated to David, Solomon and Jesus, alongside the shrines commemorating Muhammad’s Night Journey (Armstrong, 1998; Reiter, 2013).

The Jewish attitude, in contrast to the inclusive Arab approach, has been exclusive and therefore any Jewish identification with sacred antiquity in al-Aqsa has led to the physical demolition of rival claims. On the very night of June 10, 1967, immediately after the armistice had been signed, 650 inhabitants of the Maghribi Quarter beside the Western Wall were given two hours' notice to evacuate their homes. Guarded by army units, Israeli bulldozers then came and reduced this historic district to rubble. Some of the Palestinian residents refused to leave and an elderly woman was buried alive beneath piles of debris. Among the buildings that were destroyed was also one of the few mosques remaining from the time of Saladin (Abowd, 2000; Tibawi, 1978).

This, however, was only the first act in a long and continuing process of the so-called urban renewal of Jerusalem, a renewal based on the dismantling of the historic Arab Jerusalem and in which demolition, archeology and a selective preservation of antiquities have all played their part in imposing a new Jewish identity on the city. By the end of June 1967 the Israeli government had annexed the city defying international opinion that officially still held Jerusalem to be a *corpus separatum* according to the UN 1947 partition resolution (Lustick, 1988; Ricca, 2007).

The 1970s saw the rise of national religious groups within Israeli society who have demonstrated a passionate and aggressive devotion to turn al-Aqsa into a sacred Jewish space. The idea of rebuilding the Jewish Temple on the ruins of Haram al-Sharif, has been voiced so often that the Israeli public has become accustomed to it, and the idea is given unspoken support by the Israeli establishment. It is in this context that one cannot ignore how, in 1984, a group of Jewish extremists plotted to blow up the Dome of the Rock in order to clear the way for the rebuilding of the Temple should the Messiah come. The Temple Institute in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, officially sponsored by the state administration, has on permanent display the vestments, musical instruments, and ritual vessels that will be used in the new Temple. The Temple Institute receives grants from the Israeli Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Education, and Jerusalem City Hall (Berkovitz, 2001).

The notion that Jewish dominance of the holy compound should be extended was at the basis of the Israeli policy that led to the 1996 bloody riots. Against the recommendation of his security advisers Prime Minister Netanyahu gave permission for a new entrance to be opened to an archeological tunnel running alongside the Haram al-Sharif that leads directly to the heart of the Muslim Quarter of the Old City. This caused immediate violent outrage and riots that resulted in the deaths of eighty-five Palestinians and 1,500 injured. Israeli spokesmen tried to point out that the tunnel did not encroach on the Haram al-Sharif itself but, particularly in Palestine, archeology has historically been no more than another way of staking out Jewish claims in Jerusalem and undermining the presence of Arab Muslim ones.

For the Arab and Muslim world the disaster that befell Palestine symbolizes their ongoing, humiliating defeat at the hands of the Western world. Having lost everything else, the loss of al-Quds in general, and Haram al-Sharif in particular, has become an unthinkable and catastrophic prospect for the Palestinians. Especially in Jerusalem, where Palestinians are surrounded by the newly built Jewish settlements, al-Aqsa has become a symbol of the beleaguered Palestinian identity. Jerusalem has become even more sacred to the Palestinians, even those who are not Muslim, since they began to feel the Holy City slipping daily from their grasp (Armstrong, 1998). At the Camp David summit in 2000 any compromise over Haram al-Sharif was simply impossible, not only because of Palestinian public opinion, or, for that matter, Palestinian religious convictions, but mainly because the whole Arab world would see this as betrayal. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, by and large considered a moderate factor in the Middle East, explicitly warned Yasser Arafat, on the latter's way to Camp David as well as afterwards, that nobody in the Islamic world had the authority to surrender Muslim religious assets (Hassner, 2009).

3.6. The refugee problem

None of the Israeli offers at Camp David made any significant reference whatsoever to the most important problem embedded in the Palestinian national ethos: Recognition of the right of return of Palestinian refugees and the solution to their problem.

From the very beginning there has been an inherent asymmetry between the two national movements in terms of power and international legitimacy with the Palestinians being perceived as victims. At first Zionism acted in Palestine just like any other foreign colonialist movement that had illegitimately captured parts of the Arab and Islamic lands. Later, being the tragic victims of the Holocaust in Europe, the Jews earned global sympathy and world support for a Jewish state. Eventually it became the Palestinians' fate to pay the price for this sequence of events. After the foundation of Israel the inequality between the two nations grew worse since, as a result of the war, the Palestinian community lost most of its national territories, it disintegrated as a community and dispersed and many of its members became refugees (Maoz, 2013).

During recent years, however, some realistic Palestinians have been calling for moderating Arab demands but arriving at a permanent settlement of the refugee problem remains the core issue of the protracted Arab-Israeli conflict (Abu Zayyad, 1994; Khalili, 1994; Shqaqi, 2000). In order to fully understand the Palestinian point of view regarding the refugee problem five major themes that construct the Arab narrative have to be noted: (a) the origins of the refugee problem; (b) the numbers; (c) the right of return; (d) compensations; (e) rehabilitation.

3.6.1. The origins of the refugee problem

The Palestinian refugee problem came into being as a result of Zionist aggression. Though somewhat inferior in military hardware at the beginning of the 1948 war the Zionists very soon managed to acquire significant arm supplies from Czechoslovakia and this left Israel with a clear advantage. The Israeli starting point was a superior one also in military manpower and this improved over time. In May 1948, at the time of the proclamation of the State of Israel, Arab forces, including local phalange formations, counted no more than 25,000 troops while the IDF, at the same time, fielded over 35,000 troops. The Arabs reinforced their military power, but local manpower resources as well as those across the borders were limited. By July 1948 the IDF forces, on the other hand, had increased to 65,000 soldiers and by December 1948 their total number exceeded 96,000, almost four times bigger than the Arab forces (Flapan, 1987; Morris, 1994).

It is true that Israel was attacked by its bordering Arab states but only by expeditionary forces. (Shlaim, 2001). In addition, the Arab narrative also mentions Arab Jews who served in the Iraqi army that came to rescue Palestine but, immediately upon their arrival in Palestine, betrayed Iraq and joined their Jewish brothers thus weakening and demoralizing the Iraqi forces (Nahhas, 2012). Beyond the Israeli quantitative military advantage qualitative accounts show how the IDF also had a better starting point than its rivals. The Arab expeditionary forces that came to rescue Palestine lacked leadership and coordination and local Arab leaders such as Abdul Qadir al-Husayni and Syrian commander Fauzi al-Kaukji, for example, were dominant figures but they excelled mostly in promoting themselves politically. The Arab armies had poor communications and very little intelligence about the IDF so that the whole Arab campaign could not really have been properly planned in the first place. On top of all this the Arabs' remoteness from their home bases created logistical problems that doomed their mission to failure (Shlaim, 2001).

Accordingly the Israeli victory was actually a reflection of the imbalance of forces in favor of Israel. Wars are generally won primarily by technological superiority and quantitative advantage and the Jews, being superior in these respects, were therefore responsible for the consequences of the 1948 encounter. Since the Palestinian community lacked solid communal leadership at the moment of crisis, when called upon to fight against the Jewish assaults on their villages, the Palestinians were left without an organizational infrastructure and with insufficient supplies of weaponry to conduct the war effectively (Peretz, 1958; Safty, 2012).

Despite the Zionist claim that the refugees left the country because they were ordered to do so⁸ most of the Palestinian refugees were forced out of the country as a result of an Israeli ethnic cleansing program that aimed to create geographic continuity and a Jewish majority throughout Palestine. The attacks on Arab villages all over the country entailed the destruction of the Palestinian community and the expulsion of the bulk of the Palestinian Arabs.⁹

The ultimate expression of Israeli organized ethnic cleansing is the military executive order called Plan D. Plan D was the name given by the Israeli high command to the general decree for a military takeover of parts of Palestine during the Israeli offensives of April and May 1948 (Khalidi, 1998). Some of the clauses of Plan D are apparent within orders given to the forces by the Israeli leadership of the time, mainly Ben Gurion and Moshe Dayan:

The [...] Destruction of villages (setting fire, blowing up, and planting mines in the debris), especially in those population centers which are difficult to control continuously. [...] the encirclement of the village and conducting a search inside it. In the event of resistance the armed force must be wiped out and the population must be expelled outside the borders of the state. (Gilad & Megged, 1957, p. 286).

The plan to coerce Arabs to flee was put into action by bombarding civilians from the air and, on the ground, by carrying out massacres that were intentionally publicized to frighten the Arab population. As a result even those who earlier had refused to leave were driven to reluctantly evacuate their homes.¹⁰

3.6.2. *The numbers*

UNWRA's lists have 726,000 refugees registered, but UNWRA did not carry out a census and not every refugee was registered. Additionally, UNWRA's data base does not include Palestinians who were out of the country for study, visiting or work and who were unable to return to Palestine once their villages had been demolished. The Palestinian estimate is, therefore, higher and totals about 900,000 refugees (Ju'beh, 2000).

There is also a disagreement about the current number of Palestinian refugees. Israelis claim that there are no more than 2.5 million refugees all over the Middle East including West Bank inhabitants, whereas Palestinian claims mount to 6 million at least (Shqaqi, 2000). The Palestinian authorities, on the other hand, claim that the world population of Palestinians is almost 12 million and nearly 6 millions of them are referred to as Palestinian refugees (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics-PCBS, 2013). According to other estimations, in 2000, when the Camp David summit took place, one could speak about a population of almost 5 million Palestinians yearning for their homeland all over the Arab world (Shiyyub, 2004). The number of Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA, however, is now just about 4.3 million.¹¹

3.6.3. *The right of return*

The problem of the Palestinian refugees should not focus on their poor socio-economic conditions, but rather on the unsettled historical injustice that has befallen them. The solution to the problem will not be found on the humanitarian level of improving their standard of living but on the political level of reversing the results of the Israeli atrocities that drove them out of their homeland in the first place.

The right of return is legally based on the UN General Assembly resolution 194 that was adopted toward the end of the 1948 war. The resolution reads:

[...] The refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property [...]. [...] Instructs [...] to facilitate the repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees and the payment of compensation [...] (UN General Assembly, 1948: A/RES/194 (III), para. 11).

This UN resolution was recognized by Israel and indeed Israel agreed to negotiate solutions to the problem within the framework of its peace treaties with the PLO. However, postponing negotiations on this issue, as part of the Oslo Accords, only enabled Israel to play for time. Meanwhile, the Israeli claim remained that even if Israel took responsibility, there was no way the refugees would return because this would endanger Israel's ethnic character as a Jewish state. Thus, the perpetual Israeli insistence on maintaining its Jewish character is in fact a full denial of any intention to allow the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland (Ju'beh, 2000).

3.6.4. *Compensations*

Since Israel has systematically prevented any Palestinian return to the country it is doubly indebted, through the UN 194 resolution, to compensate the refugees. First it should compensate them for the real estate and possessions that were robbed from them in 1948 and, second, it should compensate them for the miseries that they have been suffering throughout the period of time that they were in exile – already over five decades in 2000. In principle Israel reluctantly agreed to pay the Palestinians, but the condition demanded for such an Israeli approval of resolution 194 practically emptied the UN decision from its original intentions and left it meaningless. These conditions were as following: (i) Israel was not willing at any point in time to take responsibility for having expelled the Palestinians. (ii) The sums of money that Israel offered as compensations were too low;¹² (iii) In Camp David in 2000, the only practical discussion that Israel was willing to deal with was about compensations for the refugees that would be paid, not by Israel, but by the international community. (iv) Israel tended to link compensation for Palestinian refugees with parallel payments for Jewish immigrants from Arab countries, although the departure of these Jews from their countries of residence had nothing to do with the Palestinians in Palestine (Ju'beh, 2000; Shqaqi, 2000).

3.6.5. *Rehabilitation*

Like the case for compensation any attempt to settle the refugees, wherever they might be, at present represents the effort to evade a just solution to the problem. Israel has agreed, during recent years, to discuss the future of the refugees on the grounds that, as part of the international community, the State of Israel was ready, just like other states, to rehabilitate refugees within their present place of residence. This attitude, however, stems from an Israeli refusal to accept any moral responsibility for the Palestinian exodus. This allegedly humanitarian suggestion is no more than an Israeli endeavor to put the blame for poor living conditions in the refugee camps on the surrounding Arab countries and to accuse them of refusal to absorb the Palestinian population. In practice, then, this Israeli approach is merely a policy whose aim is to cast the blame onto the Arabs instead of taking responsibility itself (Ju'beh, 2000).

4. **Conclusion**

In order to comprehend the full scope of the Arab-Israeli conflict the 2000 Camp David summit was chosen as a case study. According to the Israeli accounts the Palestinians rejected one Israeli concession after another; according to Palestinian accounts the Israelis failed to prove any good will. An inquiry into the substance of the summit has revealed how, in all, the conflict is based on six major issues all of which have been reviewed here from the subjective stand of each of the parties:

- (1) The establishment of a Palestinian state: Although, ever since its foundation, the State of Israel has de facto rejected that part of the partition plan that refers to a Palestinian state, it was now ready to accept such a state. For the Palestinians this was no concession since they maintain that their right to political self-determination is based upon fundamental historical, religious, demographic, moral and legal claims.
- (2) Locating land for the Palestinian state: Israel was willing to surrender 92% of the territory in dispute and, as a consequence, to remain without essential strategic assets. For the Palestinians, however, the territory in dispute is the entire area of the original Palestine and 92% of the West Bank barely represents a fifth of the 100% lost Palestinian land.

- (3) The Evacuation of Israeli settlements: Israel offered to evacuate most Israeli settlements from the territory that would be handed to the Palestinians in total contradiction to its basic Zionist convictions. The Palestinians, however, understanding that Israel's concessions in the West Bank would grant them no more than a noncontiguous set of cantons and, having experienced four decades of an Israeli settlement policy that only strengthened the 1967 conquest, could not allow themselves to trust the sincerity or practicability of the offer.
- (4) The partition of Jerusalem: In contrast to most of their religious and national traditions, the Israeli leadership was willing to divide Jerusalem into Jewish and Palestinian sectors. The Palestinians, on their part, had lost their share of Jerusalem twice: in 1948 when their homes became the Western neighborhoods of an Israeli capital and, in 1967, when all their villages that surrounded the city were annexed. Once again Israel was being generous about something that never belonged to it.
- (5) Palestinian custodianship over the Temple Mount: Granting permanent custodianship of the Temple Mount to Palestinians was a far-reaching Israeli concession considering that this is the holiest of all places for Judaism. The Palestinians, on the other hand, perceive themselves to be the victims of decades of Israeli urban renewal in Jerusalem based on the demolition of Arab sacred sites.
- (6) Solving the refugee problem: Israel was willing to express regret over the suffering of the refugees and to absorb tens of thousands of refugees into its pre-1967 borders but deeply embedded in the Palestinian national ethos lies the demand for the right of return and for a solution that will finally reverse the 1948 injustice.

However, even after a thorough review of the six fundamental problems that lie at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the basic question remains: why is it that none of these issues have been resolved? How come, after so many wars and decades of bloodshed, each one of the disputes has remained just the same as it has always been?

The answer that this study suggests is that the six issues are related to contradicting forms of national ethos, an Israeli and a Palestinian one, that are ruled by interpretations of reality that fit each rival party's national creed. This insight goes back to the late eighteenth century German philosophers like Johann Gottfried Herder who, inspired by Friedrich Hegel's concept of mind and moral fiber, spoke of the cultural, ethical and political climate in which a nation evolves and crystallizes (Barnard, 2003). Herder argues that there is a strong association between the ethos and the representations of a distant history that the nation claims for itself since the characteristics of a community originate throughout the stages of the history it experiences when the mental maps of the people, their prevailing culture, norms and ideas are cultivated. This attitude also corresponds with the writings of Maurice Halbwachs, who spoke of a group memory that is shared by its members, passed on, and constructed by the social group. According to Halbwachs and other advocates of collective memory who have followed him, such as historians Marc Bloch and Aby Warburg, a social group's common recollection is a contested ideological terrain, where different actors try to establish their particular interpretation of the past as the only possible reading of history for their particular group. Society's collective memory is an ongoing process that unites the group under the ideological perceptions and under the common ethics that are derived from its told and retold history (Anderson, 1983; Durkheim, 1912/1955; Halbwachs, 1952/1992); Rothstein, 2001).

As the result of studying centuries of bloodshed, late twentieth century scholars have added critical insights to our comprehension of collective memory, particularly in its national contexts. Statist ideologies, some of them claim, involve a manipulation of space and time in order to legitimate a monopoly over administrative control. National history, according to this attitude, is no more than the presentation of a false unity designed through an elite's conquest of historical awareness. These scholars also point out how national states all over the world have exploited professional historical

research and have subsequently shifted their peoples' center of collective memory from the temple and its priests to the university and its professors. This shift is from a religious set of myths to a political one, which relies upon a subjective interpretation of history at best (Duara, 1995; Levi-Strauss, 1979; Smith, 1986).

Researches show clearly how the tremendous capacity of national ethos is the leading factor in the ability of countries to sustain power over time. Psycho-political and socio-political case-study researches of historical incidents concluded that national ethos is a key factor for a people's ability to survive its wars. When called to defend its essential values and existential interests, the necessary condition for a country in a state of danger to win over its enemies is its internal unification by a national ethos. Such national ethos, particularly in times of war, binds the nation and drives the people to the overwhelming efforts that achieving victory demands. National ethos promotes pro-social behavior in the form of patriotic readiness for sacrifice in war, and becomes an essential factor promoting the chances for victory and survival (Lewin, 2012, 2014, 2015).

However, without casting doubt on this basic assumption, an unanswered issue relates to the question of the goals of a specific war. If a nation is led by its king or president to an immoral violent campaign, will the national ethos play a positive role or a destructive one? It seems that on various occasions throughout history national ethos turns rather into a negative factor that pushes the country's forces towards devastation. One historic example may be taken from the chronicles of the Third Reich.

The evolution of a German strong national ethos is one of Europe's historical wonders. Whereas, ever since late medieval times in countries like England or France, citizens dwelled in a well-defined territory under a single monarch, the Germans lived in a plurality of territories and were ruled by many princes. As late as the 18th century, there were still over 300 separate states in Germany and nearly 1,500 knights' estates, whose relations were not necessarily harmonious. None of the princes who ruled the country had the intention to form a German nation-state; hence the German population was left with a king that, in reality, had no immediate power over them.

With the lack of political unity, a cultural bond developed, instead, into a German doctrine of national mission—an ethos that long preceded the 1871 establishment of the Empire. In the absence of a unified and homogeneous German state, the idea of a German nation migrated initially into the sphere of culture, and the German educated classes advanced a national spirit based on the German language that, by then, was dominant in church and town bureaucracies, in courts, in academies and in theaters.

Starting in 1835 and continuing for about 30 years, a book series containing dozens of volumes was published in Quedlinburg and Leipzig, ambitiously titled "the Library of the Complete German National Literature." The declared guiding principles of the book series, as clearly announced by the publisher, were nationality, completeness, and canonicity. This enterprise reveals, not only an intellectual interest in the collection of medieval German writings, but also the emergence of a common readership that enabled the commercial foundations for such a venture (Leerssen, 2008).

When Otto von Bismarck established in 1871 the German Empire, combining the principle of a dynasty with the hegemony of Prussia, German nationalist forces had already established the cultural infrastructure of a German national ethos, laying stable foundations for the relatively new nation state (Brubaker, 1992; James, 1989; Preuss, 2003).

In addition to the German national ethos, historians point out how the Napoleonic wars of the early 19th century stimulated a nationality that was born in the barracks. The military service forged,

according to this historical interpretation, a closer relationship between the state and its subjects; it encouraged a militaristic culture that would bind German society in a manner that would last as late as the 20th century (Frevert, 2004; Hagemann, 2000). France's role as a binding enemy outlived the defeat of Napoleon, and in 1840, the collective threat perception led to new German patriotic sentiments. It was during those days that a talented poet, Hoffmann von Fallersleben, wrote a song set to an old tune by Joseph Haydn, *Deutschland Deutschland über alles*; the song would later become the German national anthem. Enmity with France, however, continued to ignite German patriotism, and during the 1870s and 1880s, Bismarck still tried to exploit the fear of French vengeance to stimulate national German unity (James, 1989).

The Nazi movement cunningly gathered its ideological anthologies, building what, to the common people, could seem like a concrete philosophical dogma. This German creed was created relying on the works of Joseph Arthur Gobineau about the historical appearance of the master race, drawing from the pan-Germanic, and Wagner admirer, Houston Stuart Chamberlain, learning from nationalist historian Heinrich von Treitschke, and, adding to all these, the relatively new Nazi anti-Semitism of Alfred Rosenberg. On top of these, with an extra philosophical and academic authority, Friedrich Nietzsche with his criticism of modern thought was fostered by the Nazis and twisted into supporting their own decadence (Brinton, 1940).

Nazism, of course, did not exist as the only response to the German past, but National Socialism presented a powerful synthesis of many of the ways in which Germans had typically thought about themselves throughout history: as a great power on the world stage; as a social grouping defined by shared cultural traditions; as the guarantor of great economic and political success and prosperity (James, 1989).

During the late 1930s, led by its national ethos, Germany set out to establish its large empire in Europe. In a series of successful campaigns and treaties, much of continental Europe was conquered or subdued. Indeed, this new German empire of the Third Reich, heading a group of countries known as the Axis, managed to expand its conquests from France in the west to Poland in the east, directly or indirectly controlling southern Europe, the Balkans, and a large territory of Northern Africa. Except for Britain, almost every European country that had been attacked by the Third Reich capitulated in this stage or another.

World War II, however, had its well-known course, and by the end of 1943 even Hitler's closest and most loyal followers finally realized that the war was turning into a nightmare, with Allied bombings over all the Reich's cities, and the news of a defeat rumored in the German streets. The *Wehrmacht* was now shooting its last bolts, pulling the effort of a last major offensive and throwing its last reserves into strategic defenses, whilst the Allies, in particular the American forces, were still at their best (Shirer, 1960). At the end of 1944 the German command had admitted a total of almost 1.5 million casualties with over 100 divisions either destroyed or disbanded. Yet, heavily influenced by the national ethos consistent with National Socialist ideological preconceptions, the Nazis continued to hope, plan, and prepare, to reverse the course of the war. They would not cease to fight, denying the possibility of defeat, until the very end of the war. Despite the overwhelming superiority of their enemies, the soldiers of the *Wehrmacht* stayed singularly steadfast throughout the war; their morale remained very high, and their belief in Hitler, and in a secret plan that would eventually turn the tide again, had not diminished even when they witnessed the annihilation of all the German units around them. The German soldiers portrayed excellent performance and they proved effective and competent, by any measure, whether employed in attack or in defense, whether winning or losing the battle. They were bold, persistent, and loyal to their cause (Fritz, 1996; Weinberg, 1995).

Finally, human attrition was bound to determine the outcomes of this war. In 1944 alone the casualties of the *Wehrmacht* were nearly 2 million men killed, missing and wounded; this figure nearly equaled total army casualties, from the start of the war until 1943, including the battle of Stalingrad. In fact, by the end of the war, about 20% of the German male population of military age

was either dead or injured. No nation and no military force can sustain such high levels of loss indefinitely, and the final German collapse was therefore no more than an inevitable epilog (Balsamo, 1991; Dupuy, 1977).

A strong national ethos generated the German spirit of fighting throughout the years of the war. It was, however, on the long run, their prescription to self-destruction and total devastation, not to mention the wreckage that great war left throughout the whole world. The fact that a strong national ethos enables prolonged national struggles ensures no success and does not guarantee that the right wars are handled or that wars are handled the right way. Consequently, wrongly used—the strong national ethos can eventually turn into a dreadful ruinous trap.

According to an old joke, late one night a drunk was on his knees beneath a street-light looking for his watch. A passer-by offered to help and joined the search but just like the drunk he found no sign of the watch. After a while the passer-by started to inquire where exactly the drunk had last seen his watch only to hear—eventually—that he had lost it probably half a block up the street. “Why are you looking for your watch here if you lost it half a block up the street?” he asked, and the drunk answered: “Because the light is a lot better here!”

This paper shows how President Clinton, Prime Minister Barak and Chairman Arafat, and probably—all those who were involved in numerous attempts to reach peace in the Middle East, were all looking for the watch beneath the street-light instead of searching half a block up the street where different forms of national ethos were constantly being shaped.

For peace seekers, decision makers and scholars who wish to embark on further studies of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the six core issues listed in this paper form a platform for an overall bird’s-eye vision of the situation. This research adds no magic formulas to the volume of existing scholarly literature that inquires the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Neither does it offer a possible way out. However, it increases our ability to eliminate artifacts in the never-ending search for practical solutions. In one of his interviews, Thomas Edison told B. C. Forbes:

After we had conducted thousands of experiments on a certain project without solving the problem, one of my associates [...] expressed discouragement and disgust over our having failed to find out anything. I cheerily assured him that we had learned something. For we had learned for a certainty that the thing couldn’t be done that way, and that we would have to try some other way (*The American Magazine*, January 1921).

It follows, then, that the significant advance that this article offers for a greater understanding of the sources of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an innovative comprehension why decades of attempts to resolve the conflict led only to failures. Understanding the importance of national ethos and national narratives and realizing that any real solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict lies not in the substance of the six core issues, but in the different forms of ethos through which the themes of these issues are narrated, can pave way for further researches and other inquiries. Those, hopefully, are bound to lead eventually to a farewell to arms in the swollen Middle East.

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Notes

1. The Palestine Royal Commission, headed by Robert Peel, set out to assess the feasibility and future of the British Mandate. The commission’s report proposed a partition of Palestine, according to which the Jews would gain a small portion of the land and the Arabs would dominate most of the territory. The Palestinians flatly rejected the plan whereas the majority of Jewish leadership (*MAPAI* headed by Ben Gurion) accepted it in principle although they had some serious reservations about the geographical details and the vote for acceptance of the plan were basically for reasons of international political tactics. The whole event led to the violent 1937 Arab

- revolt (Cohen, 1977; Klieman, 1980; Morris, 2004).
- The UN Partition Plan that recommended a partition of the country that would follow the termination of the British Mandate was adopted by the UN General Assembly and marked the beginning of the 1948 war. The plan was accepted by the Jewish public, except for a small extreme political minority, and totally rejected by the Arabs who commenced a civil revolt that emerged into a full-scale one (Abu-Zayyad, 2002; Maoz, 2002; Salem, 2002).
 - That being said, in spite of the points made here to establish the comprehension that Israel had a long tradition of rejecting any possibility of a two state solution to the conflict, one should not ignore the assertion that, already during the late 1990s, that is—before the Camp David summit, both Shimon Peres and Ehud Barak as well as other Labor leaders came to terms with the prospect of a Palestinian state and ceased to rail against it long before they made their change of opinion publically known (Ziv, 2010). An additional claim is that, even if it was not publically addressed, there was a realization of the feasibility for Israel of a two state solution and a growing Israeli consensus about the idea of a future Palestinian state before the Camp David summit (Allegra & Napolitano, 2011).
 - Geographical strategic assets are studied within the sub-discipline of geopolitics. According to geopolitics, political predominance is a question, not just of having power in the sense of human or material resources, but also of the geographical context within which that power is exercised. Geopolitics as a term was first initiated by political scientist Rudolf Kjellen of Sweden in 1899 referring to the geographical influences on global conflicts. Geographer Sir Halford Mackinder, whose ideas in that field are said to have aided British statecraft during the early 20th century, claimed that geography per-se was not the core issue of geopolitics; geopolitics was rather, he stated, the geographical configurations that presented opportunities for the decision makers who were leading their countries (Mackinder, 1890).
 - The translation is taken from the Knesset's official website.
 - The way the historic numbers were artificially exaggerated is taken from an article by Efraim Karsh. Karsh conducted his own calculations based on British, Jewish and, to a lesser extent, Arab, population figures of all identified rural and urban localities abandoned during the war. Basing his evaluations on these preliminary data, Karsh claims that the number of Arabs who fled Mandatory Palestine amounts to 610,000 at the most (Karsh, 2011).
 - Corrective justice requires that if A causes damage to B's property then A is responsible and therefore must compensate B for the damage. This form of justice requires compensation even if A happens to be an extremely poor person and B is tremendously wealthy and the act of compensation will cause A to starve, while it will be utterly negligible to the rich B (Weinrib, 1991).
 - This claim has been the subject of debate mainly between Jewish and Palestinian historians. According to the Arab historiography the BBC monitoring archives were checked by several researchers and no evidence was found for any Arab leadership's command to evacuate villages or cities while Arab radio stations were found to have urged the Palestinians to cling to their homes (Childers, Khalidi, & Kimche, 1988; Khalidi, 2005).
 - In response to the accusations of atrocities, however, other historians argue with Kalidi and other's claims and assert that instructions called for the demolition of villages only if they could not be held permanently. Expelling population was to take place only in cases of Arab resistance. Indeed, the Israeli operational command explicitly clarified that expulsion would only be applied to those villages that fight against the Jewish *Haganah* militias. The concerns of the Jewish leadership at that time were strictly military and the purpose of Plan D was to prepare for an all-Arab invasion, not to expel any local population (Gelber, 2006).
 - In order to fully understand the manner in which the local Palestinian population was forcibly driven out of the country, one has only to carefully read the words of Moshe Dayan, one of the prominent Israeli leaders of all time, more than twenty years after the 1948 war: "We came to this country which was already populated by Arabs, and we are establishing a Hebrew, that is a Jewish, state here. [...] Jewish villages were built in the place of Arab villages. You do not even know the names of these Arab villages and I don't blame you because these geography books no longer exist; not only do the books not exist, the Arab villages are not there either. [...] There is not one place built in this country that did not have a former Arab population [...]" See Dayan at an address at the Technion, published in *Ha'aretz*, April 4, Dayan, (1979); quoted in Said, 1979, p. 8.
 - UNRWA defines Palestinian refugees as those whose place of residence was in Mandatory Palestine during the period from June 1, 1946 to May 15, 1948 and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and are eligible for UNRWA registration. The descendants of the original refugees are also eligible for registration (UN Refugee Agency, 2007, p. 5–6).
 - In 1990 Israel valued the worth of Palestinian stolen property at almost 2 billion US Dollars, whereas Arab estimations ranged between 50 and 80 times these numbers.

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