

President George W. Bush's Legacy on the Israeli-Palestinian "Peace Process"

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Following the events of September 11, President George W. Bush shifted his approach in support of further involvement in Middle Eastern affairs. He delivered, on June 24, 2002, a speech in support of the creation of "a peaceful and democratic" Palestinian state alongside Israel. Bush specifically asked the Palestinians to reform the Palestinian Authority, dismantle their militant groups and elect a new leader. Bush also backed the Quartet's Road Map formula (sponsored by the U.N., the E.U., and Russia) for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although Bush's vision and the Road Map plan marked a new shift in U.S. policy on the Palestinian issue, both failed to exercise leverage upon Israel to withdraw from the Palestinian territories. They failed to provide details concerning the final status issues, including the future of Jerusalem, the refugees, Jewish settlements, statehood and borders, which served to satisfy Israel's objection to packaged deals that may entail pressures for withdrawal from the Palestinian territories. While exploring factors, events and forces that may have motivated Bush's plans for the region, this article will underline the main themes of his two states idea and those of the Road Map's formula. It also examines signs of inconsistencies and fluctuations in Bush's policies towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, along with comparing Bush's rhetoric on the Palestinian state to the actual realities on the ground. This article seeks a historically grounded critical understanding of U.S. policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in general and the Bush Administration's conception of the two states solution in particular. It also reflects slightly on signs of continuities and/or changes experienced during Barak Obama's presidency with regard to the Middle East region.

Keywords: George W. Bush, Israeli-Palestinian Relations, U.S. Policy, Peace Process

1. INTRODUCTION

As a candidate, President George W. Bush argued against expanding U.S. involvement in nation-building efforts around the world. However, the events of September 11th shifted Bush's approach in support of further involvement in the Middle East at many levels, among them, the "war on terror," democracy promotion, and Israeli-Palestinian relations. In the first two years of his presidency, Bush proposed a peace plan for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of a two-state formula. He explained that in a speech delivered on June 24, 2002, which was based on an earlier speech made at the U.N. General Assembly in 2001, in support of the creation of "a peaceful and democratic Palestinian state alongside Israel" (Bush, 2002). President Bush demanded from the Palestinians to reform the Palestinian Authority (PA), dismantle all Palestinian militant groups and elect new leaders to head the PA. In 2003, President Bush also backed the Quartet's Road Map formula (sponsored by the U.S., the U.N., the E.U., and Russia) for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Both the two-state idea and the Road Map plan were also sponsored by President Barak Obama Administration as the basis for the ongoing peace negotiations taking place between Israel and the Palestinians.

Bush's plan and the Road Map formula were rooted in earlier understandings formulated

at the Madrid Conference in 1991, the principle of land for peace, the UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338 along with other subsequent peace efforts, including the Oslo Accords and Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah's plan, which was adopted by the Arab Summit held in Beirut in March 2002. Bush's explicit backing, for the first time in U.S. history, of an independent Palestinian state has been particularly significant. Previous U.S. plans, including the Oslo Accords, had neither called for the creation of a Palestinian state nor did they consider Israel as an occupying force or viewed Israel's settlements as illegal. However, this new policy has been more rhetorical than actual (Khalidi, 2013).

Although Bush's two states plan and the Road Map marked such a new shift in U.S. policy in the region, both proposals failed to exercise U.S. leverage on Israel to halt its settlement expansion in the Palestinian territories. The Bush Administration had instead, focused its efforts more on delivering Palestinians compliance with Israel's security demands while downplaying Palestinians' national claims. The two plans also failed to provide details concerning the final status issues, including the future of Jerusalem, the refugees, settlements, statehood and borders (Malley, 2002). Israel's objection to packaged deals, while insisting on direct negotiations to resolve final status issues, may have been the main reason behind the broadness of such documents. Having left the final status issues for future direct negotiations between the two sides was alarming for Palestinians, fearing a repeat of past failures experienced at the Camp David II Summit. Bush's two-state plan and the Road Map formula could have perhaps become more significant had they incorporated the results of talks that were reached at Taba and Geneva during the end of the Clinton Administration (Pressman, 2003). The Geneva talks, conducted between the Israeli opposition and Palestinian officials, were removed from public debates after Israel began initiating its unilateral disengagement plans for the territories, namely with regard to the Gaza Strip (Shikaki, 2004).

Israel's increasing concerns with what it considers as a demographic threat to its Jewish identity, which is attributed to the growth of the Palestinian community within Israel's borders, may have also motivated Israel and the U.S. into backing the two states idea. This concern, and perhaps exaggerated fears of Palestinians, may have also enticed the current Israeli government into insisting on declaring Israel as a Jewish State for the Jewish people worldwide, thus endangering the political status of its Arab minority. Typically, in past mediation efforts in Israeli-Palestinian relations, the U.S. have almost always expressed opposition to the notion of a Palestinian state, while favoring assimilating Palestinians into surrounding Arab countries, notably Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Israel, supported by the U.S., has historically rejected Palestinian claim to national self-determination within any part of historic Palestine (Shlaim, 2000). Bush's acceptance of the two-state idea has, in this context, been considered a turning point in the U.S. handling of Israeli-Palestinian relations. In actual conduct however, President Bush placed Palestinians national claims within an already entrenched U.S.'s pro-Israeli "frame of reference" (Christison, 2001). Bush's supporters and critics have at the same time been initially confused by his explicit support for a Palestinian statehood, when he was aligning himself with extremist U.S. and Israeli views on Palestinian and Arab causes.

One of the accounts that may also explains the Bush Administration's acceptance of the two states plan has been rooted in policies and actions that were expressed by Israel towards the Palestinians (Khalidi, 2013). For instance, since taking office in 2001, Ariel Sharon's government sought to isolate the Palestinians from Israel by confining them within manageable limits strengthened by a separation wall, special highways, and checkpoints. By limiting the Palestinians within the boundaries of their own isolated towns and cities, along

with barring them from entering Israel, the Israeli government began expressing readiness to give up control over most populated centers in the Palestinian territories and abandon its past strategies that entailed the transferring of Palestinians into surrounding Arab countries or leaving them under Israel's indefinite military rule. To accommodate Israel's demographic and territorial concerns, the Bush Administration assured Israel that the support of a Palestinian state would not undermine Israel's settlements blocs or Israel's security concerns. The Obama Administration followed the same approach vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian relations, where it overemphasized Israel's security at the expense of Palestinian claims (Campbell, 2012).

The following discussion underlines the key themes of Bush's two states plan and those of the Road Map formula. It explores signs of inconsistencies, double-standards and fluctuations in the Bush Administration's policies towards the Israeli-Palestinian issue. The purpose is to seek a critically grounded understanding of the Bush Administration's failure to resolve the conflict and conclude a lasting agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. The article concludes that the policy direction of the Bush Administration, along with that of the Obama administration, has been unfavorable for the Palestinians.

2. PRESIDENT BUSH'S LEGACY ON THE PEACE PROCESS

2.1 The Two States Plan

The failure of the Clinton Administration to set up an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians at the Camp David II Summit in 2000 may have caused President Bush's reluctance to risk his prestige in similar mediations during his first term in office. Instead, Bush, his Vice President Dick Cheney, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State Collin Powell, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Defense Deputy Paul Wolfowitz have all endorsed the position of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and adopted a "hands-off" approach to Israel's treatment of the Palestinians (Freedman, 2003). They viewed Israel as a participant on the side of the U.S. in carrying out the "war on terror" strategy. By advancing the use of U.S. military power to promote moral principles in foreign policymaking, as expressed by neo-conservative trends in the U.S., the Bush administration justified Israel's excessive use of force against Palestinians as a means to achieve its own peace and security. Only after the political support of Arab regimes was needed when the U.S. toppled Saddam's regime did the Bush administration begin, after consulting with Israel, revealing the two states vision for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Bush also launched the democracy promotion plan as part of reinventing the causes for the Iraq war, given the administration's inability to locate the weapons of mass destruction in the country. Bush finally delivered, in June 2002, a much anticipated speech calling upon the two sides to accept his vision of "two states living side by side in peace and security." Bush warned that his two states proposal provides "an opportunity to lay the foundations for future peace" across the region and "a test to show who is serious about peace and who is not" (Bush, June 24, 2002).

Bush's two states plan was initially revealed on November 10th, 2001 at a speech delivered by President Bush at the U.N., where he invoked, for the first time in U.S. history, the endorsement of a democratic Palestinian state alongside Israel. Bush anticipated "the day when two states-Israel and Palestine-live peacefully together within secure and recognized

boundaries” (New York Times, Nov. 12, 2001). Although Bush was critical of the PA and called for the ousting of Yasir Arafat and the election of a new leadership, the PA overlooked such comments and welcomed Bush’s support for their state. Israel also accepted Bush’s call for the creation of a provisional Palestinian state, only if and when it meets Israeli standards. Of course, the Benyamin Netanyahu’s current coalition government believes that the present circumstances remains not yet suitable for the establishment of a Palestinian state that would threatens Israel’s security concerns.

Bush identified, in the June 2002 speech, the basic content and procedures that must be considered in order for the two states vision to be fulfilled within three years. He stated that the Palestinian people must elect “new leaders,” and establish “new institutions and new security arrangements with their neighbors.” He identified the Palestinian state “sovereignty” as “provisional until resolved as part of a final settlement.” On the Israeli side, Bush argued that in order for Israel to preserve its Jewish and democratic identity, it must “take concrete steps to support the emergence of a viable, credible Palestinian state. Ultimately, it is up to the Israelis and Palestinians to negotiate a settlement that would resolve and put an end to their conflict” (Bush, June 24, 2002). The Bush administration believed that only after the Palestinians accomplished their expected duties, and after Israel responded favorably to them, the two states solution would then be pursued, where Israel and Palestine could negotiate directly the details of their agreement. Bush’s demands were viewed as difficult, if not impossible, to implement given the Palestinians’ inability to function freely under Israel’s military rule of their territories. Also, Israel has been unwilling to stop its settlement activities and land confiscation in the Palestinian territories. While justifying Israel’s settlement policies and its use of force against the Palestinians, Bush only expected the PA to de-legitimize Palestinians’ resistance to Israel.

Along with the security issues that Israel and the U.S. have raised with regard to the Palestinians, the Bush administration also suggested that the spread of democracy in the region as a necessary condition for the success of a future Palestinian statehood. Bush’s fixation with democracy promotion placed the notion of a Palestinian statehood on hold until surrounding Arab autocratic regimes become democratic. Democracy promotion plans have, in this context, served not only as a means to prevent Israel’s withdrawal from the territories but also to distract attention from Israel’s policies on Jewish settlements. Israel’s supporters have used such arguments to suggest that the Arab region must meet certain standards of democracy and tolerance towards Israel in order to determine the creation of a future Palestinian state. Strangely, democracy has never been used as a precondition for establishing Israel or any other state in any part of the world for that matter. On the issue of Palestine, it was argued by the Bush Administration, along with many Israeli officials, that a democratic Palestinian state is unlikely to be established as long as the other surrounding Arab countries remain autocratic, authoritarian and perhaps despotic.

Neo-conservative members of the Bush Administration portrayed autocratic Arab regimes as obstacles to peace and democracy promotion in the region. Ironically, in his support for a provisional Palestinian state, Bush urged Jordan’s King Abdullah and Mubarak’s of Egypt to work together with the PA “to create a new constitutional framework and a working democracy for the Palestinian people.” These conflicting messages continue to thwart U.S. credibility in the Arab world. With no fear of contradicting himself, while warning the Palestinians that their state “will never be created by terror,” Bush supported Israel’s right “to defend herself.” (Bush, 2002). In so doing, Bush has created a flexible definition of the meaning of success, where Israel and the U.S. can always contest their

demands claiming that they were not met. Bush's double standard approach to Israel and the Palestinians was also reflected in expressing sympathetic language of support for Israeli victims of Palestinian violence but none for the Palestinian victims of Israel's violence. Bush simply considered Israel's conflict with the Palestinians to be similar, if not the same, to the U.S.'s war against global Islamists.

Calling upon Israel to support the emergence of "a viable Palestinian state," Bush acknowledged that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could not be resolved through military means. Bush also assumed that Israel's military occupation since 1967 would be expected to end through direct negotiations with the Palestinians (Bush, 2002). However, given the unequal balance of power that exists between the two sides, Israel has always been assured to prevail in direct talks with the Palestinians. The two states plan, as presented by the administration in terms of its content and procedures, would indeed result in forcing Palestinians to create isolated ghettos in areas that are proportionally smaller than what the international community would have expected from an Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders. As such, Bush's rhetorical backing of a Palestinian state would not be expected to create a viable, territorially continuous and contiguous Palestinian state. Israel's construction of facts on the grounds, including its wall that "is designed to surround a truncated Palestine completely, and a network of exclusive highways...cut across what is left of Palestine" is not consistent with his two states vision (Carter, 2007). These policies are more consistent with the creation of a Palestinian permanent Bantustan that Israel has been trying to establish for decades (Mohamad, 2001). Some argued that, irrespective of whether Bush's vision is genuine or not, the actual realities in the occupied territories reveal that it might be impossible to implement the two states plan given that the Palestinians are sharing their land with an increasing population of Jewish settlers. Such reality highlights the importance of the one democratic state idea (Karmi, 2007).

Bush's plans for democracy promotion across the Middle East yielded other unexpected results, which raised more doubts about his legacy on the peace process, namely after the election victory of Hamas in the Palestinian territories (Zakaria, 2006). For its part, the Bush Administration has not been willing to accept Palestinians' electoral choices due to Israel's rejection of the outcomes of the 2006 elections, which were used as a pretext to reject the Palestinian state idea, and strengthen the Israeli government's pursuit of more unilateral policies and disengagement plans in the Palestinian territories.

2.2 The Road Map Formula

The Quartet's Road Map formula has become part of the U.S. attempt to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Its revelation in April 2003 coincided with Sharon's reelection and Abu Mazen's appointment as Palestinian Prime Minister, both in the same year. Parallel to Bush's vision, the Road Map formula consists of various steps that were intended to lead to a negotiated agreement between Israel and the Palestinians on the basis of the two states solution (New York Times, Nov.15, 2002). From the start, the Road Map faced challenges similar to those that related to Bush's two states idea, notably regarding the Israeli claim of the lack of a Palestinian peace partner. Although the Road Map could have been pursued following Arafat's death and Palestinians' legislative election, Israel's focus on its disengagement plans stalled the peace process.

The first phase of the Road Map formula expected the Palestinians to halt their *Intifada*, address Israel's security needs and make serious efforts to prevent attacks on Israelis. Before

negotiations resume, the PA was particularly expected to confiscate weapons and dismantle the infrastructure of militias and begin consolidating security forces under a unified command structure acceptable for the U.S. and Israel. Faced with this situation, coupled with the absence of details about the future peace settlement, the PA would run the risk of a low intensity civil war in the territories if and when it tries to disarm militant Palestinian groups that consider themselves part of a legitimate resistance forces to Israel's military occupation of the Palestinian territories. Although Israel was asked to remove its settlements and ease travel restrictions on Palestinians, it failed to do so. Despite the challenges, the U.N. special coordinator, Terje Roed-Larsen, was, in 2003, optimistic in his assessment of the PA's and Israel's tasks to meet the Quartet expectations. He believed that the PA is determined to rebuild its "security services into a unified and reliable force" along with "combating terror and collecting illegal weapons." On the settlements issue, Roed-Larsen also thought that Israel was serious about "removing West Bank outposts" along with easing "the daily suffering of the Palestinian civilians," and eventually accomplishing its full military withdrawal to the line of September 2000" (Roed-Larsen, 2003).

The Road Map's second phase entailed the formation of a provisional Palestinian state that lacks identifiable boundaries and sovereignty. Palestinians feared that such a state might remain permanently provisional. The provisional state was also expected to emerge within a year and a half following the implementation of the first phase. The third phase would be considered the most difficult, where the focus will be centered on final status issues such as borders, refugees, settlements, security, statehood and Jerusalem. A major concern at this phase was the expected repeat of the collapse of the Camp David II talks, where Israel and the U.S. blamed Arafat for the failure of the summit (Malley and Agha, 2001). Although the PA failed to accomplish its duties as part of the Road Map, Israel also failed as it continued to construct its settlement plans and erected the separation wall with no regard to the 1967 boundaries. Israel also failed to remove newly created settlements in the territories, referred by Israel only as unauthorized outposts, and continued to restrict the movement of Palestinians throughout the occupied territories. The third phase was meant to finalize an agreement by May 2005, declaring an end to the conflict. Instead of reaching a settlement, and under the justification of its security concerns, Israel pursued uncoordinated unilateral steps in an attempt to determine its version of the final status negotiations, while Palestinians continue to live under the difficulties of the status quo situation.

Obviously, the failure of the peace process placed the Palestinians at more disadvantages than the Israelis, given that the Palestinians continue to live under dreadful economic, political and social conditions. The absence of U.S. pressure on Israel did little to hinder Israel's plans for the occupied territories, including its expansion of existing colonial settlements along with creating new ones. The Bush Administration manipulated the process and provided diplomatic support and maneuverings for the Road Map, thus excluding the Quartet's other members from doing their part. Despite its many problems, the two states idea still enjoys international and regional legitimacy more than all other plans. Although Palestinians continue to support the two states solution, the realities on the ground are more measured by their failure to improve their deteriorating status quo.

2.3 Contesting Bush's Peace Efforts

The outbreak of the *Al-Aqsa Intifada* in 2000 came as a Palestinian response to the failure of the peace process and continuation of Israel's military occupation of their territories.

Obviously, until a more viable peace plan is reached and implemented, the PA will likely remain unable to reform itself and the Israeli-Palestinian violence will continue to escalate. For its part, Bush's two states plan has failed to establish the foundation for a successful peace deal that could satisfy the minimal claims of the Palestinian side. Bush's endorsement of the Road Map formula also failed to deliver for the Palestinians and thus suffered from challenges similar to those that confronted his initial peace efforts. Indeed, the Oslo process as a whole, which started since 1993, was a setback in peacemaking as it deprived Palestinians of their internationally recognized claims while helping Israel to build its own projects of Bantustanisation in the Palestinian occupied territories (Guyatt, 1998). The failure of the Camp David II Summit in 2000, accompanied by the absence of new and more viable alternative peace models from the agendas of the negotiators, along with their mediators, also resulted in furthering tensions surrounding Palestinian-Israeli relations. Consistent with the Oslo framework, Bush's plan and that of the Road Map's formula expected the Palestinians to settle for and accept incremental gains. The failure of such peace plans along with the absence of peace in general in the area largely rests on the inequality between Israel and the Palestinians, along with the lack of an impartial third-party mediator. As the U.S. demanded more from the Palestinians than from Israel, it placed the blame for the escalating violence on the victims rather than the victimizers. In its current content, structure and procedures, the peace process maintains Israel's favorable place in relation to talks with the Palestinians and mediations with the U.S.

Although the Road Map has been viewed as the best U.S. approved offer for a solution, the lack of essential details about the future settlement and the means of enforcement to create a viable and sovereign Palestinian state alongside the Green Line boundaries challenge its implementation. Israel and the PA may share the blame for the failure of the Road Map, but the U.S.'s refusal to pressure Israel into agreeing to withdraw to the 1967 borders remains the main cause for the failure. The Bush Administration's approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been based mainly on matters concerning Israel's security without considerations for Palestinians' claims, including their need for security as well. This marginalization of the Palestinians by existing "politico-economic arrangement that suppresses their freedom" in their territories did little to entice the Bush Administration into enforcing the two states idea (Fernandez, 2005). Bush's vision and the Road Map may have intended to bring moderations in the political stance assumed by both sides and thus arrive at a negotiated end for the conflict. However, the content of Bush's plan contradicts such message. Bush plan asked almost nothing from the Israel government, which makes it a one-sided vision (Veliotes, 2002:11-12).

Bush's two states vision along with the Road Map formula seems to have been motivated by a combination of established legacies in the U.S. towards the conflict on the one hand, and by new changes in Israel's policies towards the Palestinians on the other. The Bush Administration's hands-off approach towards Sharon allowed Israel to crack down on the Palestinian resistance with an unprecedented force. Unable to crush the *Intifada*, the Sharon government began pursuing its long-term unilateral plans that complemented Bush's provisional Palestinian state idea, where Palestine may never become a sovereign state. The Bush Administration also backed Israel's "unilateral physical separation from the Palestinians" and accepted Israel's "building and armed patrolling of a country-long security fence dividing Palestinian areas from Israeli ones" (Unger, 2002: 1-2). Bush's conduct, which contradicted his stated vision at the time, has obviously been inconsistent with attempts to create a Palestinian state. Bush appears more willing to support the creation of a

restricted “Palestinian entity that falls short of the attributes of statehood” (Umger, 2002, 6). Although the U.S. called upon the Palestinians to exercise their democratic rights to free themselves from their old leadership, the Bush Administration has contributed, after Hamas’s electoral victory, into destabilizing the PA and in penalizing the Palestinians for choosing leaders that were not acceptable for the U.S. and Israel. Hamas’s victory was also used as a pretext to “deepen Israelis’ inclination toward unilateralism in their relations with the Palestinians” (Herzog, 2006).

Bush’s two states idea may have also been influenced by events surrounding the Iraq war. The U.S.’s ability to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a satisfactory way for both sides would have perhaps preserved much of the U.S.’s long-term interests and credibility across the region. Initially, Bush had to support the Road Map as a means to “contain Arab ferment” over the U.S. war in Iraq (Mandel, 2004: 3). Given his pursuit of unilateralism during the preparation for the Iraq war, which alienated many across the world, the Bush Administration believed that the Road Map might provide them with the chance to appear more cooperative with the U.N. and the E.U. on the peace process, which would consequently enhance the status of U.S. autocratic Arab allies in the region.

As far as the underlying forces that may have determined the course of Bush’s policies towards Israel and the Palestinians are concerned, pro-Israel lobbyists, Protestant evangelicals and the neo-conservative camp were by far the most important influencers on Bush’s foreign policy agenda. Pressures from domestic forces that support Israel and consider Arab claims to be risk free have guided Bush’s policies throughout the region. John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt singled out the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) because of its ability “to divert U.S. foreign policy as far from what the American national interest would otherwise suggest, while simultaneously convincing Americans that U.S. and Israeli interests are essentially identical” (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2006). Although the American Jewish community is by no means a homogeneous group, the AIPAC has succeeded in pressuring the Bush Administration to follow Israel’s lead in peace talks. The two states idea has accordingly been hindered by the success of the pro-Israel lobby (Rosner, 2006).

Protestant evangelical groups in the U.S. have also exerted tremendous influence on the Bush Administration and have succeeded in placing Israel’s interests at the forefront of U.S. foreign policy agenda. The evangelicals’ vital political base has motivated many of the Bush Administration’s policies towards Iraq, Israel and the Muslim world. Their support for Israel is based on biblical accounts that are reflective of deep affinity with the Jewish state and the Holy Land. Known as Christian Zionists, a majority of them assume that as the world nears to an end, the Church, comprised of Christians, will be ruptured into heaven leaving behind those who have not been saved (Mohamad, 2009). To accelerate this process, they believe that Solomon’s temple must be rebuilt in modern day Jerusalem at the location of the Dome of the Rock (*Al-Aqsa* Mosque). Aside from having anticipated the creation of Israel, they also believe that the Jewish state will deliver for them their other theological prophecies (Amos, 2003). While awaiting the second coming of Jesus Christ to occur, evangelicals continue to pressure U.S. policymakers to preserve Jerusalem as the unified capital of Israel. They predict more warfare to emerge in the Holy Land, notably on the site of Armageddon (*Megiddo*) where the anti-Christ will be defeated and the Messiah will emerge from heaven to end evil and set up a paradise on earth. Being a vital electoral constituency, Bush is influenced by their views that reject imposing territorial compromises upon Israel. Among others, Christian evangelicals’ impact on the U.S.–Israeli relations assumed that Bush’s

presidency "has resulted in a new importance for the relationship between evangelicals and U.S. foreign policy" establishment, namely in the period that followed the events of the 11th of September 2001" (Durham, 2004).

Although not all Protestant evangelicals subscribe to these beliefs, politicians and religious figures like Ralph Reed, Kay Arthur, Jane Hanson, Gary Bauer and Pat Robertson, along with many members of Congress such as Richard Armey, Tom Delay and James Inhofe, to mention a few, have been candid about their religious beliefs and political support for Israel on religious grounds. They generally believe that any position taken against Israel is a stand against God, who they believe purposefully lead the Jews to the Holy Land (Hyer, 1982: 6; Claiborne, 1981: 11). They support Israel's "expansionist agenda" and they believe that to do otherwise "would be contrary to God's will" (Mersheimer and Walt, 2006). These followers have expressed a romanticized view of Israel not just because it was the place where Jesus was born and had been resurrected, but also because of prophecies that are believed to be linked to Israel's creation. Although evangelicals supported Bush's policies across the Middle East region, many of them have opposed his backing of the Road Map formula for peace. Pat Robertson, for instance, warned Bush that his support for the Road Map defies God (Durham, 2004: 152).

However, it may be too simplistic to assume that evangelicalism is the only, or perhaps the most important, driving force behind Bush's policies towards Israel and the Palestinians. Along with the pro-Israel lobby, the neo-conservative elements in the administration have played a more significant role in urging Bush to grant Israel all the freedom it needs to combat Palestinian violence and preserve its security concerns at all costs. Not just in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, neo-conservatism has widely been identified as the main driving force behind Bush's policies worldwide. Supporters and critics of Bush consider his democracy promotion project, the Iraq war, his pro-Israel policy and the emphasis on U.S.'s hegemony in world affairs as integral parts of the neo-conservative strategy that motivates Bush's foreign policies in both terms in office. Neo-conservatives have supported Bush's doctrine on preemptive and unilateral exercises of U.S. power in world affairs (Hurst, 2005). In the case of Iraq, and perhaps the rest of the Arab and Muslim region, neo-conservatives have come to assume that Arabs understand only the language of force, and that they need the U.S. more than the U.S. needs them.

Bush's two states plan faced serious problems relating to implementation, especially since it is only one among other, often conflicting, goals that the U.S. has been trying to achieve in the region. Bush's style is another challenge that often hindered his vision. His reference to biblical concepts in scripted speeches has not only led to the construction of Arabs and Muslims as enemies in the minds of Americans, but has also increased anti-Americanism across the region (Merskin, 2004). The U.S. also suffered from engaging itself in devising policies on the Palestinians and the region that are based less on true knowledge and more originated in the conventional wisdom and the frame of reference that favors Israel against the Palestinians (Christison, 2001).

The failure to pursue Bush's two states vision and the Road Map formula have not only shifted debates towards focusing on whether a Palestinian state can be established or not, but also on debates concerning the size and nature of a future Palestinian state. Skepticism about the viability of the two states solution particularly enticed discussions on alternative solutions, including those that envision Jews and Arabs living together in a one state setting. It is becoming more obvious that an alternative scenario to the two states formula would be the formation of a single democratic state. The one-state idea, known as binationalism,

entails political equality between Arabs and Jews (Said, 1999: 31). Although it is perhaps the most just scenario for a political settlement, binationalism remains an unlikely approach for conflict resolution for both sides. Although most Palestinians continue to support coexistence with Israel within a two-state setting, almost a quarter of the adult population in the West Bank and Gaza support a binational state. In the end, no matter what political settlement is pursued, the Palestinians have succeeded in canceling out plans that aimed at transferring them out of their land (Finkelstein, 2003).

The electoral victory of Hamas in the Palestinian Legislative Council's election placed more obstacles facing current Israeli-Palestinian relations. By opposing Hamas's success in the election, the Bush Administration has repeated past mistakes that were made during the 1991 Algerian elections when it stood, along with European countries- notably France, against Islamists who had won election (Mohamad, 2000). In opposing the inclusion of Hamas in the political process, the administration has not only hindered the prospect for the group to moderate itself, but also strengthened authoritarian Arab regimes' arguments warning that democracy promotion in the region only benefits Islamists, given that Islamists are usually the most popular groups and well-organized groups in the Arab world to win an election (Zambelis, 2005: 92). Bush's policies towards Hamas represented a fundamental continuity to the U.S.'s legacy that had opposed the choices of the Algerian people, which was justified on the grounds that Islamists are "anti-democratic in orientation" and, as U.S. diplomat Edward Djerjian believed, that Islamists have a tendency to utilize the "one man, one vote, one time" formula to establish "legitimately elected Islamist governments" (Cofman, 2004: 64).

Hamas's victory has also led many politicians into criticizing the Bush Administration's pressures upon the PA to carry out the elections, despite expectations that Hamas's strength matches that of Fatah. Domestic pressure on the Bush Administration has entailed the boycotting of the new PA's government along with reinforcing Hamas as a terrorist organization (Weisman, 2006). Congress, for instance, issued a new "legislation that would tighten restrictions on U.S. contacts and aid," with the Hamas government. The House of Representatives had previously passed resolution 575, "which asserts that *Hamas* and other terrorist organizations should not participate in *elections* held by the Palestinian Authority" (McArther, 2006). The pro-Israel's lobby and the members of Congress fear that pressure on the administration, which may derive from Bush's Arab allies, may lead to the buildup of a working relationship between the U.S. and Hamas. These concerns were raised after the Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Hamas's representatives in Moscow in March 2006. Congress and the Bush Administration agreed to cut off financial aid to the Palestinian government, and objected to all "dealings with Hamas unless it renounces violence, disarm and recognizes Israel" (Richter, 2006). The administration also dispatched Secretary of State Rice to the region in order to discourage Arab countries from providing a Hamas led-government with aid, unless the group meets the U.S.'s demands and pursue a moderate strategy that is acceptable for Israel and the Bush Administration. Bush's insistence that *Hamas* accepts these conditions "or suffer a cutoff" of aid to the Palestinians, which is reflective of the strength of pro-Israel's lobbyists, is, once again, "short-sighted," "dangerous" and may further threaten the U.S.'s interests in the region (Mersheimer and Walt, 2006).

3. POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION

This essay intended to explore the George W. Bush Administration's two-state vision and the Road Map formula as one of the failed frameworks for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although the two plans marked a new shift in U.S. policy on Israeli-Palestinian relations, the U.S. has been unsuccessful to exercise its leverage to establish peace between the two sides. While favouring Israel, often at all costs, Bush's policy on the Palestinians, Iraq and the war on terror has been heavily criticized across the world, and consequently intensified Arab and Muslim public resentment of the U.S. and its allies. Although Bush has initiated and advanced U.S. policy in favor of the two states option, he at the same time undermined the process by insisting that the Palestinians must meet Israel's security standards, elect a new leadership and establish democratic institutions before realizing their statehood status. The administration went to the extreme in indicating that democratic changes across the Arab region are also essential for creating a Palestinian state that would be peaceful and friendly towards Israel. President Bush has, on various occasions, stressed that Israel have the right to use force by all means necessary against what he labeled as acts of Palestinian terrorism. While referring to Israel's Prime Minister Sharon as a "man of peace," Bush labeled the Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat as a failed and a terrorist figure that must be removed from power.

Based on his two renowned speeches in Turkey and Egypt, President Obama promised to improve relations between the U.S. and the Arab and Muslim world. While campaigning in 2008, he stated that he would dramatically shift U.S. foreign policy towards resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the bases of the two states idea and satisfy the minimal claims of the two sides. He criticized Bush for "neglecting to launch any major effort to resolve the [Israeli-Palestinian] conflict until the last year of its two-term presidency" (Feldman and Shikaki, 2009: 3). Obama also criticized Bush for overreacting to the events of September 11, 2001, especially with regard to the launching and handling of the Iraq war. On the peace process, Obama differed only in style, but not in real substance, from Bush's policies. In his conduct, there was an "evident absence of any plan to follow up on the Cairo speech with equally dramatic concrete steps" that could bring about peace in the region (Feldman and Shikaki, 2009: 4). President Obama insisted initially on halting Israel's settlement activities as a precondition for the resumption of peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians. Faced with criticisms from the pro-Israeli groups in the country, Obama was pressured to abandon his request on the settlements freeze, and supported Bush's one-sided approach to the two states solution.

More substantial shifts from Bush's policy were noticed in Obama's speeches and conducts regarding the war on terror. Contrary to Bush's policy, Obama assumes that the scope of the war on terror should have been more limited to, and focused on, al-Qaeda rather than Iraq. This has been a typical criticism of Bush's handling of the war on terror, utilized to justify Obama's focus on setting up an exit strategy from Iraq. However, while Bush's policy had authorized the use of drones against Al-Qaida, Obama expanded the use of such drone programs into other countries, notably Yemen and Pakistan. Although President Bush was the one who initiated an open-ended war and one-size-fits-all strategy against Islamists, the Obama administration revised Bush's broad strategy into a more specific one that emphasizes the "war against al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and [other] associated forces," including the Islamic State of the Levant (ISL) in recent years (Sterio, 2012: 202). The most significant

departure from Bush's policies assumed by the Obama administration has been the issue of Iran's nuclear ambitions. Contrary to Bush's rigid approach to Iran, Obama expressed a strategy based on conducting direct negotiations with Iranian officials. Although Obama remains committed to the principle held by Bush that insists on disallowing Iran from ever acquiring nuclear weapons, Bush's approach to Iran was identical to the Israeli perspective that objected to negotiations as a means to deter Iran from pursuing or acquiring nuclear weapons (Chomsky and Achcar, 2011). In so doing, Israel, backed by the Bush Administration, intended to remain the only hegemonic power in the region, a status that could indeed be shared and/or threatened by Iran if and when it develops nuclear weapons capabilities. In the past two years, Israeli officials continue to voice discontents with Obama's lenient approach towards Iran.

Obama's policy regarding peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, and to a lesser degree his handling of the war on terror, represents more of a continuation of, rather than a conflict with, the policies of the Bush Administration. Both Presidents believed that the prospect for a final settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be reached through direct negotiations between the two parties themselves, which evidently places the Palestinians at an unending disadvantaged situation. While Bush blamed the PA in general, and Arafat in particular, for obstructing the establishment of a Palestinian state, Obama condemned Hamas as a terrorist group that obstructs peace and security for Israel and the Palestinians alike (Siegman, 2010). On Israeli-Palestinian relations, it is typical for U.S. policymakers, and advisors, in this context, to blame the Palestinians for the failure of negotiations. With the exception of recent, largely personal, tensions between Obama and Netanyahu, little or no criticisms have ever been made publically by either of the two presidents towards Israel's policies, including its military occupation of the Palestinian territories. Indeed, the continuation of Israel's military occupation of the West Bank and its embargo against Gaza remains the main obstacle facing the future of peace between the two sides and across the region. The recent reelection of Netanyahu for a second term as Israel's Prime Minister, coupled with his ongoing political tension with President Obama (often viewed as personal) over Iran's nuclear issue and, to a lesser degree, with regard to the Palestinian state idea has further complicated the prospect for peacemaking between Israel and the Palestinians. Israeli politicians have been very vocal in their critique of the Obama Administration (Oren, 2015). Blaming the Palestinians has been a risk-free situation for U.S. policymakers, regardless to their partisan affiliations, namely when catering to domestic factors that influences the dynamics of U.S. politics.

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