1 The Arab–Israeli conflict

Ways of war

> It is not true that the Arabs hate the Jews for personal, religious, or racial reasons. They see us, rightly from their point of view, as Westerners, foreigners, even invaders who seized an Arab country to create a Jewish state . . . Since we are obliged to achieve our aims against the wishes of the Arabs, we must live in a permanent war.
>
> General Moshe Dayan[1]

For the best part of a century the Arab–Israeli conflict has been a complex problem with important ramifications for the international community. As other chapters in this book will highlight, this conflict has embroiled other actors, such as the USA and the former Soviet Union, into, on one occasion, near nuclear confrontation. It has had a major impact on the international and more specifically capital-based economies of the international order, and promoted extravagant, wasteful and profligate spending on arms to the point where Kalashnikovs are apparently more valued by many of the region's political leaders than a decent standard of living for its citizens. How then does one begin to make sense of this bitter feud between the Jews and the Arabs, the state of Israel and the Arab (and other) states of the region, between religious cousins and territorial neighbours? In our first two chapters we aim to analyse this problem by making a distinction on the one hand between the wider Arab–Israeli conflict – marked by the wars of 1948, 1967, 1973, 1982 and 2006 as well as the peace treaties of 1978 between Israel and Egypt, and 1994 between Jordan and Israel – and on the other the more narrowly focused Palestinian–Israeli dispute that resulted in the Arab revolt of 1936 to 1939, the wars cited above and the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising (Intifada) in 1987, as well as attempts at peacemaking between the two parties from 1993 onwards.

Some might argue that making such distinctions is unhelpful; after all, should we not liken the conflict to the chicken-and-egg conundrum, asking

Map B – Israel and neighbouring states

which came first, the Arab–Israeli dispute or the Palestinian–Israeli? Such conundrums rarely have a simple answer, which is why we believe it is best to try to make distinctions between the two in order to assist understanding rather than obscure or confuse. It is true, of course, that the Palestinian issue lies at the heart of the wider conflict. We will argue, however, that the importance of the Palestinians as the primary focus has waxed and waned

over the past century and that other factors, such as the competition between rival Arab states for regional leadership, need to be explained if this conflict is to be adequately understood.

The conflict between those regularly referred to as the 'Jews' and the 'Arabs' has been well under way for nearly a century. The reignition of war between Israel and Hizballah forces in Lebanon in the summer of 2006 and the absence of meaningful peace between Israel and the Arab states of the region continue to augur badly for lasting peace. Within its confines the differences between these peoples, religions and attitudes have at times manifested themselves in conventional wars, and led to the militarization of the entire region, where even aspiring democrats have only recently begun to discard their military uniforms. Inevitably under such a climate, economic relations, culture, history, literature, mass media and communications, international organizations, regional associations and interest groups have all been enlisted and manipulated to demonize the enemy. Rival nationalisms, the superpower conflict, the right to self-determination, Islamism, anti-Semitism, control of oil, and the emergence of Third World radicalism and anti-Western sentiment have all played parts, making up the cocktail of conflict described by Sahliyeh as 'the most lethal and volatile . . . and the most difficult to resolve'.[2]

Although the essence of the conflict is the battle between two people over one land – the territory of the Holy Land, including Jerusalem – over time the Arab–Israeli dimension has developed characteristics often far removed from the original Palestinian issue and territorial focus. One example is the bitter dispute and battle that has raged from the late 1970s between Israel and the Lebanese Islamic resistance movements, and latterly the Shi'a Hizballah organization. While Israel's original motives in invading and subsequently occupying Lebanon in 1978 and 1982 were to rout the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), once the PLO had left the country the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) remained as an occupying force and made themselves the principal enemies of the Lebanese Shi'a population.[3] Hizballah was subsequently formed as a resistance movement to end Israel's illegal occupation of southern Lebanon and, until Israel's withdrawal in spring 2000, waged a major military campaign against its enemy and those perceived to be its supporters. The latest reignition of the Israeli–Hizballah battle occurred following the kidnap of Israeli soliders by Hizballah when Israel launched a major military offensive against the whole of Lebanon. While it may be true that there was little love lost between the PLO and Hizballah during the Lebanese civil war, they ended up sharing a common antipathy to Israel as an occupying force on Arab lands. Certainly, this is an instance where Israel's policies may have inadvertently created allies out of enemies, thus undermining its own security.

The roots of this conflict lay in the resistance mounted by the Arabs and their leaders in the region against the initial attempt by settler Zionists, most of whom were immigrants from Europe, to build a state in Palestine. But it was the subsequent dispossession of the Palestinian Arab population, the creation of a Palestinian national identity and the emergence of new Arab nationalisms united in opposition to Zionism and to the close association it was perceived as having with the forces of imperialism and colonialism that gave the conflict its wider dimension. The struggle to gain and retain Arab rights to self-determination over Palestine in the face of European dominance over the entire region had its roots in the First World War, when the British made contradictory commitments to the Arabs and to the Zionist Jews to enlist their support against Germany and its Ottoman (Turkish) allies. The Arab leadership was led to believe that Arabs would control much of the region following the defeat of the Ottomans, but at the same time the British and French were planning to replace Istanbul as the dominant power centre in the region. The situation was complicated further by a British promise to the Zionists to support the establishment of a Jewish national home in Arab Palestine: the Balfour Declaration (described in Chapter 2). The expediency of measures taken to further war aims was to be questioned in the decades that followed. It soon emerged that the British had promised more than they could deliver and had engaged in duplicitous behaviour described as a 'disgusting scramble for the Middle East'.[4]

When the Ottoman Empire was dissolved at the end of the First World War most of the Middle East became subject to colonial rule or influence. European powers, principally Britain and France, redrew the boundaries of the Middle East and many Arab areas came under their direct political control. This period of direct and indirect colonial control, short lived though it was, resulted in the invention and promotion of new Arab rulers and monarchs presiding over newly created states within artificial boundaries. It sowed the seeds of future conflicts – between Israel and the Arabs (involving the Iranians) and among the Arabs themselves – that for the most part remained unresolved throughout the last century.

As we describe in the next chapter, the incipient conflict between the Jews and Arabs in the region took shape during the first three decades of the twentieth century and culminated in the first direct war in 1948 as Britain ended its mandate in Palestine, which had lasted since 1919. During this period the British authorities were, according to the official remit of the mandate as agreed by the League of Nations, supposed to assist the mandated territory to self-government. But they were caught between conflicting pressures: Zionist attempts to establish their own state (something more than the 'national home' envisaged in the Balfour Declaration, as incorporated into the mandate's provisions) and Arab efforts to oppose this in the pursuit

of their own national aspirations.[5] In these circumstances the British had little option but to pursue an often oppressive policy of control and public order.

The grievances of the Palestinian community in Palestine at the time (particularly over the large influx of Jewish immigrants) raised tension between the two communities and resulted in the 1929 riots when Jews in Jerusalem and Hebron were murdered. This event was followed by further conflict, including the 1936 General Strike and the Palestinian revolt from 1936 to 1939. The British authorities, also under attack from militant Jewish organizations, appeared to be unable to develop policies or strategies to resolve the conflict, and the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe in 1939, and the Nazi-perpetrated Holocaust against six million Jews, had unforeseen consequences for the future of Palestine. After the war Jewish immigration reached new heights, and pressure for a Jewish state in Palestine as a haven for the persecuted survivors of the Holocaust grew relentlessly. The British were increasingly unable to maintain law and order, and meanwhile the Palestinians and their national leadership demanded self-determination. Eventually the whole problem was turned over by the British to the newly established United Nations, which decided to resolve the competing claims for self-determination by promoting partition between the Jews and the Arabs, with Jerusalem falling under international authority. The Zionist movement accepted statehood as a much better deal than the national home they had been offered under the Balfour Declaration amid considerable hostility and nascent conflict from their Arab neighbours. There was a belief that securing statehood would promote a much-needed sense of security for the Jewish people and an end to their exile. The diaspora could be gathered in under the flag of Israel. However, the Palestinians and Arab states rejected the UN partition plan, arguing that it was inherently biased and ignored the legitimate rights of Palestinians, who complained that their land was being given away as a means of appeasing European guilt over the Holocaust. When the British withdrew in May 1948 the battle for the land of Palestine broke out in earnest between the Israelis and the Arabs.

The war started shortly after the Israeli Declaration of Independence on 15 May 1948, as units from the Arab armies of Egypt, Jordan and Syria (backed by forces from Lebanon and Iraq) attempted to win back the Palestinian soil that had been lost to the Israeli state. The Arab armies, poorly led and equipped, were ultimately unsuccessful and failed to defeat the small but well-motivated and highly trained Israeli Defence Force. Armistice negotiations did not occur until January 1949, by which time between 700,000 and 800,000 Palestinians had fled their homes or been forced to flee. In some cases Palestinians, encouraged by their Arab leaders, left the battle-zones in the belief that after a swift Arab victory they would be able

to return. In other cases they fled their villages after hearing news of the massacre by Israeli forces in the village of Deir Yassin. As Rodinson notes, 'Many leading Jews were glad to see the departure of a population which by its very presence presented an obstacle to the realisation of the Jewish state projected by the Zionists.'[6] The Palestinians who arrived as refugees in Lebanon, Transjordan, Syria, Egypt and the Gaza Strip quickly realized that they had lost their homes and would not be allowed to return to them. The only comfort that the leaders of the Arab world could offer was the promise that this first encounter was just one war in a major conflict that would continue on their behalf. The Palestinian community refers to this period in their history as '*al-nakbah*' – the catastrophe.

In terms of territory the end of the war meant the effective partition of Palestine, as it was formerly known. The West Bank and East Jerusalem (including the old city) came under the control of Jordan and its monarch King Abdullah. The Egyptian government administered the Gaza Strip from Cairo. The rest of the country, which as a result of the armistice had enlarged from 14,000 to 21,000 square kilometres, came within the new Israeli state. The Arabs were thus left with one-fifth of the original territory of their land and their aspirations for an Arab Palestine battered and weakened by the war.

Thus, within days of its birth the new Israeli state had been compelled into war with its Arab neighbours. The war lasted until armistice agreements secured in January 1949. Aware of their poor chances, the intertwined political and military leadership of Israel had no option but to engage in the fight against the six Arab armies ranged against them. One advantage that the Israelis believed they had over their enemy was referred to by Israeli Chief of Operations Yigael Yadin in May 1948 when he remarked, 'the problem is to what extent our men will be able to overcome enemy forces by virtue of their fighting spirit, of our planning and our tactics'.[7] The new state, forged in war, emerged from that experience with a unique character and an emphasis on institutions, such as the military, which might not, under more peaceful circumstances of statehood, have been necessary.

The repercussions of the conflict were widespread and enduring. Among them was an initial period of instability in the Arab countries as they came to terms with their defeat, and a backlash against British and Western influence in the region. This was most noticeable in increasing popular opposition to the British-supported Hashemite monarchies in Iraq and in Jordan. In 1951 Jordan's King Abdullah was assassinated and the new King Hussein – bowing to popular pressure – dismissed General Glubb Pasha, the British commander of the Arab Legion. The upsurge of popular nationalism elsewhere across the region in response to the Arab defeat signalled the end of the corrupt royalist regime in Egypt, where, in 1952, the

Free Officer Movement led by Gamal Abdel Nasser mounted a coup, trumpeting the rhetoric of Arab nationalism and unity in the face of the Zionist enemy across the region. In the eyes of Arab nationalist radicals in Cairo, Beirut, Baghdad and Damascus, Israel was an enemy not just because of the injustice against their brethren in Palestine but because of its close association with what they perceived as Western imperialist aspirations towards the region and in particular its recently exploited massive oil reserves. Thus, radical Arab nationalism and pan-Arab pretensions created a new dimension in the conflict with Israel, as was strikingly demonstrated during the 1956 Suez War.

The Suez conflict, which erupted over the decision by Nasser to nationalize the Suez Canal Company in July 1956, was a major escalation of anti-colonialist and, by association, anti-Zionist sentiment in the Arab world. The Suez Canal was built in the 1860s and by the late 1880s came under British and other foreign control (via a number of shareholders), maintained by British occupation of Egypt. The British saw the canal as an essential element in their control of the main sea route to India. In the four-year period leading up to the nationalization of the canal, Nasser embarked on a programme of pan-Arab cohesion and made military pacts with Syria, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. His goal was the restoration of the Arab nation under Egyptian leadership and an end to foreign influence in the area. The nationalization of Suez was the first time that a Third World country had successfully regained one of its major foreign-owned assets.

Both the French and the British were outraged at Nasser's decision. A highly secret tripartite operation in collusion with the Israelis was organized which hatched a plot to regain control over the canal. On 29 October 1956 the Israeli army launched Operation Kadesh; their forces crossed the border and entered the Sinai Desert. Over a period of five days they routed the Egyptian army and approached the canal. In accordance with a prearranged plan – 'Operation Musketeer' – the British and French bombed Egyptian targets and sent their troops to occupy Port Said and Port Fouad on the pretext of protecting them from hostile action, whether from Israel or Egypt. The Israelis had accepted a ceasefire as part of the secret prearrangement with the British and French, but the Egyptians refused to pull their troops back from the canal, as had been anticipated by the three colluding powers. Despite the military successes, the British and French were forced to accept a ceasefire and withdraw their forces as a result of US economic pressure on Britain and international public opinion as expressed through the UN. Nasser had held on to the canal and Arab nationalist feelings and anti-imperialist sentiment reached an all-time high.

The dispute between the Arabs and Israelis was exacerbated by the Arab perception of the Israeli role in the conflict as nothing more than defender

of Western interests in the region. As a result tensions remained high and the deep animosity between the nations worsened. By siding with France and Britain and continuing to occupy the Gaza Strip between 1956 and 1957, the Israelis managed not only to deepen the rift with Egypt further but to anger the USA, bringing a close relationship under severe pressure. Within Israel the involvement of their armed forces in the 1956 crisis was perceived quite differently. The Israeli political and military establishment were concerned by persistent Arab attacks on Israel mounted from Gaza and the Sinai and by the Egyptian blockade of the Red Sea; consequently, the Israeli port of Eilat took defensive steps against Egyptian belligerence. While it is true that the Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai in March 1957 was prompted by US and UN pressure, Israeli involvement in Suez, secret agreements apart, would have been considered part of the domestic security strategy and sold as such to the Israeli people. In many respects the legacy of 1956 would not be visited upon the Israelis for some ten years or more. There can be little doubt, however, that Nasser's motives in 1967 were, at least partially, rooted in the 1956 encounter and his memories of military humiliation.

The war of 1967 was inevitable; the disputes between the Arabs and the Israelis had remained unresolved and the era of fervent and self-confident Arab nationalism was at its peak. On the eve of the war the combined Arab troop numbers were more than double those of the Israelis. The Arabs also had three times as many tanks and aircraft. Yet within six days they were totally routed by the Israeli army. The build up to the war on the Arab side had been fraught with reckless rhetoric and strident propaganda about the military prowess of the 'Arab people' and their ability to defeat the Israelis, to sweep them into the sea and win back Palestine. Egypt was the most eager of the combatants and was in a sense a victim of its own propaganda, which grossly exaggerated its potential as a military power. The Syrians and Jordanians, with territory at stake, were somewhat less hawkish but came under pressure from Nasser and the weight of their own public opinion intoxicated by the prospect of victory.[8] Nasser, determined to earn his place in the history books as the undisputed leader of the Arab world, pursued the liberation of Palestine as if it were a Holy Grail. At the same time he oppressed the Egyptian-administered Palestinian population of the Gaza Strip and the refugee community in Egypt, imprisoning thousands of them throughout his presidency.

The war took place between 5 and 11 June. The Jordanian army was defeated and its air force destroyed; similar Israeli victories occurred over the Egyptians in the Gaza Strip and the Syrians in the Golan Heights. By Saturday 10 June the Israeli army occupied the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank (including East Jerusalem and the Old City) and the

Golan Heights. The acquisition of this territory increased Israel's size by six times (almost half that formerly administered by Jordan), which had massive logistical, military and political implications for the Israeli government.

Once again Israel had prevailed militarily despite the odds stacked against it. Following the appointment of Moshe Dayan as Defence Minister just days before the war, the Israeli armed forces had meticulously planned their daring campaign against a belligerent Nasser and his Egyptian forces. By seizing the initiative, launching the war before the Arabs could, the Israelis were able to dominate the rest of the military campaign, first by air and then by land. By the end of the war, Israel, a 'country that had felt embattled and threatened only days before was now the decisive military power in the Middle East . . . Equally Israel had changed in the process, for she was now an occupying power.'[9] The role of the UN during the hostilities was minimal. However, on 22 November, after five months of bargaining, it passed Security Council Resolution 242, which required a withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied territories in exchange for the cessation of fighting, the recognition of all states in the region, freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Aqaba, and the creation of demilitarized zones.[10]

The fourth conflict between Israel and the Arabs six years later had a number of unique features. First, Egyptian and Syrian forces were able (albeit temporarily) to break through Israeli lines, an unprecedented military success for the Arabs. Second, although Israel was the ultimate victor, the perceived weakness of the army in the initial stages of the hostilities affected national morale and self-confidence and led political leaders to rethink their position vis-à-vis their Arab neighbours. Third, the war was an Egyptian and Syrian attempt to recover their own territory, with the Palestinian issue coming a poor second in terms of strategy and objectives. Finally, it was during this war that the Gulf states started to use oil prices and boycott as major weapons against the West. For the first time the West was made aware of the significant leverage the Arab states held over the oil-dependent economies of the capitalist world.

In 1973 Nasser's successor, President Anwar Sadat, announced that he was preparing to attack Israel in an attempt to recover territory lost in the war of 1967. Sadat had been making such statements for a number of years while conducting a low-key campaign of attrition across the canal, so his latest announcements were not treated seriously. Although both American and Israeli intelligence networks were to a great extent aware of the plans, little was done in preparation for an attack. Nevertheless, on 6 October, the Egyptians crossed Suez and the Syrians attacked the Golan Heights. The USA and the Soviet Union immediately commenced a diplomatic effort to halt the conflict. At this point, as we discuss further in Chapter 3, neither

of the superpowers wanted to risk being drawn into the war. Within two weeks the situation had begun to turn in Israel's favour, reversing earlier Syrian and Egyptian gains. By 24 October Israeli tanks had reached the suburbs of Cairo.

At the last minute the Americans began to pressurize the Israelis, and Sadat went to the UN for a ceasefire agreement. The UN passed Resolution 338, calling for the ceasefire. On 24 October the fighting stopped. The Israelis had ultimately been successful, but the war demonstrated that they now had to regard Arab forces – especially the Egyptians – as being a match for their own and that the conflict would inevitably continue.

While the superpowers had been able to impose the ceasefire agreement, arranging an enduring peace was shown to be a difficult and lengthy process. One outcome of the war was that the US administration was forced to make a serious effort to push for peace between Israel and the Arab states. The war had exacerbated the instability of an already unstable Middle East, had frustrated American ambitions in the region, and had hit the US economy through the oil embargo announced by Arab oil producers. An OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) increase in oil prices of several hundred per cent, plus the total embargo against the USA announced by Saudi Arabia and other Arab oil producers on 19 October, was intended to achieve a number of goals, with the resolution of the Palestinian issue among them. As Gerner notes, 'analysts differ on whether the events of 1973 resulted in a fundamental restructuring of the relationship between the Arab oil-producing countries and the West'.[11] It seems likely that it did.

At Camp David – the summer residence of the US President – on 17 September 1978 President Carter succeeded in getting the leaders of Egypt and Israel to sign a peace treaty between their two countries and agree to a framework of negotiation for peace in the Middle East. This was a momentous event in the history of the Arab–Israeli dispute. After the 1973 war Sadat felt he had little to lose in 'throwing in his lot' with the USA. He knew that in terms of diplomatic settlement only the Americans could deliver Israel into a peace, for they alone had enough influence over the Israelis to prise concessions out of them. He was also hopeful that a programme of US economic assistance would benefit the Egyptian economy. For Sadat, initially, one important aspect of the treaty was the opportunity to link the Egyptian–Israeli peace to the issue of the Palestinians. However, the Egyptian domestic situation, especially economic pressures, made him desperate to reach an agreement even in the face of minimal Israeli concessions. The Palestinians were suspicious of Sadat's role and reluctant to be associated with an agreement negotiated in their absence. This resulted in the Palestinian issue becoming sidelined in the peace negotiations, it being seen as too difficult to resolve. Sadat paid a high price for his willingness to make

peace with the government of Israel: it ultimately led to his assassination on 6 October 1981. The peace treaty also left Egypt isolated in the Arab world, declared a pariah and shunned by the other Arab states.

The Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty was the product of intense negotiations, accompanied by theatrical grandstanding, influenced by an array of economic inducements and domestic pressures, and achieved through the success of the American government in bringing the two parties together. It demonstrated that Washington had the ability to influence Israel when its interests demanded such a course. It has been argued that the treaty was purely the result of US pressure for settlement of the Arab–Israeli conflict (which among other things was destabilizing world oil prices). Certainly the American role at this stage of the peace process could accurately be described as dominating and exclusive. Attempts by Sadat in 1976 to get the UN to resolve to internationalize the peace conference were thwarted by the Americans, a policy that Washington has tended to follow ever since. Carter recognized the importance of the Palestinian issue as central to the resolution of the Arab–Israeli conflict: a separate peace would flounder if Palestine was not dealt with, and Camp David proved him right. To a certain degree US influence in the peace process meant that it was able to establish a new foothold in the Middle East while enhancing its special relationship with Israel. However, this was the limit of American achievement. It had been hoped that the peace process would encourage other Arab states – like Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria – to enter into a similar process. Instead these states joined the Soviet-sponsored radical 'Rejectionist' front, headed by Syria, which aimed the majority of its attacks at American 'imperialist and Zionist' policies.

The Israelis, for their part, viewed the treaty as a success. Although they had succumbed (to some extent) to US pressure in making peace with Egypt on terms Cairo could accept, overall they had gained much and conceded little (merely a return of the Sinai to Egypt). They had also effectively neutralized the one Arab power that presented a significant military threat to their security. The adage 'No war without Egypt' accurately applied here. In addition, by pursuing a bilateral peace treaty they adroitly avoided linkage to the Palestinian issue. Egypt may have regained the Sinai but it lost the respect of the rest of the Arab world and was regarded as an outcast. The Palestinians gained nothing from the peace treaty – not that they had sought anything. The Israelis promised unspecific long-term considerations for granting Palestinian autonomy, but in the meantime Israeli concerns focused on the Palestinian threat both within and outside their borders; more specifically the escalation of 'fedayeen' attacks from the southern area of Lebanon which was then termed 'Fatahland'. In this context it was no surprise that the Israeli Prime Minister, Menachem Begin, made no secret

of the fact that as far as he was concerned a peace agreement with Egypt would ignore the Palestinian right to self-determination.

Begin's decision to invade Lebanon was in some senses an Israeli answer to the Palestinian issue but ultimately embroiled others further in the conflict and put the usually cordial US–Israeli relationship under severe pressure. Israeli logic behind the invasion was twofold: first, to protect its northern borders from Lebanon-based Palestinian guerrilla attacks; second, to expel the PLO from Lebanon. Aware that Sadat's only concern was not to compromise regaining the Sinai, and knowing that the Arab world was divided and the PLO relatively isolated, Israeli leaders felt they had a free hand to sort out Lebanon for themselves. In 1978 they had already briefly invaded the country, establishing what was referred to as a 'buffer zone' in its southern territory. But they had been forced to retreat as a result of US pressure.

Throughout 1981 there was a noticeable rise in tension: a missile crisis with Syria in spring was followed on 7 June by a raid against the Iraqi nuclear centre of Tammuz. By December Israel had formally annexed the Golan Heights, which had been captured from the Syrians in the war of 1967. But, crucially, in June 1981 the IDF and PLO troops based in south Lebanon had shelled each other until the United States negotiated a ceasefire with the two parties. Against this background, it was inevitable that certain elements of the Israeli military would use their influence within government to take action against the PLO in Lebanon. Although there were splits within the military over this issue, the 'hawks' prevailed and steered Begin into a further course of invasion.

'Peace for Galilee' was the name given to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982. Officially the Israelis declared that their march across the border was only a question of affirming control of a forty-kilometre strip, from which terrorists would no longer be able to shell the north of the country. Yet, despite these apparently limited aims, the IDF soon found itself in Beirut. The city was soon under Israeli-imposed blockade. Thus began the siege of mainly Muslim and Palestinian West Beirut, where Palestinians and the Lebanese National Movement fought side by side, while the Christian Phalangists lent support to the IDF as it attempted to eradicate the PLO. There seemed no end to the phosphorus, napalm, cluster and imploding bombs that relentlessly poured down on the starving, parched west section of the city. Apart from 6,000 PLO guerrillas in the besieged city, there were some half a million Lebanese and Palestinian civilians, and every day of the bombardment about 200 or 300 of them were killed.

As the bombardment went on, day after day, the international community looked on impotently, seemingly mesmerized by the brutal nature of the Israeli action. The European Economic Community (EEC), the UN Security

Council and other bodies issued condemnations, while the United States remonstrated ineffectually with its protégé and was brusquely snubbed. Yet it is difficult to disagree with Gilmour's conclusion that

> the most feeble reaction came from the Arab world which seemed petrified into silence and inaction. Beirut, the ideological birthplace of Arab nationalism and for long the intellectual and commercial capital of the Arab world, was being pulverised by a brutal foreign army while the Arab states did nothing.[12]

In this respect Israel succeeded in its greatest victory in its conflict with the Arab world, and exposed the hollow posturing of the grand slogans of 'Arab unity' in the face of the Zionist threat. If the leaders of the Arab world could not rally to the defence of its brethren in Beirut as Israeli tanks rolled into its suburbs, what did 'unity' mean?

On 30 August 1982 the PLO admitted defeat and the leadership and guerrillas left Lebanon in shame. Its leader Yasser Arafat moved on to Tunis and the PLO network went with him. The departure of the PLO, however, was not the end of Israel's battle against the Palestinians of Lebanon. On 16 and 17 September Israeli troops moved into West Beirut, and their Phalangist allies massacred at least 2,000 children, women and elderly men in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila. Israeli collusion in the massacres appalled the world.

Such was the tragic end of the first phase of the Lebanon War. A second phase now began: that of Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon. For eighteen years Israel remained in Lebanon and promoted its presence through its local ally, the Christian-led South Lebanon Army (SLA). UN forces, mandated in 1978 to act as peacekeepers until Israel withdrew, found themselves embroiled in various battles between Lebanon's militias and the SLA and IDF. Israel's northern border remained vulnerable to attack and domestic pressure grew for an end to Israel's Lebanon experience. As Israeli casualty rates rose the country's political leaders responded. In 1999, following his election as Prime Minister, former Defence chief Ehud Barak announced that Israeli troops would finally be withdrawn from Lebanon. They finally did so in humiliation in May of the following year after Hizballah resistance fighters had inflicted heavy casualties on the Israelis and brought about the total collapse of the SLA.[13]

The Israel–Lebanon War of 2006, discussed in detail in Chapter 5, altered the balance of forces viz-à-viz the Arab–Israeli conflict more widely. First, the war demonstrated an unprecedented weakness in both the Israeli military establishment and the political leadership of the country. The fact that a well-armed militia so severely undermined Israel's defensive capacity has

led to a major domestic fallout in Israel. The war also established a linkage between actors and events in Iraq, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Israel and the USA that continues to hinder efforts at resuming a peace process that engages all the major parties in the Arab–Israeli conflict.

As this chapter has demonstrated, there are no outright winners and far too many losers in this brief balance sheet of the Arab–Israeli conflict. During the course of these hostilities national revenues have been squandered on the purchase of weapons. Some states have further impoverished themselves in seeking loans from Western arms manufacturers and governments to purchase a technology dedicated to regional domination rather than development. In as much as the Palestinian issue has closed Arab ranks in the quest for justice it has perhaps also done as much to divide the Arab world, ordinary citizens and leaders alike.

Progress towards resolving the dispute seems to have been achieved only under two significant conditions. The first is American pressure, influence and guarantees in winning concessions from Israel and rewarding the parties involved (mostly financially) for taking risks on peace. The second is the Israeli-preferred route of negotiation via bilateral rather than multilateral or international forums, such as the United Nations. Washington, generally speaking, has supported this tactic and facilitated such a process at Camp David in the negotiation of a separate peace between Israel and Egypt. For those who still believe that the only way a just and comprehensive peace can be forged in the Middle East is through the participation of the international community and specifically the UN, there can be little cause for comfort in achievements so far. But, however reached, a lasting and just peace depends not on treaties forged by outside parties able to cajole and pressure leaders but in the quality of that peace and its sustainability through popular acceptance over present and future generations in both Israel and the Arab world. Sadly, there is currently little evidence that this new dawn is anything but a distant prospect.

2 The Palestinian–Israeli conflict

Hostages to history

Some of the most enduring images of the twentieth century have been generated by the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. The historic handshake in September 1993 between Israeli leader Itzhak Rabin and Palestinian chief Yasser Arafat is but one of them. For the better part of a century the conflict of two peoples over one land has defined the politics of the region and has had a major impact on many aspects of international politics, including political economy, and international and state terrorism. In some respects, as we argue in this chapter, both the Palestinians and the Israelis have been hostages to their own histories as well as to each other. In addition, the nature of the contemporary world since 1945 can go some way in explaining the nature of this conflict and the major factors that have dominated it at various junctures.

The themes of the conflict, as we shall discuss in this chapter, embrace many of those tensions that characterize the modern world and its development. Thus it should be made clear that we do not subscribe to the argument that for centuries the Arabs and Jews have been in a fatal, atavistic embrace based on primordial hatred. Instead, we agree with Tessler, who asserts that 'both Israel's Jews and Palestinians have legitimate and inalienable rights. These rights are rooted in the historical experience of each people', rather than other factors.[1] Since the early roots of the conflict the battle between Palestinian and Israeli has been about territoriality, identity, ethnicity and religion, economics, competing nationalisms, colonialism and imperialism. Attempts to resolve the conflict, once described as one of the most intractable on earth, have in the past floundered on mutual suspicion and antagonism often exacerbated by the influence of other actors on the conflict. In this chapter we shall discuss these themes rather than present a chronology of events and hostilities.

The Palestinian–Israeli conflict reveals that the divisions that run between Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews are multifaceted. Some might argue that the conflict is a religious and sectarian issue and go some way in agreeing

with the primordial argument that there is something inevitable about such a relationship. Others perceive the conflict as ethnic and point to the incompatibility, despite the same Semitic origins, of two such distinct groups as Arab and Jew. Some view the deep divisions between Palestinians and Israelis as the results of competing nationalist agendas, each with a unique political view. And still others explain the conflict as a classic class-based colonial paradigm under which only a united working class (Arab and Jewish) will bring about peace and political change. All of these interpretations, along with others, have had roles to play in explaining why Palestine and its territory became the most enduring battleground of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

For our purposes the examination begins at the end of the nineteenth century. The roots of the conflict lie in ethno-political rather than purely religious differences. Indeed, under the rule of the Ottoman Turks the Jews, Christians and Muslims of Palestine coexisted peacefully. Like all peoples of the region, however, the inhabitants of Palestine were deeply affected by the intervention of the West, not just in terms of ideas and culture but by the consequences of colonial control and foreign penetration of Arab lands. In terms of European ideas and movements, one of the most influential was nationalism. Indeed, the settlement of land by Jews from Europe from the late 1890s onwards happened as a direct result of the influence of a new Jewish nationalism entitled 'Zionism'. The congruent origins of Zionism and the rival Palestinian nationalism need to be stressed, not just in the historical context but in terms of explaining the course of the conflict throughout the twentieth century. Indeed, it is both remarkable and unfortunate that at the same historical juncture both Jews and Arabs became motivated and conscious of the same themes of self-determination, nationhood and statehood in response to the motifs so strongly associated with nationalism.

'A country without a people for a people without a country' (Chaim Weizman, World Zionist Congress). The emergence of Zionism crystallized the desire within the Jewish diaspora for a Jewish homeland for the Jewish people. Its chief architects, such as Theodor Herzl, a European Jewish intellectual, who in 1896 published a book entitled *The Jewish State*, maintained that assimilation for Jews would never happen and that the Jews should found their own state, preferably in Palestine, the ancient home of the Jewish people. As Gresch and Vidal point out, the link to the former homeland was strong: 'The memory of the lost homeland and the desire to return there were long fostered by religion alone: "Next year in Jerusalem" believers prayed each year.'[2] The call of Zionism was the direct product of hundreds of years of European anti-Semitism and the persecution of Jewish communities, including the Russian pogroms. Zionism was an ideology of

its time and place – a product of Western political thought and intellectual trends embracing the nationalist vision.

From 1897, when the first Zionist Congress was convened in Basle, Switzerland, to 1917 the Zionists promoted their vision and lobbied the 'great powers' of USA, Britain, France and Russia for political support. At the same time the first Zionist settlers set off for Palestine to join the members of the Jewish community who were already there. From 1897 to 1903 some 30,000 Jews emigrated and by 1914 there was a total of 80,000 Jews in Palestine. The Zionists in Europe found most sympathy among members of the British government (by this time involved in the First World War), who, through a mixture of hard-headed military strategy and romantic pro-Zionist sentiment, saw some value as part of their war strategy in the movement. The culmination of this support, as discussed in Chapter 1, was the Balfour Declaration. For the Zionist movement the declaration, although by no means everything they wanted, was a significant recognition of their cause and their claim to the historic home of the Jewish people in Palestine. In later years, during Britain's mandate of Palestine, however, many in the Zionist movement viewed such patronage with barely disguised frustration and hostility towards their former British friends, whom they felt were not wholeheartedly supporting the creation of a Jewish state – as opposed to merely a Jewish national home.

One major obstacle stood in the way of Zionist aspirations: Palestine's Arab population. Yet, as Gerner points out, for the Zionists, the fact 'that Palestine had an existing population . . . was no more relevant than was Kenyan history to the British or Algerian society to the French'.[3] However, as Jewish immigration to Palestine increased, new Zionist communities were established, economic methods were implemented and society changed, the Palestinians began to organize themselves, establishing their own new nationalist movements and parties in the belief that they had a legitimate right to self-determination alongside others of their Arab brethren across the region. Nevertheless, the Palestinian Arabs could only stand by in dismay as Britain laid claim to their land, as subsequently endorsed by a League of Nations mandate at the end of the First World War. Such decisions, along with continuing tensions with the Zionist settlers, further galvanized the Palestinians. So the roots of Palestinian nationalism lay in the same rights-based principles as Zionism.

With the establishment throughout the 1920s and early 1930s of nationalist organizations, the Palestinian political elite lobbied for change. By 1936 such frustrations had reached fever pitch as the Palestinian leadership called a major general strike and the country fell into a revolt that would last some three years. In 1939 the revolt collapsed as the Palestinians descended into bitter internecine struggle. In addition, the British authorities had deported

or imprisoned the major leaders of the Palestinian nationalist movement. In one sense the outcome of this period of mandate was that the two principal communities of Palestine, in their commitment to competing nationalism, drew a growing set of boundaries between each other which created economic, religious, cultural and political cleavages that made the likelihood of integration and cooperation increasingly difficult. For example, while the Zionists deliberately pursued a policy of denying employment opportunities to the Arabs, the Arab leadership issued fatwas (religious sanctions) against anyone selling land to the Jews. The many, increasingly insurmountable, frontiers between these communities became a form of partition unanticipated by the country's rulers.

The British struggled for a political solution to the ever-deepening divisions between Jews and Arabs in Palestine under their rule. One commission after another was formed to address the issue. However, both the Zionist movement in Palestine and the Palestinian Arab factions were steadily undermining British rule. In 1937 the Peel Commission first proposed the partition of Palestine into three sectors: an Arab state, a Jewish state, and an area including Jerusalem. Two years later the British announced a limit on the number of Jewish immigrants who would be allowed into Palestine. But this measure would have only a temporary impact and would be turned on its head in the face of the massive tide of Jews fleeing Hitler. By the end of the Second World War the British had thrown in the towel. Clement Attlee admitted that Palestine was an 'economic and political liability' and called on the newly formed United Nations to resolve the problem of this 'twice promised land' – which it then attempted to do by opting for partition, as the British had. But this two-state solution to the conflict between Palestinians and Zionists in Palestine was unacceptable to the Palestinians and triggered further embittered and embattled relations between the two communities for the next half a century.

'On this day that sees the end of the British mandate and in virtue of the natural and historic right of the Jewish people and in accordance with the UN resolution we proclaim the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine.' These were the words with which, on 14 May 1948, David Ben Gurion, leader of the Zionist movement, announced to the world the birth of the state of Israel. He affirmed the new state's claim to legitimacy: that of the Jewish people's right, according to biblical promises made by Jehovah to Abraham.

The new state, however, although recognized by the UN, immediately found itself in confrontation with its Palestinian population and their Arab supporters. Further conflict seemed to be the only item on the agenda. The war of 1948 proved a victory for Israel and a national disaster for the Palestinians, hundreds of thousands of whom found themselves dispossessed of their homes, land and historic heritage, and crammed into squalid refugee

camps dispersed across the Arab world. The precise events of the war are widely disputed by historians, and both official Zionist and Arab versions are often misleading. On one side historians such as Karsh assert that 'the Palestinian tragedy was not the inevitable outcome of the Zionist dream but primarily a self-inflicted disaster'.[4] However, 'revisionist' Israeli historians – among them Benny Morris and Ilan Pappe – have started to challenge the official version of events, arguing, among other things, that the newly founded state of Israel was guilty of the deliberate 'ethnic cleansing' of Palestinian communities in the war.[5]

Not in doubt is that by the end of the war, the new state of Israel controlled over three-quarters of Palestine, twice as much as originally proposed by the UN. Immigrants settled into many previously Palestinian homes and villages in the new Israeli state. Other former Palestinian settlements were destroyed and deliberately erased from the map. Jerusalem, which the British and UN had declared should be internationalized, became a divided city, the two halves under the respective control of the Israelis and the Jordanians.

There is certainly enough 'evidence' on all sides to generate the important founding myths that are needed to galvanize nations, build new states and sustain liberation movements for many decades. For the Zionists, the founding myths of the state and its conflict with the Palestinians have played a part in helping to create a nation from a settler and immigrant community gathered from many parts of the globe. On the other side, the folklore that surrounds the events of the dispossession has played an important part in sustaining a dispossessed and stateless community that is now scattered across the globe. In both cases competing nationalisms and ideological impulses have encouraged many to sustain those myths as important national motifs setting one community apart, once again, from the other.

Those Palestinians finding themselves within the frontier of the new Israeli state became unequal citizens. In more than half a century there has been no sign of integration between the Jews and the Arabs of Israel. Separation of these groupings has been officially encouraged; intermarriage is rare and not permitted under religious law in Israel. Schooling, housing and other services are largely confined to one ethnic group or another. This official policy promotes division within Israeli society because it does not embrace the separate but equal philosophy in practice. Arabs and Jews remain unequal parties in many aspects of life.

Within the new state of Israel a number of ethnic and religious groups vied with each other for power. Palestinian refugees in the Arab world organized themselves politically, embracing and developing a nationalist programme based on the right of self-determination. Their claims and rights were recognized by the UN but were largely ignored in practice by the international community. Under the limitations imposed by the vagaries of

Arab authoritarian rule the refugee populations in exile planned their liberation.

From this point it appeared that intractable lines of conflict were drawn between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Political solutions to the conflict were in short supply and focused on the tried yet largely unsuccessful formula of partition that, given its ineffectiveness in promoting the resolution of other ethnic disputes (namely Ireland), was questionable in the first place. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, as Israel embarked on a major process of state consolidation, there emerged sharp divisions over the proposed frontier of the state. On the right wing, the Zionist goal of establishing a Jewish state in the whole of Eretz Israel (biblical Israel) was developed and publicly debated. Such expansionist plans were not shared by all of Israel's political leaders, though, as many felt they would condemn Israel and the Palestinians to further conflict. The majority of Israelis clung tenaciously to their new state, enshrined its Jewish identity through the law of the 'right of return', founded in the aftermath of the Holocaust, and were dedicated in safeguarding themselves and future generations. The maintenance of the security of the state and its people, surrounded as they were by so many neighbours who were enemies, became a major preoccupation of the political establishment, with the military gobbling up a consistently large share of the country's gross domestic product. Many Israeli leaders claimed that they were not courting further conflict but rather seeking to establish the security of the state for present and future generations.

If, as we noted in Chapter 1, the Israeli victory in 1967 meant that Israel got more than it bargained for in terms of the newly acquired territories and the Palestinian Arab populations of the West Bank, Arab East Jerusalem (including the Old City) and the Gaza Strip, there was also evidence of splits within the political establishment over what strategy to adopt next. While it is true that the Israelis have remained in continuous occupation of these lands ever since, there have always been opposing arguments against the maintenance of Israeli control (or sovereignty) over them. From a strategic point of view, by holding on to the West Bank, for example, Israel could better defend its borders and major centres of population. On the other hand, there were some who believed that if land were traded for peace with Israel's Arab neighbours, then relinquishing the West Bank or elsewhere would be worth the strategic cost. By and large, however, the strategic arguments have prevailed and remain an important aspect of the present-day peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

While the Israeli occupation has been a military one, the strategic foothold established in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights has been facilitated by the settlement of Israeli Jews on large parts of Palestinian land in direct contravention of UN resolutions on the issue. Many types of

settlement activity, some ideologically motivated, others religiously, and yet more 'paramilitary-security' based, emerged over the ensuing decades and were tacitly supported by the state. The settlement of Palestinian land started in earnest in the early 1970s and by the late 1990s hundreds of thousands of Israeli Jews were living in illegally constructed settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and were proving to be a major and growing obstacle to the resolution of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. Even American threats in the 1990s to halt 'soft loans' to Israel failed to stop the support offered by successive Israeli governments to the right-wing-led settler movement, many of whom were financed by members of the Jewish Zionist diaspora, especially in the United States.[6] Settlement activity has created new demographic realities to which Israel is committed. Nevertheless, the future of the settlements remains a key item on the agenda for the final status negotiations.

Since 1967 the Palestinians, through the extension of their commitment to nationalism, have established formidable political movements for national liberation and self-determination. The best known of these groups is the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), officially established in 1964, an umbrella organization representing four major nationalist factions: Fatah, the Communists, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). In 1968 the PLO fell under the control of Yasser Arafat and his comrades. Although the organization is large, bureaucratic and extremely factional, it has attempted to provide for and serve the Palestinian refugee community, conducted an armed struggle, and represents to the rest of the world the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and independence. Regarded as the 'legitimate' representative of the Palestinian people, including the refugee population, this movement, and its often dissident offshoots, has engaged in a struggle for national liberation. Over its forty-odd years of 'armed struggle', the PLO and other Palestinian dissidents have been involved in acts of political violence – such as hijackings, bomb attacks and assassinations – against Israel and its representatives abroad, including American Jews. It has also confronted two major Arab states – Jordan in 1970 and Lebanon between 1975 and 1982, where it became engaged in civil conflict with state authorities and was accused of running a 'state within a state' for major Palestinian refugee communities resident in both countries.[7] Indeed, until the late 1980s the Palestinians were regarded as synonymous with terrorism the world over. Supporters of Palestinian rights to self-determination argued that the terrorist strategy was part of a cycle of desperation at a time when they were denied political rights or statehood. Many others, however, particularly in policy-making circles in Tel Aviv, Washington and other Western capitals, were not prepared to tolerate the pursuit of politics through the barrel of a gun.

The Palestinian nationalist call to arms was finally set aside in 1988 when Yasser Arafat literally delivered an olive branch at a specially convened meeting of the UN General Assembly in Geneva. At this event Arafat declared, 'we totally and absolutely renounce all forms of terrorism, including individual, group and state terrorism'.[8] The statement was considered a clear indication that the PLO sought full admission into the international fold. It would take five more years before the announcement of Israel's decision to recognize the PLO as the legitimate representatives of the Palestinians and the initiation of the peace process that in early 1993 culminated in an agreement for limited Palestinian autonomy and an agenda for final status negotiations between the two sides. Until that time the Palestinians and Israelis had appeared to live in two separate worlds, each denying the right of existence to the other. But the path to resolving the conflict would still be a long and tough one.

The two communities, however separate in terms of political coexistence, have never lived in total isolation from each other. Hostility and mutual antagonism, however, often characterize their relations. Within Israeli society the state functions very much like that of any other liberal democracy: regular and free elections are held, the citizens are enfranchised and the electoral system is one of proportional representation based on a single constituency. Yet, in the occupied territories, the Israeli state, obsessed with security, has often acted in an authoritarian and repressive fashion. Until 1993 the Palestinian population was governed by myriad military orders requiring permits for every aspect of their lives and eschewing any attempt by the Palestinian community to take power for itself and determine its own affairs. Israelis, on the other hand, believed they lived under the constant threat of Palestinian attacks from all quarters. Such fears were compounded by the very real threats posed by an organization dedicated to armed struggle in the realization of its goals. While hundreds of thousands of Palestinians worked in Israel as day labourers, they were compelled by Israeli law to return to their homes over the 'Green Line' by nightfall. While some friendships managed to grow, they were largely exceptions to a rule on both sides that kept the two communities apart. Although economically tied together, there were very few political, religious or cultural motifs that were common or shared between the two groups. Even in Jerusalem, Israel's so-called 'united capital', Israelis and Palestinians lived very different lives from each other and few urban spaces were available for all to access equally.

In addition, it has to be noted that the economic relationship between Israel and the Palestinians has been undeniably exploitative on Israel's part. The occupied territories became Israel's largest export market and source of cheap labour, and the Palestinian economy was crippled and penalized in return.[9] Until the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising, or Intifada, in 1987

there was also evidence of growing support on the Israeli right wing for the annexation of the West Bank. (Annexation would provide a direct economic benefit to Israel). The only problem facing the annexationist lobby was the issue of what to do with the Palestinian population of the area. By this point a number of political groupings and parties had emerged advocating the 'transfer' or 'mass deportation' of Palestinians to Arab states like Jordan. Indeed, in 1987 the mainstream Israeli press were willing to air debates entitled 'Jordan is Palestine' that openly promoted 'transfer' as a solution to the growing demographic threat within the occupied West Bank.

Within the Palestinian community there was increasing resentment and frustration at the restrictions they faced in everyday life. Any form of political activity was criminalized by the military authorities: the PLO was outlawed, people were banned from free assembly, public meetings were forbidden; membership of political organizations was punishable by long prison sentences, often without trial. By the late 1980s, with the PLO expelled from Lebanon, Jewish settlement continuing apace and the 'iron fist' of occupation perpetrating an almost perpetual stranglehold, a sense of desperation began to permeate Palestinian ranks. In the West Bank and Gaza the Palestinian refugees felt increasingly abandoned by their Arab brethren, who appeared preoccupied with other regional matters. The international community held little sympathy for Palestinian 'terrorists'; and Israel, bolstered by a 'special relationship' with the USA, despite its illegal acts of settlement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, seemed untouchable.

The outbreak of the Intifada in December 1987 marked the culmination of growing political awareness among young Palestinians and starkly exposed the fault line in this conflict between Palestinian and Israeli. The long-term goals of the uprising were articulated as a desire to bring an end to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the establishment of a Palestinian state. In the short term, though, the plan was to disengage from the structure of the Israeli occupation as much as possible and achieve a greater level of Palestinian self-reliance and unity of purpose. The local economy, for example, was boosted through consumers boycotting Israeli products.

The Intifada was a major turning point in the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. The Palestinians, through the quickly established framework of the uprising, indicated that they were rejecting anything that represented Israeli rule over their lives. They were sending a message that said 'no' to Israeli control. This mass rebellion also communicated an important message to the PLO leadership in Tunis, and, as Khalidi asserts, 'betokened a realisation by the PLO leadership that the future of the movement lay in Palestine, rather than outside it'.[10] It is widely acknowledged that this popular-based uprising took the PLO and other Palestinian leaders as much as Israel by surprise.

But the question we must now ask is: did the Intifada galvanize the Israelis and Palestinians into seeking a solution to the deep breach between them? The Intifada shook Israel because of its spontaneous and widespread nature. This was portrayed positively in the international media, which flocked to Israel and the occupied territories to film poignant scenes such as small boys having their bones deliberately broken by Israeli soldiers acting under the express orders of Defence Minister Itzhak Rabin. Initially the Intifada was not a planned event but rather a very powerful and spontaneous Palestinian protest against the everyday indignities inflicted by Israeli control. The first months of the uprising were characterized by mass demonstrations involving every sector of society. The international media's portrayal of women and children, the young and the old demonstrating with such passion went some considerable way in rehabilitating or altering the perception of Palestinians, presenting them not as terrorists but as victims of a military occupation that had lasted some twenty years. The uprising was quickly harnessed by locally based committees, which were formed to help people at every level. The establishment of the United National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU) – representing all factions of the PLO as well as the Islamic movements Hamas and Islamic Jihad – to provide direction to the uprising also represented a major development in Palestinian politics. It demonstrated the maturity of the local political leadership when pursuing a national agenda.

The Israelis had no immediately successful answer to the campaign of mass civil disobedience. Their army, trained and prepared for combat on the battlefield, was often faced with an enemy made up of unarmed women, children and young people whose major weapons against Israel's hi-tech armoury were rocks and Molotov cocktails. The Palestinians had from the outset decided to refrain from the use of firearms against the Israeli army and settlers – a highly successful ploy that played well internationally. But, of course, there were several disturbing aspects to the Intifada, too.

First, the uprising was only serving to deepen divisions between Israelis and Palestinians. However objectionable the policies of the occupation, it had at least forced some level of daily contact between the two groups. The uprising ruptured this tentative relationship that had built up over twenty years. Each side retreated into the laager of their own society, and cross-community contacts were frowned upon and treated with mistrust as dangerously disloyal. Second, the atmosphere of war-like, low-intensity combat meant that informal channels for conflict resolution were eroded or eliminated. Almost as soon as the first attacks on Israelis were launched by such groups as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, moderate organizations in Israeli society like Peace Now were ridiculed and marginalized. Accordingly, the Israeli right wing gained increased support because of their resolutely

anti-Palestinian stance. Indeed, in the 1988 Israeli election, the right wing won a victory at the polls and headed the national unity government. Moreover, extremism and religious radicalism found support within the communities of both Israel and Palestine. Third, the uprising challenged overnight the status quo in the occupied territories. Attempts to quell it by the Israeli army proved ineffective, which in turn affected army morale and led to public debate in Israel about the role of the military. The Israelis realized that they had to do something about the Palestinian issue immediately and had to accept that previous talk of annexation or even maintaining the status quo ante was now completely out of the question. In addition, international pressure was making itself felt to an unprecedented extent within the Israeli political establishment. The international mass media had transmitted film for prime-time viewing of Israel's soldiers taking on unarmed women and children. Commentators criticized Israel's treatment of the Palestinians, and human rights abuses came to light. Both at home and abroad many Jews began to question, for the first time, the efficacy of the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This exposed fissures and tensions within the Jewish community, undermining the previous solidarity of public opinion. For once, the Arabs were ahead in the PR battle for international opinion.

It was also clear that the fissure between the Palestinians and the Israelis had become so deep rooted that the only solution was to offer some glimmer of a negotiated peace process. As it happened, however, it was another event, well away from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, that would create the conditions for decisive change, encouraging all the parties involved, crucially including the Americans, to make a concerted effort to kick-start the peace process.

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990 and the ensuing Gulf crisis (see Chapter 8) had important implications for the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. Most importantly, it stimulated an American-led initiative to secure some kind of Arab–Israeli peace process in the Middle East. In the wake of the crisis the USA sought to re-establish stability in the region, and once again recognized that the Palestinian issue was at the heart of any settlement between Israel and the Arab states. This had to be addressed. With the eclipse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a 'new world order', a historic opportunity to go for peace was now at hand. The moment also provided the Americans, the one remaining superpower, with a chance to dictate the peace they envisioned rather than rely on one promoted by actual parties to the conflict.

The right-wing Likud government in Israel, led by Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, refused, however, to enter into any direct discussion with the Palestinian leadership. Shamir's government still did not recognize the PLO

and made it clear that the most they were prepared to concede to the Palestinians was a limited form of autonomy (similar to that discussed with Sadat at Camp David) in which Israel would retain ultimate control over the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It was under these unpromising preconditions, with the Jordanians providing a cover for the Palestinian negotiators, that the historic first round of Arab–Israeli peace talks were convened under the auspices of the USA and the former USSR in November 1991 in Madrid. Thus a spontaneous mass rebellion in coincidental conjunction with a war elsewhere in the region temporarily and unprecedentedly united East and West. For a variety of reasons, which in one way or another had a linkage back to the dynamics of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, this proved to be the catalyst in promoting a new attempt at a negotiated settlement of that conflict.

Within Israel the election of a Labour government in June 1992 on a pro-peace platform reflected Intifada fatigue within the electorate. This was recognized both at home and abroad as a brave step within the larger national framework of debate about security versus peace. The Intifada had directly affected many sectors of Israeli society – through the increased deployment of Israeli conscript and reserve troops to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the issue of Palestinian labour in Israel. Ordinary Israelis no longer felt free to travel without fear in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and increasingly by the early 1990s a new form of fatal attack was affecting Israeli cities like Tel Aviv: car- and suicide-bomb attacks carried out by Hamas and Islamic Jihad. In this new political climate secret negotiations were subsequently proposed and approved in left-leaning Israeli circles and met with the cautious approval of Prime Minister Rabin himself. In public, however, the formal Madrid process floundered as one obstacle to negotiation after another stymied the ineffectual attempts on all sides to get to grips with the main issues.

As we now know, while the official peace process was seen to stagnate throughout 1993, Israel and the PLO were conducting a highly secret channel of negotiations in Norway. These culminated – to universal surprise – in the official White House ceremony and signing of the 'Declaration of Principles' (DoP). The DoP, or Oslo Accords as they are now called, permitted limited and phased autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. They also provided a future framework for the peaceful resolution of the most important issues pertaining to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict: land, Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security and borders. This was the event that produced the stage-managed handshake between Rabin and Arafat with which we started this chapter. Stage-management, however, would not be enough to establish a meaningful process of trust-building between Israel and the Palestinians and the conclusion of final status peace talks outlined

under the Oslo framework. The peace process continued to be stymied and bedevilled at almost every turn. The reality and pressures of transition and peace-building shattered dreams on both sides of the divide. In Israel Itzhak Rabin was assassinated, the right-wing Likud gained new ascendancy on an anti-negotiation platform, troops were not ordered to redeploy according to agreed timetables and remained on territory they were supposed to evacuate. The newly established Palestinian Authority, headed by PLO-leader Yasser Arafat, failed to deliver security, economic or political dividends for the Palestinians. Escalating Islamist violence against Israel, manifest in the continuing use of suicide bombs, added new dimensions to the conflict and attempts to establish security and peace at one and the same time.

Nevertheless, the election of a new Labour government led by former army general Ehud Barak again on a pro-peace platform in 1999 promoted an illusion that peace might be found. Yet the bitter fallout and absence of genuine compromise on final status issues dogged the talks process throughout 1999 and 2000. Palestinian frustration at perceived Israeli arrogance crystallized around the deliberately provocative visit of former Likud minister Ariel Sharon to Jerusalem's Islamic holy site the Dome of the Rock in September 2000, and a new Intifada broke out. With that, death and violence superseded peace and reconciliation, and the shallow foundations of the Oslo Peace were exposed. Both sides believed, once again, that they were engaged in a war of independence in which there could be only one victor and the enemy must be vanquished. Peace through negotiation fell into abeyance and in the absence of sustained American pressure the two sides fell back into deep suspicion of each other.

However, in 2003 a 'roadmap' sponsored by the UN, USA, Russia and the European Union (known as the Quartet) was formally tabled as a kick-start to a new MEPP, with peace to be concluded as early as 2005. This formula began with US acceptance of a two-state solution to the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. But the process demanded that mutual suspicions needed to be banished, and both sides had to negotiate with flexibility and good faith. How easy that sounded! How often had we been here before! The 'roadmap' was particularly difficult for the hard men of the Palestinian Authority and of the state of Israel, and American pressure would be needed to convince the extreme right-wing government of Ariel Sharon. This presented a major challenge to George W. Bush that, given his increasing problems in Iraq, he was not willing or able to address. The President, moreover, faced fresh elections in 2004 and could not risk alienating traditionally pro-Israeli Republican voters by launching a confrontation with Sharon. Even with a win under his belt in that election, it was clear in 2005 and 2006 that the Bush administration would not take Israel to task. Indeed, bilateral Israeli steps, such as the withdrawal from Gaza in the summer of

2005 and the war in Lebanon in 2006, were strongly supported by the Bush administration.

For the Palestinians, the death of their leader Yasser Arafat, a man whom the USA, Israel and others had considered an impediment to peace, and the presidential election of the moderate Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) did not lead to the anticipated accelerated resumption of the peace process. In January 2006 legislative elections led to the victory of the Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas, partly as a protest vote against perceived corruption within the outgoing government. Almost immediately the Quartet announced that the incoming government would face sanctions if it did not recognize the state of Israel and renounce violence, and respect previous agreements signed between the Palestinians and Israelis. Implicitly, this signalled the Quartet's rejection of the result of a democratic election that had been deemed free and fair by most official observers. Financial sanctions were swiftly imposed upon the new government, creating a state of siege in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Denied money for government coffers, Hamas was compelled to seek other donors, such as Iran, to replace lost revenues. This led to further pressure and intervention of the USA in support of President Abbas, with a worrying consequent development of parallel government. This support also raised the spectre of the USA (and possibly other Western powers) allying themselves with one faction against another, especially as, by the autumn of 2006, inter-factional Palestinian fighting had broken out. This reached disturbing new heights in January 2007, having the appearance of an all-out civil war. The following month, negotiations in Mecca led to the formation of a national unity government, with so-called 'independents' holding important ministerial portfolios such as Finance and Interior. But in Israel and elsewhere the new government was not warmly welcomed and it was still widely perceived as an impediment to peace. Meanwhile, Palestinians continued to complain that Israeli actions – such as building what the Palestinians, supported by a wide body of international opinion, regarded as an illegal wall in the West Bank, continuing with settlement measures, the arrest and detention of Palestinian legislators, human rights violations, and the erection of barriers and checkpoints that were killing the internal Palestinian economy of the West Bank – were also significant impediments to peace that the international community nevertheless seemed reluctant to censure. The notion that the conditions were ripe for peace and justice seemed as elusive on all sides as ever.

9 The politics of conflict and failure of peacemaking

It is a safe prediction that conflict in the Middle East will never be fully resolved, nor for that matter will it be fully resolved anywhere else. Nevertheless, levels of conflict and how they interrelate can be reduced or controlled, and in some cases removed. However, the most important point to be made about conflict and peacemaking since 1945 in the Middle East is that it was not until the early 1990s that substantial progress towards the formal conclusion of peace treaties was achieved within the region.

Conflict resolution as a meaningful process has taken the best part of fifty years to emerge as something in which the parties to conflict can effectively engage. This is not to ignore Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy of the 1970s or the Egyptian–Israeli Peace Treaty of the same era, nor the numerous plans and proposals outlined by successive US administrations since their increasing involvement in the region following the decline of Britain and France after the Second World War. Rather, it is to put such efforts into historical context, a context that actually militated against any serious attempt to address the real issues at the heart of so many conflicts in the region. Indeed, we believe that in many respects it was only with the ending of the Cold War and superpower competition in the Middle East that progress could be made in the major arena of conflict in the region, the Arab–Israeli and Palestinian–Israeli conflicts. We would caution, however, that without a more comprehensive approach to conflict resolution and appropriate linkages to other political and economic issues in the region, there is still a serious likelihood that conflicts such as those in Iraq could undermine the wider goals of peacemakers. Such an approach, however, also requires a major adjustment of the Western mindset towards the region's majority Muslim population, which is currently perceived as part of a suppurating mass of Islamic violence, repression and primitivism that threatens Western interests in the region.

In September 1993, when Israeli Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin and PLO President Yasser Arafat shook hands on the lawn of the White House at the

conclusion of the Declaration of Principles, the rest of the world declared that peace had at last been achieved in the Middle East. The white dove with its olive branch had finally shown up in a region where conflict had become a way of life for citizens and of politics between states. Many may have rubbed their eyes in wonderment at two battle-hardened combatants finally, if grudgingly, grasping the prize of peace. Indeed, both Rabin and Arafat were formerly regarded as men of war, each with battle experience under his belt, each the declared enemy of the other. Now heralded as a 'peace of the brave', the ability of military men to put the past behind them and grasp the hand of friendship was promoted by pundits and commentators alike as a symbol of how far along the path to peace the leaders of the Israelis and Palestinians had come. Such figures added a legitimacy to a difficult process of peacemaking.

But on the same day, far away from the White House in the Middle East itself, a different picture emerged. There was very little celebration, an absence of euphoria, no dancing in the streets, no victory parades and parties, no national days of rejoicing. Instead, there was a recognition that the first, not the last, difficult step on a long road had been undertaken by participants who were largely cajoled and pressurized into peacemaking by outside players and major powers. For many, the famous picture of the Rabin–Arafat handshake was too much to absorb. Generations within the region had battled with each other, being fed on national images demonizing the enemy with atavistic abhorrence. Yet now the 'peace of the brave' was declared from on high. Peacemaking became a daunting, novel prospect, and the familiar certainties of conflict remained all too alluring for leaders whose authority and survival in the region depended on the military.

To argue that many in the Middle East might have a stronger stake in conflict than in peace and stability might sound perverse. However, many of the region's political systems have been dominated for decades by antagonisms around which political power, economic decisions and regional alliances have been constructed. The political and economic elites of many states within the region have prospered on the back of conflict and its associated commerce in arms. In the case of Jordan, for instance, its position as a front-line state in both the MEPP and Iraq contexts attracts considerable financial and other support from the USA and its allies. Internal political divisions and discontents have often been suppressed through appeals to national unity in the face of the enemy from outside, not within. The prevalence of the military in the political systems of the region, as was discussed in the introduction to this book, is immense, even in democracies like Israel where, as Arian has remarked, 'the boundaries between the civilian and the military . . . are not clear . . . With the army being so esteemed, so prominent, and so important, it is not surprising that it is also so powerful.'[1]

Arms spending in the region has always been prolific, higher than that in any other area of the developing world, and with little evidence of decline as yet.

Thus, those who may be said to have a stake in conflict are admittedly few in number, but they form the core elites in many states so their perspective matters. These political leaders are rhetorically bound into the cycle of what appears to be interminable conflict; this is an image they project at national as well as regional and even global level. Breaking out of such habit-forming behaviour appears almost impossible. In striking the pose of conflict, it is no wonder that so many have viewed the Middle East through the kaleidoscope of war, conflict, bloodshed, soldiers, terrorism and guns, and that so many have talked about the region in terms of a cycle of war, conflagration and antagonism.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, signs of major conflict or full-scale war had been absent for a decade. Lebanon, Israel–Palestine, Israeli–Arab, Iran–Iraq, Kuwait and Yemen could all be cited as arenas where major conflict and war had subsided or dissolved into 'complex political emergencies'.[2] Indeed, the closing decades, and particularly the events of the last decade, of the twentieth century contributed to what many called new patterns of conflict transformation and peace-building. Less than a decade later, though, major conflict gripped parts of the region again: Lebanon, Iraq, Israel–Palestine and Israeli–Arab conflagrations were all apparent. Complex political emergencies still raged, too, and the recourse to war once again appeared irresistible to political leaders both inside and outside the Middle East. The regional arms race, particularly the nuclear capacity of at least Israel and Iran, has played its part as an issue of regional escalation rather than preventive strategy for ruling out the kind of major wars that characterized the region for so many decades. Nuclear deterrence was not working when external parties were prepared to deal with the issue in a piecemeal manner. The futility of developing economies dedicated to arms spending, arms production and arms procurement is still barely recognized among the elites of Arab capitals across the region and beyond. The race to acquire or develop ever-more sophisticated weaponry systems, and the willingness of Western governments and others to supply arms, continues apace. Newspapers and specialist reports consistently cite the extent to which states within the region as well as others outside it are willing to fund an escalating arms race, often citing 'mutual deterrence' as the pretext for funding and allowing the shipment of thousands of arms and billions of bullets into contested arenas. As one Gazan asserts, 'For a gun, a piece of bread and the promise of a job tomorrow everyone is a gun for hire when there is hunger and extreme poverty on our streets.'[3]

Since 1945 attempts at peacemaking within the region have been perceived as largely unsuccessful. Indeed, the standard response to a conflict seemed

to be extra effort in exacerbating the problem rather than seeking its peaceful resolution. For many years, the most that was hoped for in the field of peacemaking were internationally mediated ceasefire agreements. In addition, the politics of peacemaking were not viewed positively in the national and regional arenas from which political leaders took their cues. Political legitimacy was all too often tied to aggression, belligerence and a vocabulary of conflict. The nature of leadership within the region was, for many decades, predicated on the notion of strength through aggression and conflict. President Nasser of Egypt, probably the greatest Arab leader of the twentieth century, underpinned his leadership of Egypt and his bid for the regional crown by promoting an agenda of belligerence, in particular against Israel but also in his relations with Jordan, Iraq and Syria, and on the side of one of the parties in the civil conflict in Yemen in the late 1960s. His roots lay in the Egyptian military, and the *coup d'état* launched by the Egyptian Free Officers in 1952 which led to the establishment of the Egyptian republic was but one episode in a phenomenon that characterized the region throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Israel is another example where the military and conflict mentality has dominated the conduct of diplomacy and regional relations for decades. Even when Israel has succeeded in concluding peace with its closest neighbours, that peace has been largely diplomatic and has not extended to the citizens of either party to it. Thus, it is fair to assert that mutual loathing and animosity has been the key characteristic behind many of the key relationships within the region, whether between Israel and Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, Iraq and Iran, Egypt and Libya, Syria and Jordan, Iran and Israel, or Saudi Arabia and Egypt. So does all of this mean that peacemaking is doomed to perpetual failure in the region?

In short, no. Although, as the new millennium witnessed the almost complete collapse of the MEPP, as well as the invasion of Iraq, it is tempting to be more pessimistic. Nevertheless, peacemaking has developed in a variety of ways. Major political changes in the late 1980s occurred regionally and globally to create a new platform from which peacemaking could be launched. Peacemaking – or perhaps more accurately 'conflict transformation' – has finally, albeit with great difficulty in some quarters, entered the vocabulary of policy-makers and political leaders across the region.[4] The futility of conflict has sometimes been recognized independently but mostly through the role, coercive or otherwise, of external actors or mediators. Indeed, it would be foolhardy in the extreme to ignore the impact that external third parties and the internationalization of conflict have had on attempts at conflict resolution in the Middle East. It would, for example, be impossible to understand the dynamics of the Middle East peace process in the 1990s without factoring in the role of the USA and its position as a hegemonic global superpower. In addition, the impact that the United Nations

has had in attempting to resolve the conflict, rather than just condemning actors through Security Council resolutions, needs to be acknowledged. Finally, the growing or potential import of other transnational bodies, such as the European Union, must be acknowledged when examining the thorny issue of external involvement in conflict transformation in the region. Indeed, Rupesinghe has argued that 'the chances of successfully resolving a dispute are much higher if national and international agencies and organisations can be persuaded to combine their efforts'.[4]

Many factors, however, need to be critically assessed to determine the required minimum to maintain the momentum for peace in the region. Such factors include the changing pattern of global politics and the end of super-power rivalry in the Middle East, economic issues linked to globalization and the region's poor performance in global markets, the impact of oil prices on world markets, and the religious dimension of some conflicts in the region which concern millions of adherents to one faith or the other across the globe. This last issue in particular was brought into sharp relief during the Palestinian–Israeli negotiations on Jerusalem in summer 2000 and the subsequent crisis of violence and conflict in the autumn of that year. The status of Jerusalem ignited violence not only between Israelis and Palestinians in the Holy Land, but in New York, London, South Asia, Yemen and elsewhere. Violent protest, conflict and mutual antagonism underscored the import of the issue to Muslims and Jews across the world.

Conflict resolution, the methods by which wars and other conflicts are ended and resolved, has also changed.[5] Traditional methods and roles remain in some contexts, but in others they have been diminished by new ways of making peace, which include indigenous and regional-based solutions. Indeed, there is evidence of an increasing resistance in many quarters to external mediation of processes of conflict resolution in the region and an increasing reliance on local, traditional methods of dispute resolution which are more inclusive of religious elements, tribal leaders and other elements in society.

The types of conflict resolution and successes associated with them have also varied considerably. Major long-term conflicts have been resolved through peace treaties brokered by international actors, predominantly the USA. Civil conflict in Lebanon has been resolved as a result of regional actors bringing the warring parties to the negotiating table. They may yet have to persuade the Lebanese to stop the descent to war again. Countries in the region such as Saudi Arabia were also responsible for promoting an end to inter-factional conflict and violence between the Palestinians in February 2007. The UN has been responsible for helping to forge peace between Iran and Iraq, and European efforts have been conspicuous in attempts to resolve the Algerian conflict. So what accounts for the renewed

interest in peacemaking and conflict resolution within the region? Before this question is answered it is important to make some distinctions. Peace-building, peacemaking, peace processes, conflict resolution and conflict transformation are all separate but related activities. Peace is not something that can be achieved overnight in the Middle East. Nor should the formal cessation of hostilities in the form of signed agreements be viewed as an end to conflict. It is not even enough to presuppose that the conclusion of peace treaties between states means that peace has truly been achieved between the citizens of those states. Unfortunately, 'cold peace' is all too familiar a concept in the region.

The first seismic shift in global politics to impact on the prospects for peacemaking in the Middle East was the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union from 1989 onwards. While the immediate results of this were clearly discernible in the Gulf crisis and the decline of Soviet support for radical Arab states such as Syria, the impact on the politics of peacemaking was not so clear. In many respects the change can only be ascertained by a retrospective focus. For example, the nature of peacemaking between Israel and Egypt in the late 1970s, following the war of 1973, was utterly altered by superpower rivalry in the region and the battle for hegemony between the United States and the Soviet Union. The détente relationship had been severely tested in this theatre of the Cold War and extended to peacemaking brokered by the superpowers. With the absence of the Soviet Union, would the USA play a different role within the region when it came to the realm of peace politics?

The change in the balance of power and an increasing perception of US hegemony in the region led many to believe that US national interest – as represented through its foreign policy – would shape the future of the Middle East, with capitulation the order of the day in a series of Arab capitals that had traditionally been hostile to the USA. It was expected that Syria, for example, bereft of its Soviet patron, would be propelled into the arms of the American State Department. In reality Washington has discovered that there is a limit to its influence in the region, particularly in pushing traditional enemies together and persuading them to negotiate peace. The first round of multilateral peace conferences in 1991, which brought Syrian and Israeli negotiators together for the first time, was misleading because the Syrian President Hafez al-Assad would travel only so far along the road to peace. In addition, the State Department in Washington faced a hostile Congress that maintained that Syria was a 'terrorist state' to which no concessions, even in the name of peace, could be countenanced. Similar accusations are now being made again in the wake of regime change in Baghdad, with members of the US 'hard right' implying that the Syrian regime should be next in line. America's traditional allies, however, have

continued to benefit from a 'special relationship' which is able to withstand the pulls and pushes of everyday politics in the region. Yet, as Halliday reminds us, 'To ascribe all of the region's ills to Washington's actions or inaction is facile. To argue consistently that alternative possibilities are preferable and practicable is not.'[6] Evidence of consideration of these new approaches is to be found not only in those spheres of the American orbit in the Middle East such as the Palestinian–Israeli peace process but in those orbits where other actors have a greater interest or influence, such as the Lebanese peace process, where Arab and European actors have played greater roles.

Out of a changing political climate, with America achieving a greater profile in the Middle East yet also determined to ensure that European and other actors play roles when necessary, the new economic landscape has yet to be evaluated. Making war is an expensive business and turning guns into ploughshares has the potential radically to alter and improve living standards in a number of states across the region. In addition, there is a prevalent belief in aid, development and diplomatic circles that with peace a new stability will be generated across the region that will promote greater economic unity and suitable economies of scale, and decrease dependency and indebtedness. Thus, not only will peace mean that the governments of the region devote less of their resources to the military and more to welfare and education, but that improved diplomatic relations will promote inter-regional trade agreements that will assist liberalizing economies. In Israel, for example, if peace agreements are reached with Syria, the Palestinians and Lebanon, not only will the government have to devote less to its standing army and arms industry but the potential markets of the Arab world will be realized for Israeli goods, particularly those in the technology sector.

Another indication that economics matters is the willingness of the international community to promote peace and sponsor peace processes and confidence-building measures through aid and loans. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, King Hussein of Jordan faced mounting economic pressures in his country that sparked public unrest and riots. But with the underpinning of his peace deal with Israel by American aid, and loans from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, risking the wrath of his vehemently anti-Israeli citizenry became a realistic proposition. Nor can there be any doubt that without the promise of a peace dividend within the American-sponsored orbit Jordan would not have climbed aboard the peace train that culminated in a treaty with Israel in November 1994. Yet while many believed that Israel would deliver the bulk of the economic dividend, the reality was that the international community – through bilateral and multilateral assistance, loans and direct aid – would shore up the economy and help it to withstand popular discontent at the King's political

gamble. The same was true in Lebanon, where, following the end of Israel's occupation of the south in May 2000, the international community reiterated its commitment to assist the process of peace and reconstruction through aid and loans. On the other hand, after 1990 Iraq's population suffered under the regime of internationally imposed sanctions as a result of the conflict with Kuwait. If the UN-imposed sanctions were designed to bring the regime of Saddam Hussein to its knees and prevent further military escapades then they failed; instead, they had the effect, thanks to cynical manipulation by the Iraqi regime, of raising rates of infant mortality, disease and malnutrition and penalizing the most vulnerable and helpless sectors of Iraqi society. The resumption of the weapons inspection programme, the rupture of international opinion, a crisis wrought on the head of the United Nations, and a further pre-emptive military action in which hundreds of thousands of American and other troops were amassed in the Gulf in early 2003 was the way in which certain quarters of the international community sought to achieve the kind of regime change that had not taken place in 1991. Along the way the legitimacy of war was severely scrutinized and immense disquiet was palpable in the majority of Arab capitals.

In Middle East peacemaking talks economic considerations loom like a spectre at the feast at the negotiating tables. Economic issues, therefore, even in the wealthier states of the Gulf, have compelled policy-makers and political leaders to consider new ways of conducting inter-state relations and regional competitions for leadership. Even Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, two of the wealthiest states in the world, were forced to rethink peace strategies in the wake of the 1990 debacle with Iraq. With a decline in oil prices, growing dependency on imports and expanding populations, the leaders of these states were compelled to assess the cost of conflict, and this was largely reflected in national plans that emerged in the latter part of the 1990s.

In the wake of the Gulf crisis, with the collapse of old Arab–Arab and Arab–Iranian relationships and the decline in the importance of maverick leaders like Hafez al-Assad (of Syria) and Muammar Gadaffi (of Libya), some new patterns formerly associated with the politics of conflict have emerged. Such patterns are nascent and it would be premature, for example, to declare that a new era of Arab unity mirroring that of the 1960s or 1970s can be discerned. This also presupposes that such unity was ever achieved in reality anyway. Nevertheless, the rhetoric and postures of hostility, mutual suspicion and antagonism that characterized so many regional relationships within the Arab orbit, as well as in the Arab–Israeli, Iranian–Israeli and Iranian–Arab spheres, show signs of decline or change. Much sabre rattling in the name of Arab unity has been replaced by new statements about unity through partnership and peace. War-weary Iranians, Syrians, Saudis, Lebanese, Iraqis, Kurds, Shi'as and Islamists have developed novel strategies

for achieving their goals which increasingly involve negotiation, compromise, peace-building and power-sharing. The importance of such initiatives lies not in their achievements but in the new dialogues emerging in some Arab circles.

The role of the Arab League in helping to broker an end to the civil war in Lebanon in 1990 highlighted new approaches. The Ta'if Accord was negotiated by several Arab actors: the Arab League, the governments of Saudi Arabia and Syria, and a tripartite commission of the kings of Morocco and Saudi Arabia and President Chadli Benjedid of Algeria. In this context the tireless efforts of Arab diplomats and political leaders in both the regional structure of the Arab League and the individual mediator states resulted in an end to what was generally considered to be intractable conflict that had destroyed the very fabric of Lebanon over a fifteen-year period. The success of these efforts, however, was explicable only in the context of the new global balance of power and the willingness of the USA to allow the Arabs to negotiate their own way out of this particular conflict.[7] Whether this formula can be repeated in the aftermath of the Israeli confrontation with Hizballah in 2006, which has led to dangerous instability in a country previously apparently on the mend, remains to be seen. Once again the USA will need to step aside from a situation complicated by Washington's hostility to Syria and its obsession with alleged Syrian interference in Iraq and its support for 'international terrorism'. Traditionally, the Americans have always sided with those elements within Lebanon which want an end to Syrian influence and interference.

Negotiation – albeit stalled, erratic, fuelled by emotion and political rhetoric has become a new political game in the conduct of conflict transformation at an inter-state level in the region. Negotiation processes, however, can take many forms, including: pre-negotiation negotiations; bilateral or multilateral talks; first-, second- and third-track negotiations; and issue-specific negotiations. Formal and informal dialogue and processes characterized relations within the region, particularly around the issue of the Arab–Israeli conflict and associated conflicts throughout the 1990s. Approaches to negotiating processes, therefore, need to be understood and contextualized in terms of the rules of this game.

While negotiation was perceived as a form of externally imposed capitulation, weakness from within, and an acknowledgement that the conflict could not be won by other means, it had little value in the Middle Eastern context. For, after all, these conflicts allowed people to live insular, community-based lives eschewing major episodes of contact with the other as an acknowledgement of their existence. It was a mindset that allowed no room for the enemy. The recognition that negotiation entailed dialogue as well as acceptance or recognition of the enemy was an important feature in conflict transformation

in the Arab–Israeli and Palestinian–Israeli conflicts throughout the 1990s. In addition, trust-building as both a prerequisite and a primary feature of such processes was essential, yet at the same time most difficult to achieve. The difficulties were encountered within the first months of the twenty-first century, and any trust that had developed was ruptured by the events that followed the outbreak of the second Palestinian uprising in September 2000. Those involved in the Oslo process failed to surmount the final obstacles and garner support for trust and concession as frantic final status talks were convened by the Clinton administration.

Negotiation, then, became meaningful only when recognition, trust-building, compromise and compensation entered the vocabulary of the peacemakers. Problem-sharing is the key to problem-solving. As Flamhaft illustrates in the Israeli–Palestinian context, three factors determine the point at which the time is ripe to negotiate: 'the combatants' conclusion that the continuation of the status quo would only worsen their situation, their simultaneous desire to reach an agreement . . . [and] the domestic support for a negotiated solution'.[8]

The Oslo process, which followed the very public failure of the Madrid Conferences (1991–3), was shrouded in secrecy and involved, for the first time, direct recognition of the PLO and contact between the Israeli government and PLO officials. The failure of Madrid, where Yitzhak Shamir had refused to recognize the PLO as the legitimate representatives of the Palestinian people and had engaged in a public strategy of stalling and intransigence, had served only to reinforce mutual suspicion and mistrust. Secrecy, on the other hand, was the key to the success of the Oslo talks: negotiators were free from external pressures and interference – exactly the type of interference that had characterized the American- and Russian-sponsored Madrid process. The bedrock of the Oslo process, however, was recognition and trust-building. On the Israeli side indirect recognition occurred in two ways. First, the secret talks were to be held directly with a member of the PLO and not through a delegated conduit, such as the Jordanians. Second, in January 1993 Israeli law repealed the ban on contacts with the PLO. As Abu Odeh highlights, 'Rabin was the first Israeli leader to recognize the Palestinians as a peace partner to be approached rather than as an obstacle to be bypassed. The DOP [Declaration of Principles] attests to that.'[9] The ground rules outlined at the first meetings in January 1993 reveal much about the processes of pre-negotiation and negotiation. The two sides agreed that there would be 'no dwelling on past grievances, total secrecy, and retractibility of all positions put forward in the talks'; from this point constructive dialogue and then negotiation could take place.[10]

Secrecy, trust-building and recognition, however, cannot guarantee any peace process, and the stalled timetabling of such processes illustrates the

impact that time and motion can have on the so-called momentum for peace. The achievement of peace treaties, agreements and timetables for future negotiation and resolution of outstanding issues is admirable, but remains conspicuous by its absence in the context of the Middle East; these are national governmental and non-governmental strategies that engage citizens in inter-state peace-building measures. To date, much of the peacemaking and confidence-building that has occurred in the region has been limited to the elite. There are no indications as yet of a generational change in attitudes towards the futility of major conflict, acts of political violence and harm to each other despite the emergence of a dynamic, motivated younger generation of citizens who are increasingly aware of their position, not just in the region but within the global system. For, as Halliday has suggested, 'relations between the states of the region themselves remain dominated by suspicion, conflict and latent (when not overt) confrontation'.[11] Certainly, externally imposed solutions to conflict in the region will ultimately fail to address core national interests and citizens' rights in a global era. Externally imposed solutions, while professing even-handedness, neutrality and mediation rather than intimidation, are nevertheless motivated by economic and strategic concerns about maintaining the global balance of power both politically and economically in the Western orbit. Wars to 'bring democracy' to the region fail to convince subject populations that the intentions of such liberators are as honourable as they claim to be. For this is the point when the collective historical memory which is so important to so many in the region comes to the fore. For the Iraqis, for instance, when British Prime Minister Tony Blair declared that the war on their country in March 2003 was about 'liberating the Iraqi people', not conquering them, the bitter memory of Britain's less-than-glorious previous meddling in Iraq was revived. For the same promises had been uttered by the British General Maude during the First World War when he conquered Baghdad, promising the people: 'Our armies do not come into your cities and lands as conquerors or enemies, but as liberators . . . Your wealth has been stripped off you by unjust men . . . The people of Baghdad shall flourish.'[12] Less than five years later the British, as one of their spoils of war, had created Iraq as a mandate territory, a highly artifical construction subject to their authority and to that of a puppet monarch, and not reflecting the aspirations of the local people.

There is a residual fear in the region of history repeating itself – this time with America replacing Britain or France as the imperial power keen to secure its economic and strategic interests at the expense of the rights of the native people. However, the tentative emergence of local methods of conflict dispute, such as religious- or tribal-based conciliation processes, offers some hope that the region may emerge from its conflicts to establish

new relationships of peace-building rather than slipping back into the atavistic grip of a Hobbesian state of war, to which so many in the West have ascribed the region in the past. To assume the former rather than the latter is to credit the citizens of the region with the same human values of compassion and peace as are found anywhere else in the world. Accepting the latter, however, might also imply that while so many states of the region remain dominated by authoritarian leaders and their military machines, the ordinary citizens will remain immobilized by oppression and conflict. Additionally, however, the prospect of liberation, by any means, does not necessarily promise automatic upgrading to freedom, equality and liberty.

In the twenty-first century, as much as at any other time in the Middle East's history, one is reminded of the words of Agatha Christie, who remarked in a different context that one 'is left with a horrible feeling now that war settles nothing; that to win a war is as disastrous as to lose one'. The challenge is to exert as much effort and put as many resources into peace-making in the region as have been devoted to militarization and conflict. This challenge has never been greater than now, as we shall describe in our final chapter.