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How Palestinian Aid Organizations Adapt to the Possibility of Further Annexation and Rights

Abuses in the Wake of "The Deal of the Century"

By Nadia Wiggins

SIT Graduate Institute Master of Humanitarian Assistance and Crisis Management

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I. Abstract

This research explores the question, “To what extent has the ‘Deal of the Century’ impacted Palestinian aid organizations, and how might it impact them in the future?” The significance of this question lies in the fact that the “Deal of the Century” claims to solve one of the longest and most complex conflicts, yet it has not been sufficiently analyzed from a Palestinian perspective nor a humanitarian perspective. Furthermore, by presenting scholarly critiques of the deal and aid worker’s concerns, my hope is that an American audience may be convinced of the complicity of our government in devising a failed and harmful plan, develop empathy for peacebuilding in the region, and support a more inclusive approach when our government negotiates peace deals in the future.

To answer my research question, I interviewed ten people involved with organizations who give aid to Palestinians. I asked them questions regarding potential changes in their missions and objectives, their feelings about the deal, their knowledge of its details, and how it relates to Palestinian refugees. By grouping their responses into common themes, I present a small case study of what elements of this deal worried Palestinian aid workers, what they all agreed and disagreed upon, and what they speculated about. My findings showed that all participants were opposed to the deal and generally tried to ignore its implications for their beneficiaries, operating according to international law instead. They all hope that this deal is not realized after the removal of U.S. President Trump from office. In contrast, my participants could not agree on how severely the mere proposal of the deal had impacted their work. However, I believe that there is enough evidence to conclude that their mentality and cause have been harmed since the deal was proposed almost a year ago.

Lastly, this research found there is an overall need for a more inclusive peace deal, which can incorporate lessons learned from past peace deal failures and listen to aid organizations who represent the Palestinian cause. All participants proved to have great insight into the needs of refugees, the requirements for peace, and the roots of the conflict. I learned from them that, to even begin to create peace, a successful deal needs to involve the parties who represent the people involved, can advocate for their people's needs, and are willing to make compromises.

II. Introduction

On January 28, 2020, the Trump administration announced a proposal to help solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict¹. The President and media outlets have referred to it as "the Deal of the Century" for addressing infamous Final Status Issues to which the two parties could not agree, such as formal borders, mutual statehood recognition, control of Jerusalem, ownership of the Syrian Golan Heights, the status of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, the Palestinian Right of Return, limitations on the Gaza Strip, and the division of resources². Much to the frustration of Palestinian advocates, the "solutions" proposed for these issues included: redrawing the boundaries to incorporate illegal West Bank settlements into the state of Israel, recognition of the state of Israel and recognition for a "future" Palestinian state (if ever established), recognizing Jerusalem as the "undivided capital" of Israel, maintaining the illegally-annexed Golan Heights as a part of Israel, and denying displaced Palestinians/their families the right to return to their former land³. It also includes new ideas and territory which has not historically been a part of

¹ Bowen, 2020.

² "Peace to Prosperity...", 2020.

³ "Peace to Prosperity...", 2020.

Israeli-Palestinian talks⁴. These include the complete demilitarization of Palestine, annexation of the fertile Jordan Valley, a tunnel connecting the West Bank to the Gaza Strip, building an island for a Gazan port/airport, and the investment of around fifty billion dollars in the entire Israeli-Palestinian region⁵. Formally titled "Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People,"⁶ this controversial deal has many questioning the future for Palestinians, as further annexation and power concessions seem inevitable. Even though President Trump has not been elected for another term, there are reasonable concerns that President-elect Biden will not reverse the precedents set by the Trump administration for Israel-Palestine. While the United States continues to maintain a close relationship with Israel and contribute billions of dollars to the state, there is a strong likelihood that, at a minimum, portions of this deal will come to fruition.

As of the month of this final composition, December 2020, the West Bank's annexation along Israeli settlement lines has been "postponed" but not canceled, due to mounting protests in the region and the deals Israel brokered with the UAE and other Arab nations. Whether the plans for annexation will be carried out this year or later, Palestinian organizations must still prepare for a changing Palestine and what this deal could mean for their work. This paper explores scholarly concerns about the "Deal of the Century," the complicated nature of a Palestinian leadership which cannot provide sufficient advocacy for its people, the importance of Palestinian relief organizations in filling gaps in advocacy and aid, questions about the needs of Palestinian refugees, and an analysis of where past peace deals went wrong. In light of this context, my research explores how Palestinian aid organizations are adapting to this latest deal — or not. Do

⁴ "Peace to Prosperity...", 2020.

⁵ Landau, 2019.

⁶ "Peace to Prosperity...", 2020.

they have new initiatives targeted at addressing "the Deal of the Century"? Are these organizations partnering with non-Palestinian groups to amplify their power as the voice of Palestinian leadership becomes smaller? Do the Palestinian internal and external refugees which they serve have different needs now? Are organizations changing their missions or objectives? Do they even feel the need to perform any changes at all? This paper has attempted to answer these questions.

As a Humanitarian Assistance and Crisis Management student, I hope to learn how humanitarian organizations continue to operate in the face of intractable and ever-changing conflicts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This study will be unique due to its examination of aid during a present-day conflict with a current "peace plan" in the works, which could alter the nature of the conflict any day. In fact, while performing this research in 2020, the United States Presidential election, deals between Arab nations and Israel, and other geopolitical developments led me to continually rewrite and revise my conclusions and predictions about the deal's impacts. My hope with this research is to lead others to understand more about the deal, and the complex status of the people and region it concerns. I further justify this research by asserting that the Deal of the Century is a critical issue for our time, which I believe will have long-term implications for one of the most prolonged humanitarian crises in the world.

This topic is one of personal interest to me. As a new scholar of Humanitarian Assistance and Crisis Management, I have been studying how the politicization of aid and views from changing foreign administrations can decide the fate of assistance for a particular group of refugees. The safety and wellbeing of a group of refugees should not necessarily depend upon whether the force which caused their exile has allied itself with wealthy and powerful countries. Yet, throughout this research, I have discovered how the money and influence of my home country,

the United States, has defined and undermined refugee protections for Palestinians and threatened the legitimacy of the humanitarian organizations supplying them with aid. This paper has caused me to learn more about this deal's bias in favor of Israel and how it provides barriers for Palestinian assistance from independent NGOs and INGOs.

This deal has been crafted despite many international resolutions which define Israeli actions as those of an occupying presence and de-legitimize items like Israeli settlements⁷. Therefore, I also set out to learn more about whether Palestinian aid organizations believe they can rely on international law anymore, and what bodies they turn to for recognizing and legitimizing their work. I have learned from my time spent studying refugees that the challenges and realities of Palestinian refugees often defy other refugees' status quo. Palestinian refugees are the only group in the world to be allocated an entire UN organization (UNRWA) dedicated to delivering humanitarian assistance specifically to them⁸. Therefore, my research on UNRWA and interviews with similar Palestinian aid organizations has also grown my understanding of their status as a unique group in the refugee world. Lastly, it is essential to conduct this research because the Deal of the Century is new and has not been thoroughly studied. While the politics behind the deal have been a popular topic of discussion in the media, its impact on Palestinian refugees and IDPs has mostly been ignored, especially in American reporting. How Palestinian aid organizations can or cannot adapt their work in response to this deal may change how the world views this conflict in the future.

III. Literature Review

⁷ Bowen, 2020.

⁸ UNRWA.org, "Who We Are", 2020.

A. Current Theories on the Deal

The "Deal of the Century" is a loose two-state solution which grants disproportionate power to the state of Israel and ends the discussion for displaced Palestinians to return to anywhere controlled and claimed by Israel. For organizations like UNRWA, which advocate for the Right of Return and serve Palestinian refugees as their mission, this deal is simply incompatible with their work. For that reason, a few scholars and publications who have analyzed the agreement assume that organizations like UNRWA would be forced to either change their mandate or ignore the deal entirely and refute its regulations for refugees. These are reasonable assumptions because UNRWA has historically relied on their United Nations mandate as superior to any laws or leaders that have attempted to undermine Palestinian refugees' status in the past⁹. However, due to the deal's novelty, there has simply not been enough research on how its proposal is affecting Palestinian organizations, nor how it would affect them if implemented.

Al Jazeera news has conducted a rhetorical comparison of peace deals to show how this latest deal signifies a significant loss of power for Palestinians. By setting every significant Israeli-Palestinian peace deal attempt side by side, they charted the difference in content and language over time. While words such as "the state of Israel" and "Jewish state" are being used repeatedly and comprise significant portions of the text, these two phrases have historically not factored into peace deal rhetoric since 1967 and 2020, respectively¹⁰. These new words are essential for Israel to frame the peace deal's context to fit their needs. In contrast, words which are practically crucial to Palestinian aid organizations on the ground like "Right of Return for refugees" and

⁹ UNRWA Newsroom: Official Statements, 2020.

¹⁰ Al Jazeera, 2020.

"occupation" are mentioned once for the former and not at all for the latter¹¹. Clearly, this deal's language implies serious change for Palestinian politics and their refugee politics in particular. For a deal to bring about a durable peace, humanitarian actors need to be included in the conversation and understand the future of their work.

Moreover, when describing the peace agreement, The Jerusalem Post has stated that this is the "first time a U.S. President has provided a detailed map of this kind."¹² While past peace deals have failed to define and maintain clear borders for Israel and Palestine, this deal states exactly where the state of Israel would extend. It further includes that Palestinian refugees will not have the right to return to "Israel" (as defined by the borders in the deal), and only a small number would be allowed to return to a "future" Palestinian state.¹³ If a new Palestine is established in the future along these rigid lines, scholars have suggested that Palestinian organizations may be confined to working in these areas. For aid organizations, this means they could potentially lose the right to work in most of the places where they were mandated to serve and lose any hope of resettling refugees back in those areas.

As the current deal stands, researchers and reporters have discovered that no Palestinian leadership was included in its drafting, nor were they consulted for their requests in a peace deal¹⁴. In 2019, before any of the plan's political details were revealed by the Trump administration, The German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) was at the forefront of discussing how the plan would disempower Palestinian political leadership and

¹¹ Al Jazeera, 2020.

¹² Harkov & Keinon, 2020.

¹³ Harkov & Keinon, 2020.

¹⁴ Asseburg, 2019.

threaten refugee welfare. In fact, while the Palestinian Authority and many Arab states were aware that a new "peace plan" was on the Trump agenda because of his campaign promises in 2016, it was not clear that this would be a plan solely between the U.S. and Israel, which Palestinians would be told to accept upon its completion¹⁵. In an analysis of the deal from Haaretz, the deal "seem[s] to reflect a desire to appeal directly to the hearts of the Palestinians themselves while bypassing the leadership and presenting a vision for a brighter future that depends mainly on their readiness to cooperate."¹⁶ One of the first signs that this deal would be one-sided was when the United States completely stopped its funding for UNRWA in 2018, stating that the aid organization "perpetuates the refugee problem by encouraging refugees to insist on their status and Right of Return rather than integrating within their current host states."¹⁷ Groups like SWP were able to predict this deal's outcome before its unveiling, but even they are not sure of what the future holds for Palestinian aid organizations.

B. The Division and Devaluation of Palestinian Leadership

A powerful demonstration of a government's legitimacy is when others recognize it as the entity to negotiate with on behalf of that government's people. In light of this fact, it is perhaps shocking to consider that one of the largest Israeli-Palestinian peace deal attempts, the "Oslo Accords", was negotiated in secret without the knowledge of most of the Palestinian delegation's formal representatives¹⁸. Therefore, it is not surprising that many Palestinians viewed the accords as not in their interest, and the peace it established was doomed to fail. A sustainable peace deal

¹⁵ Asseburg, 2019.

¹⁶ Tibon et al., 2018.

¹⁷ Tibon et al., 2018.

¹⁸ Khalidi, 1997.

must involve the individuals/bodies who hold recognizable influence over their group and can legitimately claim the ability to enforce the particulars of a peace deal. Even worse than the Oslo Accords, the Deal of the Century was only negotiated between the United States and Israel; neither of whom can truly claim the ability to influence and represent the Palestinian people.

On the other hand, when the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was publicly engaged in peace talks with American and Israeli leaders at the end of the 20th century, they were staking their claim as speakers for Palestinian national interest. “Over time, the PLO has embraced a broader role, claiming to represent all Palestinians while running the Palestinian National Authority (PA)”¹⁹. Yet, scholars ironically maintain that the Palestinian Authority's international authority, which was given under the Oslo Accords, is fictitious²⁰. They do not have sovereignty, jurisdiction, or ultimate control over the West Bank, Gaza strip, and East Jerusalem. Unlike traditional Weberian states, the Palestinian Authority still does not have a monopoly over the law and legitimate forms of violence within their territories. Understandably, it is difficult to maintain control over their borders, when Palestine's borders have changed drastically in the last century; and to enforce the law, when a surrounding country constantly enforces its law over their own. Despite this, the Palestinian Authority still holds on to public exhibitions of legitimacy. For example, a small group of members belonging to the Palestinian Authority enjoy greater access to the region and can travel more freely than other Palestinians due to a supposed recognition of their authority by Israel. The Palestinian Authority also uses traditional signifiers of statehood (such as a state capitol, national flag, and governmental ministries) to indicate that they govern over a recognizable state, even if other nations do not concede this recognition.

¹⁹ History.com Editors, 2018.

²⁰ Khalidi, 1997.

Despite these displays of authority and unified control, Palestinian representation remains divided. The most visible groups who claim to represent Palestinians, the “Fatah” party in the PLO and the “Hamass” organization located in Gaza have split the Palestinian political identity as they both compete for power. After the start of Pan-Arabism, socialists were drawn to a new secular nationalist party led by Yasser Arafat, known as Fatah. According to scholars at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, anyone could join Fatah, so long as they believed in pushing out Israel, armed resistance, the Right of Return, and protection for refugees²¹. These concepts made Fatah extremely popular with Palestinians inspired by the militaristic revolutionary trend of the 1950s, who believed it was Palestine's time to fight back. In the 1960s, a series of "lone wolf" Palestinian acts of aggression were carried out. Arafat claimed the most extensive attack for Fatah, to make them appear more authentically of the people and more revolutionary than Egypt's Nasser. Fatah might have remained the sole unifying force for the Palestinians if it had not been for outside influence, mainly the interests of Egypt and Jordan in the Palestinian territory. After the first Fatah-claimed attack in 1964, Nasser formed the “Palestine Liberation Organization” (PLO) to regain a foothold in the Palestinian cause. In 1967, Fatah joined the PLO, and Arafat became PLO Chairman in 1969.

In the years that followed, persistent unrest, the 1970 Six Days' War, and Jordan's "Black September" led to the constant displacement of Palestinian leadership until the PLO was no longer within Palestinian soil. The insecurity of being on foreign territory made the PLO vulnerable representatives at best over the Palestinians. In 1987, the Palestinian people decided to take matters into their own hands, and the “First Intifada” occurred. Thus, marks the beginning

²¹ al-Omari, 2015.

of the Islamic resistance movement known as Hamas. The Intifada shocked both Israel and the PLO. Wanting to regain the people's trust and legitimacy, Fatah attempted to spin the aftermath of the Intifada to officially declare independence for the State of Palestine in 1988. Despite this, the increased security measures and resentment built between Israel and Gaza secured Hamas' de-facto control, who primarily took credit for the Intifada and continues to champion armed resistance in Gaza and a complete return for formerly Palestinian land. Hamas sees the growing fragility of the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government's fear of another rebellion as proof that the time for rule by the people is imminent. They predict Fatah will collapse, and the PLO will be eventually forced to recognize Hamas's legitimacy, perhaps even incorporating them into the organization. Hamas's strategy is to outlast the PLO's crumbling infrastructure, instead of disarming and making other changes that might tempt the PLO to accept Hamas as legitimate Palestinian power beforehand²². Only time will tell who will gain supremacy over the Palestinian voice, but in the meantime, the fractured leadership continues to weaken the Palestinian cause.

C. An Explanation of UNRWA: The Largest Palestinian INGO

Palestine has necessitated unprecedented concern and attention from the United Nations. Palestinian refugees are the only group to have their own UN agency, separate from UNHCR. For nearly 70 years, this agency known as UNRWA has expanded beyond advocating for refugee resettlement to perform social, medical, and educational services within five separate states/territories.²³ UNRWA is a subsidiary body of the UN General Assembly, and the state of Palestine is an “observer state” of the UN. These facts contribute to UNRWA's need to constantly prove their legitimacy on the diplomatic front, a situation which only worsens as the

²² al-Omari, 2015.

²³ UNRWA Newsroom: Official Statements, 2020.

Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues. Using traditional diplomatic methods, UNRWA often points to their UN-established mandate, reminds UN member states of the Security Council Resolutions relating to Palestinian refugees, and appeals to International Humanitarian Law when their beneficiaries are disproportionately attacked during the conflict. They also must continually proving to stakeholders and donor governments why their work is invaluable to humanitarianism. UNRWA has a written legal foundation to rely upon and the support of many international organizations, committees, councils, and peace treaties which have called for an end to the Palestinian refugee crisis. Some of these supporting bodies include the United Nations Security Council (according to Resolutions 242 and 338), the United Nations General Assembly (according to Resolution 194), and numerous treaties which form the basis of customary law (such as the Taba Summit, the Camp David Accords, the Oslo Accords, the Clinton Parameters, the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, and more). However, their legal legitimacy is a double-edged sword because, as the conflict continues, Israelis and Palestinians alike have witnessed how the United Nations does not seem to have the power to enforce its support for the Palestinian cause.

As the conflict became protracted, UNRWA found that expecting a comprehensive and immediate "Right of Return" (the Palestinian call for resettlement to their previous homes and lands) was unrealistic at this point in politics. However, instead of ignoring that fact, the organization reconsidered its mission, which is what I believe sets UNRWA apart from other humanitarian organizations. Instead of leaving the refugees to their fate, UNRWA now cares for them in the humanitarian sphere by offering aid on the ground, while simultaneously pushing for policy change and the Right of Return in the diplomatic sphere. According to an essay in *Humanitarian Diplomacy*, the mission of UNRWA has shifted from refugee resettlement towards an assurance that these refugees "would be supported and protected until such time as

there is a comprehensive political settlement on the question of Palestine."²⁴ However, this more inclusive mission has changed UNRWA to operate like a small-scale government, with a massive impact. For example, in 2007, UNRWA provided jobs and salaries for 25,000 employees (most of whom were refugees), making it the single largest employer in the region.²⁵ Every time their mission becomes more challenging due to political changes and territorial losses, UNRWA adapts its approach and uses diplomatic channels to continue its mission. For example, after the Six Days' War resulted in the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, UNRWA negotiated The Comay-Michelmores Agreement with Israel, where the latter pledged their support to cooperate with UNRWA officials working in these areas. Furthermore, when the Second Intifada of 2000 caused many oppressed UNRWA employees in Gazan camps to desire participation in retaliation, the organization maintained their dedication to UN principles and provided humanitarian assistance to both sides of the confrontation²⁶. Due to UNRWA's great regard for diplomacy, this UN organization has maintained its operations in the most difficult of circumstances and even superseded its mission; causing an increased level of support for its beneficiaries and an alleviation of suffering in the region which would not have been possible otherwise.

D. The Issue of Palestinian Refugees

Palestinians consider the crisis of 1948 to be a central issue in their conflict with Israel, referring to the time as “al-Nakba” (“the catastrophe”). After the mass migration of refugees in the 1948 war, Palestinians who fled their homes joined others who had been forcibly removed,

²⁴ Wijewardane, 2007.

²⁵ Wijewardane, 2007.

²⁶ Wijewardane, 2007.

deported, or displaced in years prior. Today, the question of who constitutes a Palestinian “refugee” is debated²⁷. There are internally displaced persons (such as those who fled to the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza) and external refugees (those who fled to neighboring countries or traveled beyond non-Arab states). Since both groups left their homes and livelihoods, they consider themselves “refugees” and are looking for reparations to consider this issue resolved. Palestinians hold onto the right to return to their pre-1948 land, and "they demand financial compensation and for Israel to acknowledge and accept some responsibility for the historical wrong done to the Palestinian refugees."²⁸ Following al-Nakba, The Right of Return for these refugees was supported in UN General Assembly Resolution 194. Section 3 of this resolution even called for refugees to receive compensation from Israel and the international community. Despite these resolutions, every negotiation which has attempted an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians on the topic of refugees has failed to actualize any solutions for them.

Israeli leadership views the issue of Palestinian refugees as a key component in the Palestinian "victim narrative" and a continuation of the Israeli implication of guilt, so Israel has an incentive to resolve the Palestinian refugee problem as well. However, Israel fears that if they allow even the original estimate of 700,000 Palestinians from 1948 the "Right to Return" to the state, then they will overwhelm Israel and undermine its nature as a Jewish state²⁹. Regarding compensation, Israel is concerned that if they pay once for the rehabilitation of Palestinian refugees and Palestinians feel the amount is not sufficient, then Israel will suffer from perpetual demands from the international community and the Palestinian Authority. They are also deeply concerned with the Palestinian political rhetoric of the past, which encouraged Israel to be

²⁷ Brynen, p.31, 2018.

²⁸ Goldenberg, p.12, 2015.

²⁹Goldenberg, 2015.

responsible for the entirety of refugee reparations. Considering that before 1948, Palestinians constituted more than forty percent of the area that would become Israel's state, compensating all the losses alone would demand immense coordination and may cripple the Israeli economy.

Furthermore, Israeli leadership has brought up demanding compensation from Arab states for the Jewish refugees who similarly fled to Israel from Arab countries. According to the Israeli narrative, many Palestinians fled their homes freely of their own accord, and the repossession of their lands was something a functioning state like Israel had to pursue once it became clear that the former residents would not be soon returning. Israel now had to absorb the Jewish immigrants who fled Arab states (perhaps out of a similar fear of persecution), plus the Jews emigrating Europe and other regions to make "aliyah"³⁰ to "the newly liberated" Jewish homeland. Israel uses this narrative to justify their actions after the 1948 war, when several policies were passed to determine ownership for the "abandoned" Palestinian lands and build the state.

A 1950 Israeli law regarding abandoned property gave rights over the land to the Israeli Custodian of Absentee Property; a position devised to look after the land who typically granted it to new Jewish settlers³¹. Supposedly, this law kept a record of the land to yield it to the original owners if they ever returned. However, subsequent laws such as the 1954 Offences and Jurisdiction Law may point to the intention to permanently retain the lands for Israelis by not allowing the previous residents to return. This later law criminalized the return of Palestinians based on the sovereignty of the Israeli state, sanctioning their deportation and imprisonment as

³⁰ Dowty, p.34-38, 2012.

³¹ Dowty, 2012.

illegal immigrants should they try to return. Contrary to these policies, empirical polls have shown that the modern Israeli citizen seems to support some form of a compensation plan for Palestinian refugees. In a 2016 poll from the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research and Tel Aviv University, a majority of Israelis stated they were not opposed to Israel offering a compensation deal to internal Palestinian refugees living in camps, and even more stated they were not opposed to coupling compensation and a permanent settlement package with a two-state solution.³² This data may point to a disconnect between the political narrative of Israeli authorities and the Israeli public's opinion concerning refugees and the larger conflict.

In the Palestinian conflict narrative, it is essential that "restorative justice" occurs for refugees. Restorative justice is a Conflict Resolution concept indicating that the offended party should be granted reparations to restore what was lost, instead of taking punitive actions against their offenders.³³ Palestinians ask for a return to the land which they lost in 1948 to compensate for al-Nakba, supporting their claim with the premise of international law. The Right of Return ("al-Awda"), is a term which Palestinian nationalists have adopted from international law, stating that "displaced people have a fundamental right to go back to their country of origin"³⁴. Consequently, the Palestinians use these resolutions to appeal to the international community, remind them of their supposed promises in past negotiations, and make Israel appear to be violating international law. Lastly, appealing to the highest law also shows credibility for the cause of a stateless people, who perhaps feel that they cannot place their trust in local legislation.

³² Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research and Tel Aviv University, p.5, 2016.

Question V8-10 shows support for permanent settlement and compensation package. Question PV11.4 shows support for compensation and settlement for internal refugees.

³³ Zehr & Mika, p.48, 1998.

³⁴ The United Nations General Assembly, 1948.

As the years go by, it becomes more difficult for Palestinians who were 1948 refugees to claim the land in Palestine as theirs, especially if they have become citizens of a new country or if their families have grown. The descendants of refugees complicate the Right of Return further because they were never natural citizens of Palestine, but it is still considered by many to be "the country of origin" for their family.

When it comes to dispensing compensation for refugees, the disparity between Palestinian expectations and Israeli concessions stands in the way of progress. Palestinians discuss compensation in terms of public and private land and include all registered refugees.³⁵ Conversely, Israel would like to pay a flat rate, possibly to an international fund that can contribute the rest of the funds needed to rehabilitate the original 1948 refugees alone.³⁶ This stance seems insincere or inconsistent to Palestinians who have seen Israel substantially provide for Jewish refugees or pay reparations to Jewish settlers in the past. For example, when Israel withdrew its troops and settlers from the Gaza strip in 2005 to leave the Palestinians to govern themselves, they provided for the resettling of displaced Israeli citizens. These settlers received more than one billion U.S. dollars, and they were fewer than 9,000 people.³⁷ Furthermore, Israel desired that these settlers move mainly for demographic reasons to maintain a Jewish majority in other places. The Israel Law Review states that Palestinians "would further note that settlement activity is considered illegal under international law, while Palestinian refugees are themselves the victims of forced displacement, making the difference in compensation levels even more difficult to swallow."³⁸ Finally, since the dignity of refugees is intrinsically tied to the issue of

³⁵ Sachs, p.78, 2015.

³⁶ Goldenberg, p.13, 2015.

³⁷ Brynen, p.39, 2018.

³⁸ Brynen, p.40 (Note 52), 2018.

reparations, it is worth noting that feelings of an "inadequate" compensation could cause more significant harm to Palestinians than receiving no compensation at all.

While the international community fails to respond, Palestinian refugees waiting on the Right of Return rely on the global agency that has consistently registered, educated, and generally cared for them and their families' immediate needs. As mentioned, UNRWA is a relief and works agency established under UN Resolution 302 in 1950 to focus exclusively on Palestinian refugees³⁹. UNRWA has "contributed to the welfare and human development of four generations of Palestine refugees."⁴⁰ From caring for around 750,000 refugees at its beginning, it now serves approximately five million.⁴¹ With the Right of Return consuming refugee negotiations on the state and international level, neither Israel nor the Palestinian Authority have dedicated their time and resources to the physical treatment of refugees. UNRWA and hundreds of grassroots organizations have attempted to answer the call; however, American support for Israel and the authoritative challenge Hamas poses to the Palestinian Authority have caused a shortage of funds and unequal treatment for certain groups of refugees.

The quality of life for internal refugees is the cause for much humanitarian concern, particularly in Gaza. Gaza's limited access routes are controlled by Egypt and Israel, meaning that the 1.9 million Palestinians who reside there have no control over what enters and exits. The reason for Gaza's staunch blockade by Israel since the Second Intifada is cited as fear of terrorism by Hamas, the party which has de-facto control over the Gaza Strip and has built their platform on violent resistance towards Israel. Hamas pushed Fatah out of their joint government

³⁹ Bastaki, p.2, 2017.

⁴⁰ UNRWA.org, "Who We Are", 2020.

⁴¹ Bastaki, p.3, 2017.

in Gaza in 2007, approximately two years after Israel chose to withdraw all forces and settlers from the strip. Although Israel's security concerns revolve around Hamas, not one route under their legal governing body, the Palestinian Authority. When it began the blockade (which was also enforced by Egypt on its part), Israel stated that the two countries no longer trusted the Palestinian Authority to maintain control within the strip. For the 1.3 million refugees living in Gaza, this blockade has meant unpredictability in access to goods, medicine, and other services. Moreover, it means no freedom of movement from the eight recognized camps, which have one of the highest population densities in the world⁴².

Overall, it is estimated that more than 800,000 Palestinians have been subjected to forced displacement under Israel, many of whom were refugees from the 1948 war.⁴³ External refugees have likewise faced being displaced multiple times, due to the "Black September" massacre in the 1970s, the Lebanese Civil War, the First Gulf War, Gadafi's expulsion of Libyan Palestinians in 1995, the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the ongoing crisis in Syria, to name a few. In 1949, the UNHCR was established to offer protection for refugees, including improving their circumstances. This agency works to resettle refugees in other states or repatriate them if their condition is no longer deemed actively hostile. Until Israel recognizes the Palestinian Right of Return, the vast majority of Palestinian refugees cannot be repatriated. Despite that fact, both internal and external refugees continue to advocate for a Right of Return, even though it has traditionally meant receiving neither compensation nor equal treatment under foreign rule in the meantime.

⁴² UNRWA.org, "Where We Work: Gaza Strip", 2020.

⁴³ Bastaki, p.6, 2017.

In conclusion, the question of Palestinian refugees has been aggrandized to a fundamental disagreement between Israeli and Palestinian narratives of the conflict. Both sides appear to see the need for a resolution, and public conception of the refugee problem may not be echoed by each group's formal leadership. The Right of Return and compensation are the two prevailing ideas to resolve this issue. While there is disagreement on these solutions' implementation and scale, the problem becomes exceedingly more challenging to solve. During the interim, the appalling conditions in Gaza and those living in refugee camps have caused the international community to seek mitigation of the conflict by improving refugees' lives with humanitarian aid and resettlement services. Although a permanent solution has not been found, hope remains; new leadership, a change in acknowledgment of the struggle for refugees, a change in the Gaza blockade, or an international agreement to provide compensation would all be unprecedented events which could occur in the future, leading to a change in status for Palestinian refugees.

E. Past Peace Deal Failures and Scholarly Recommendations for Improvement

Peace deals have historically struggled to provide lasting solutions in this conflict. The 1948 war resulted in damage and distress to approximately 700,000 refugees, forming a Chosen Trauma passed down from generation to generation. While their frustration over the lack of a resolution grew, human rights violations have escalated in Gaza and Palestinian refugee camps. There have been many attempts in the past to resolve at least the refugee crisis, but they have failed to listen to the concerns of both sides, failed to calculate realistic estimates, and have been aimed at "Track I Diplomacy" (diplomacy between political elites) for solutions alone.

The first significant peace deal of this kind occurred one year after the 1948 war, when the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP) worked with Israel and refugee

groups to calculate property lost by Palestinians and resettle some of them⁴⁴. In their proposal, the international community would help facilitate about 100,000 refugees, and Israel agreed to pay some compensation for their property losses⁴⁵. That plan came the closest to Israeli agreement for a Right of Return, covering both resettlement and monetary compensation for external refugees. However, it was seen as a "Band-Aid solution" for the following reasons: 1) It only covered one-seventh of those estimated to have been displaced in al-Nakba, 2) The compensation would exclude "war damages" and the total value of the property that Arab states had taken from Jews in 1948, and 3) The majority of refugees relocated under this plan would be settled *outside* Israel-Palestine⁴⁶. Consequently, the project was rejected by both parties. A similar proposal was issued in the Clinton Parameters. The Clinton Parameters proposed both a return of refugees to "historical Palestine" or "to their homeland" and some form of monetary compensation, given by the international community and facilitated by the United States⁴⁷. The addition of financial compensation could be a valuable solution for external refugees who are not living in camps and have been comfortably resettled in other countries, because their families may not desire to permanently rebuild their lives in Palestine again. However, acknowledging their claim to a Right of Return, increasing their ease of access for visiting the Palestinian territories, and providing financial compensation for their families might be a suitable substitute.

Therefore, instead of a plan to completely repatriate all refugees, a successful project should incorporate financial compensation for those who cannot or do not wish to be repatriated. A potential pitfall of this solution could be resistance from Palestinians who feel like they are

⁴⁴ UNCCP, 1950.

⁴⁵ UNCCP, 1950.

⁴⁶ Fischbach, p.94, 2003.

⁴⁷ "The Clinton Parameters...", 2000.

trading financial compensation for the Right of Return. To avoid this, a successful peace proposal must carefully offer refugees compensation (and allow them to reject it), representing the money as "something which they are owed" and something that grants them the agency to leave an unhealthy environment if they are currently residing in one. They should be encouraged to hold on to the Right of Return since it is strongly tied to their conflict narrative. If done correctly and respectfully, sufficient compensation may lead to a greater willingness to cooperate with Israel on another peace agreement to resolve the other major issues in this conflict. Cooperation and a renewed relationship between Israeli leadership and the Palestinian Authority is perhaps the only way to re-open the door to a physical Right of Return offer which may be agreed upon by both sides.

On the other hand, another danger of suggesting financial compensation for refugees is resistance from the Israeli side. When the Madrid Conference occurred in 1991, the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations resulted in both sides acknowledging the importance of looking after the 1948 refugees. After Oslo, the refugee question officially became a final status issue again⁴⁸. Yet, when these conversations attempted to draw up refugee compensation, Israel was concerned that paying reparations would indicate that they had committed a one-sided wrong⁴⁹. Perhaps, for this reason, Prime Minister Netanyahu continues to ask Arab states to compensate Israel for their 1948 Jewish refugees if Israel is expected to compensate the Palestinians. Some scholars suggest it is better to avoid the term "reparations" in a peace deal for this reason, and the United Nations has historically preferred the term "compensation" instead.

⁴⁸ Brynen, p. 34, 2018.

⁴⁹ Sachs, p. 80, 2015.

Another spoiler for compensation in the past was coupling it *immediately* to promise a Right of Return. The Clinton Parameters plan never came to fruition because the Israeli government felt threatened by the prospect of being suddenly overwhelmed by nearly five million refugees. Instead, a successful proposal should attempt to assess which groups of refugees would like to return and harmonize that with how many refugees Israel feels they can accept per year. Perhaps a slow "trickle of refugees" can be agreed upon that would allow for the Israeli economy and population to adjust, and other groups of refugees who are more permanently settled would consent to receive compensation on the condition that they do not overwhelm Israel too. Even though the Palestinian rhetoric is to never give up the Right of Return, many well-settled refugees would like to visit their homeland rather than rebuild a new life there from scratch again⁵⁰. It will take significant work on the ground to estimate the refugees who wish to return and those who want to receive compensation and count the maximum possible number of refugees that Israel may be willing to accept before proposing it. For this reason, Track III diplomacy efforts are necessary to perform the groundwork and convince both parties, perhaps at the community level, that this is their best option for a refugee solution.

Instead of relying on out-of-touch political spokesmen, diplomacy efforts need to be expanded to include influential non-government actors and even grassroots organizers (known as "Track II" and "Track III" diplomacy, respectively). Scholars have pointed to the pivotal role that influences but "average" people played in other violent intractable conflicts, such as the conflict in Northern Ireland, where Catholic priests and businessmen became key diplomats in the solution for peace. For this reason, it has been suggested that a successful peace proposal should

⁵⁰ Fischbach, p.98, 2003.

also focus on the community level, including the religious sector. To be successful, this type of recommendation needs to incorporate religious people from both sides, who have not been previously included in the conversation about refugees and hold much influence in their communities. Secular leaders usually facilitate all peace process negotiations and international leaders, who are out of touch with community values. From among Israelis and Palestinians, there could be a representation of Reform, Orthodox, and Haredi Jews, Sunni and Shi'i Muslims, and Catholics and Orthodox Christians in a conversation about refugees. However, each group's representation in the intervention plan may be based on their proportion in the refugee population in question.

Another refugee intervention strategy has been the structural improvement of refugee camps. Many cities were inundated with 1948 refugees who have become regular citizens, such as Amman. However, particular areas such as Al-Sabinah and Zarqa, are designated refugee "camps." Of the five million estimated refugees, roughly one third live in fifty-eight recognized refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip⁵¹. In these camps, the quality of life is usually reduced since the host country allowed refugees to live there with the mindset that they would be eventually returning. After all this time, the community has had to construct infrastructure which may not be ideal in their location. Temporary camps that have turned permanent are depleting scarce resources like water, and structural deficits (such as the poorly constructed sewage systems in the Burj Barajneh Camp) can impact their health, hygiene, maternal and infant mortality rates, and free time. In December of 2009, the European Union supported a refugee camp rehabilitation project for UNRWA, which included a new water system and sewage network for Burj Barajneh, the most overpopulated camp neighboring

⁵¹ UNRWA.org, "Where We Work", 2020.

Beirut.⁵² However, these projects may no longer be possible due to the recent defunding of UNRWA by its largest donor, the United States. Around \$200 million in Palestinian aid was cut under the Trump administration in 2018⁵³. The organization's chief accused President Trump of withdrawing UNRWA funds in retaliation for Palestinian protests regarding the Jerusalem embassy decision⁵⁴. Considering the closure of the PLO office in Washington, DC, and the public statements made about the United States' unwavering support for its friend and ally, Israel, the United States may be removing itself from responsibility for the Palestinian cause in general. If this is true, perhaps a successful peace proposal should seek to supply a new donor to the Palestinian cause, appealing to the European Union or other UN member states.

IV. Methodology

A. Research Design

For this study, I have relied heavily on qualitative data composed of primary sources. I aimed to conduct at least ten interviews online with participants from Jordan. I chose a qualitative design because this research is a case study into the personal thoughts and feelings of aid workers and government officials, to report their perceptions of how the "deal of the century" has affected and may affect their work in meeting the needs of the Palestinian people. I conducted these interviews virtually, via video and phone, because of the inability to conduct in-person meetings due to the outbreak of COVID-19. Additionally, I used qualitative data like newspaper opinion pieces and other relevant secondary sources to supplement my interviews' findings. As a

⁵² UNRWA.org, "Burj Barajneh Camp", 2020.

⁵³ Al Jazeera, 2018.

⁵⁴ Al Jazeera, 2018.

result of this topic's new nature and the possibility that it will change in a few months after the Biden administration transitions to power in the United States, there are few books and secondary sources written about the impacts of this deal. However, I have included the opinions of as many credible scholars and statements from international bodies as possible to position my interviews within a broader context. For my interviewing process, I began by reaching out to employees at aid organizations that have been actively working with Palestinians since the deal's proposal. I briefed them on the interview contents and my research topic, providing them with the "Informed Consent Form," which can be located under Appendix B of this paper. Then, I interviewed them through a prepared set of questions, which will include these topics: what they know about the "Deal of the Century," how they feel about significant components of the plan if they believe their organization and other organizations were impacted by it, how their organization is/is not responding to it if there is a need to partner with other Palestinian aid organizations if they believe it has changed the needs of Palestinian refugees if there are certain elements that make the Palestinian refugee cause unique, and what knowledge future peace deal creators should have. The full list of interview questions can be found in Appendix A at the end of this paper.

B. Research Limitations

This research should be viewed in the context of its limitations since the interviews only provide case studies of Palestinian aid workers and government officials in Jordan and cannot represent the entire population of people who assist Palestinians. Qualitative case studies were the most useful approach for my research since this research's overall goal was to discover whether Palestinian aid organizations feel the need to adapt to this latest peace deal, in the opinion of their employees and people who are knowledgeable about them. Additionally, I only

asked my participants questions over three months (October to December), which significantly limits the impact of my research conclusions over time, as politics change and the peace deal is or is not realized. Access to participants has also significantly limited the scope of my findings since I interviewed out of convenience, with the help of my contacts in the area. Interviewing out of a convenience sample means that I likely did not interview a balanced range of aid employees. The ramifications of COVID-19 also increased the barriers to access, so I interviewed fewer people than I probably would have if this research were conducted in person.

Moreover, because I am a foreigner, an American citizen, and partially ethnically Palestinian, public perception may have led to biased answers from my participants. However, I took care to speak to my participants before the interview begins, and express to them that I am a student, that my research will only be used for educational purposes for the School for International Training, and that they will receive a copy of this research upon completion. Lastly, I have kept my interviewees' identities and the specific organizations they work for confidential and have not included any names or attributed any direct quotes to a single person/organization in this research. I hope that the extra confidentiality measures have given my participants the confidence to speak honestly about their opinions and helped eliminate some of the inevitable bias that comes with this interview process.

C. Sample Selection

This study featured a "convenience sample" style since the population was selected out of convenience from my Jordan contacts. I aimed to interview at least ten adults employed or formerly employed with aid organizations or the government in Jordan. I interviewed people whose organizations assist Palestinian refugees/IDPs, preferring employees whose organizations comprise Palestinians. The interviews were conducted with organizations and government

officials from Jordan because my practicum at the Jordan Health Aid Society International and first-semester schooling in Jordan facilitated my access to these groups. I did not limit the sample based on categories like gender, sexuality, ability, or marital status, because the only factors critical to this study were the person's relationship to an organization (employed or unemployed) and the length of employment. I limited the sample based on work because if participants had been out of contact with an organization for over a year, they might not have had sufficient information regarding the impact of the deal on the organization and its beneficiaries. I also limited the sample based on language and only selected people who were comfortable speaking English for the interview duration. It was vital that I not rely on a translator or try to conduct the interview in Arabic for ethical reasons. I wanted to avoid placing additional pressure on the interviewees by having an interpreter present, and English is the only language in which I am completely fluent. Lastly, I limited the sample size by age, selecting only adults for participation. The age limit was essential to ensure that all participants could fully answer for themselves and consent for my research involvement.

D. Data Collection and Analysis

I followed a question-based interview style to form the data set for this research. I have decided to conduct the interviews on an individual basis and developed a list of questions to guide the interview. I preferred a virtual interview approach rather than a self-administered questionnaire because I am interested in the participants' opinions and wanted to give room for interpretation and explanation. I selected an "open question" format, which means that participants could answer all my questions in their own words, rather than being limited to a list of options. I conducted the interviews solely in English without a translator and over the phone or by video call, depending on which choice made the volunteer most comfortable. I sourced my

participation subjects through contacts at the Jordan Health Aid Society International and through my supervisor, Dr. Bayan Abdulhaq. They put me directly in touch with individuals and/or organizations in Jordan involved in humanitarian assistance for Palestinians. I also reached out to my contacts within and outside of the School for International Training for advice on organizations interested in consenting to an interview.

Additionally, I did not interview any person who had a close, personal relationship with myself to limit personal bias from the responses. The data was collected over three months, from October until the beginning of December, and it was compiled into this final capstone report during the same time frame. Any data not directly used in this final report was not shared with anyone else and deleted after five years (December 2025). Upon the conclusion of my research by mid-December, every participant will be provided with a digital copy of this final report for evidence of the data which I collected with their consent.

E. Ethical Considerations

I did not interview any vulnerable populations, relying entirely on adults who consented to the interviews and on publicly accessible databases for my secondary sources. It was of the utmost importance that I maintained the confidentiality of everyone I interviewed, especially if they confided details of their organization, their government work, or how the deal of the century had affected them personally. Therefore, I took care to never report details of their work that were not directly relevant to my research; and I avoided asking any questions that were not relevant, could evoke anger or embarrassment, or threaten participants' confidentiality. For this reason, my research did not begin until all approvals had been obtained from both my capstone advisor and through an Institutional Review Board, with the School for International Training's help. Additionally, I made it my policy to never record any employee names or descriptive

details of their situation, which were observed during interviews, which might have resulted in identifying an employee or their associates.

I did not conduct any interviews with any person until I had obtained their consent to the interview via my Informed Consent Form and verbal approval over the phone directly before the start of the interview. I also answered any questions about the purpose of my research, my status and identity, and how the data I collected would be used. I emphasized my position as a student before the interview to limit any potentially uncomfortable power dynamics between the participants and myself. Lastly, I ensured that participants controlled the terms of the interview by explaining that they may refuse to answer any question at any time, stop the interview at any time, see any notes I took from the interview, and request for any information to be left out of the final report. After the interviews, all participants were emailed a copy of this final report. There were no incentives or benefits to anyone participating in this research besides gaining access to the final report.

V. Findings

I was able to interview a total of ten participants who were connected to Palestinian aid organizations in Jordan, through a virtual interview adhering to the descriptions in my methodology section above. All quotations in these findings come directly from interview responses, however they have not been attributed to the people who said them, to maintain confidentiality. If over 50% of interviewees stated the same (or similar) perspective, I have reported this to be the opinion of “a majority” of my participants. Similarly, if under 50% of participants stated the same opinion, I have reported this to be “a minority”, or the “opinion of a

few” interviewees. If only one participant stated something, I referred to this as an “outlier”. The following are the results of their interview responses, organized by the topics of the research questions I asked:

A. “What do they know about the Deal of the Century?”

While the particulars of the "deal of the century" are still unknown to many, it has been the cause of serious concern for those connected with Palestinian aid for the past year. All participants knew that the deal was devised by the Trump administration in the United States, after meetings and consultation with formal Israeli political leadership, without the consultation of any significant Palestinian leadership. 50% of participants were aware that it had allocations of land for establishing a “future” Palestinian state, and 50% were aware that there was a promise of investment of billions of American dollars for infrastructure. However, these figures were not comprised of the same people, with most participants being aware of either one or the other clause alone. 100% of participants were aware that under the deal, major concessions of the West Bank territory would now be classified as “Israeli land”. Additionally, all participants knew that the current Israeli and American administrations had not yet begun realizing every element of the deal. In particular, a majority of participants were aware that notable West Bank annexations and American investment in the region had been halted by a number of political reasons – ranging from protests in the region, to competing deals with Arab nations, to the U.S. Presidential election. Every participant was aware that former U.S. President Trump lost re-election, and they all hope that this deal will never be enforced in the years to come. Lastly, while participants disagreed about what aid organizations should do in response, every single person I interviewed felt negatively towards the deal and its promises.

B. “Has the deal impacted their organization, and do they believe it will impact them in the future? Will they change their mission or vision? Will they partner with other orgs?”

Participants disagreed about whether the proposal of the deal alone had a severe impact on Palestinian organizations, but a majority of them stated that they had been operating this past year under the assumption that it would be realized. Moreover, although President Trump may not be in office in the future, this deal has set a precedent of virtually unlimited support for Israel, and the majority of people I interviewed did not believe that fact will change in the near future. Some people disagreed about whether the deal was still on the table with President-elect Biden's new election. These individuals stated that the deal would leave with President Trump because its details were unrealistic and developed without the inclusion of Palestinian leadership in the first place. Yet, regardless of whether they believed the deal would die out or be actualized in the future, all interview participants treated the announcement of the deal as "nothing new" in their eyes. Many stated that the United States has had a long history of backing Israeli territorial expansion and their quest for international recognition at Palestinians' expense. Therefore, a more extreme pro-Israel deal was expected from President Trump, whom they believed would back this status quo.

Before the U.S. election, the general consensus was that other Palestinian organizations will act the same and treat the United States as a "lost cause" if President Trump won reelection, and not waste time trying to appeal to American officials for aid or a renegotiation of the deal. However, since the election, most people responded that even if the U.S. continues to be pro-Israel, there is a possibility that this particular deal will not come to fruition. For that reason, they believe Palestinian organizations should be proactive in spreading information about how dangerous the effects of this deal would be for refugees and Palestinian citizen's rights; to

prevent any aspects of the deal from being realized by the future Biden administration. When asked what aid organizations were doing in response to the deal's announcement, participants stated that their organizations were all cautiously watching to see if it would be realized, while continuing "business as usual". According to their interviews, none of the organizations did change their mission, objectives, or seek new partnerships. A few individuals felt a great deal of stress and disappointment about the deal, but they stated that all they could do was hope it would never be actualized; because it would be impossible for them to change the desires of the Palestinian people whom they serve (and therefore impossible to change their overall organizational goals).

C. "Will the needs of Palestinian refugees change because of this deal? Have they felt the need to prepare for a change in refugee rights/status?"

When two powerful states, the U.S. and Israel, dictated that there is "no Right of Return" for refugees to their homeland, Palestinian organizations struggled to redefine what "refugee rights" would entail. Per their mandates and international law, Palestinian refugees' rights *must* involve a Right of Return. Therefore, the most likely outcome was that these organizations simply refused the deal's definition of refugee rights on the basis that neither the U.S. nor Israel have the authority to dictate those rights.

When I asked if the needs of Palestinian refugees have changed, everyone replied that refugees' most desired need is an end to the years of conflict; and they do not believe a successful end to the dispute will be reached until Palestinians have a state. Thus, in the meantime, aid organizations are continuing to meet refugees' needs by providing them with the assistance they require to survive until the point in time where they can have a state. Many participants shared the sentiment that aid organizations will continue to operate according to

their current standards, backed by the UN, "in the face of deals and treaties coming from other countries to govern Palestinian lives and land."

D. "What do their organizations rely on to prove the legitimacy of their work? Will other Palestinian aid organizations act similarly to theirs in response to the deal?"

On the matter of refugee rights, these organizations have strong backing from the United Nations' texts and the example set forth by other Palestinian relief groups. In response to the deal, the organization UNRWA fell back on Resolution 194 as they have done in the past; and continued advocating for a Right of Return to formerly Palestinian lands. My interviewees have always relied on international law and a local element that many described as akin to the "values of the Palestinian people" to prove their work's legitimacy. Therefore, as long as they hold true to their constituents' values and can point to international law (such as UN Security Council Resolutions 194, 242, and 338), then their daily actions remain unchanged.

E. "What do they think about the plan's claim to eventually give territorial expansion for establishing a Palestinian State? What do they think about the claim to eventually grow investment by 50 billion U.S. dollars in ten years?"

Aid workers seem pessimistic about the deal's promise to provide Palestinians with "land roughly comparable in size to the West Bank and Gaza for establishing a future Palestinian State". According to my participants, a Palestinian state's goal is to have authority over the lands from the 1967 territory, based on UN Resolution 242. Therefore, it is not acceptable to Palestinian leadership for a peace deal to ask Palestinians to give up even more land for a "potential" state in the future with land "comparable" in size to the already-diminished land they hold in 2020. While the deal recognizes the Palestinian desire for a state in the abstract sense, it

does not seem to make realistic plans for the state's location or timeframe to be established. Considering that the desire for a state was previously named as "the most basic need of refugees" by my interview participants, this peace deal has failed to meet the one requirement which Palestinian leadership absolutely must have incorporated into a peace deal: their statehood.

Interviewees were also skeptical of the deal's promises of an airport, a tunnel connecting Gaza to the West Bank, and a capital in East Jerusalem. Participants remarked that, if any of these promises come to fruition, it will likely be the investment of money into the region. As part of the deal, United States investment in the region is supposed to grow Palestinian infrastructure and bolster the Palestinian economy by the amount of "about fifty billion U.S. dollars" within ten short years⁵⁵. However, with a new presidential administration and changing foreign aid opinions, this extreme growth project may not happen. Even if it does, each person interviewed said that Palestinians will feel that this amount is a "pay off" which they are not willing to accept in exchange for their true desires (a universally-recognized state with Jerusalem as its capital, the Right of Return to the land, rights over the resources in their land, and the removal of settlements in Palestinian territory). One of my participants stated that the politicians who crafted this peace deal were "thinking like businessmen" and were too focused on economic methods of achieving peace. Another person echoed this sentiment, saying that money is not the key issue for Palestinian assistance because "you cannot buy justice." Clearly, these individuals agreed that a peace deal needs to offer Palestinians a valid state to bring about peace and justice.

VI. Discussion

⁵⁵ Landau, 2019.

After listening to my participants and conducting this extensive research on the deal, I have also formed my own conclusions. A majority of my interview participants stated that they had been operating with Palestinian aid organizations for the past year under the assumption that the “deal of the century”, a deal which they were staunchly opposed to, would be realized. While my interview participants disagreed on the severity of impact which the mere proposal of the deal had on their work, I believe this fact alone implies negative consequences for their mentality and the wellbeing of their mission. Regardless of whether the deal will be actualized in the future, it is clear from my participants answers that it has already negatively impacted Palestinian aid organizations. The responses from my participants reflect what scholars at SWP and reporters from Al Jazeera and The Jerusalem Post predicted when pointing out that the language of the deal disempowers Palestinian leadership, threatens refugee welfare, and could limit where aid organizations are allowed to operate in the future.

Furthermore, I believe that the formal codification of these norms has made this deal a hindrance for achieving "peace" or crafting a peace plan in the future. To echo one scholar from *Intellectual Discourse*, the possibility of the United States serving as a mediator in this conflict may not even exist anymore.⁵⁶ He explains we have clearly chosen a "side" and served American interests to the extent that the United States cannot ever be trusted to be impartial. As somber as this outlook may seem, half of those whom I spoke to shared this opinion with me when they stated that the deal was “nothing new” and that the U.S. has repeatedly chosen to back Israeli territorial expansion in spite of international law. This half were also pessimistic that President-elect Biden nor any other American President would reverse the promises made in this deal. As my participants explained, only a deal which offers Palestinians their one true desire, recognized

⁵⁶ Moten, 2018.

statehood, can lead to progress for peace. So far, we have not seen true consideration for a recognized Palestinian State proposed by United States peace negotiators for some time.

However, the other half of my participants believed that a peace deal would necessitate the United States' participation. Yet, this proclamation was not based on the assertion that the United States could have a more pro-Palestinian leadership, which elevated the Palestinian voice to become a serious negotiator to Israel. Nor was it suggested that the United States could be an impartial mediator, because we would advocate for two states or a more equal state out of our desire to end the cycle of violence and uphold human rights. Instead, my other participants stated that the United States would have to be involved in a successful peace deal because we are the only nation who may have sufficient influence over Israel to stop the path of annexation and convince their leadership to consider another attempt at peace. These claims by my participants are validated by the scholarly analysis of the fragmented Palestinian leadership. With their divisiveness and competition for power, groups who claim to represent the Palestinian voice are not being taken seriously by the international community as leaders, nor capable of devising solutions for peace. Therefore, as their leadership currently stands, the Palestinian people need another strong ally – either to represent their voice in peace talks or to force Israel to the negotiating table.

Lastly, I have concluded that Palestinian aid organizations may be the key to convincing our nation to act in the interest of the humanitarian crises which these organizations work to alleviate every day. They are the ones who stay to help vulnerable populations after the news headlines have lost interest in the latest violence in Israel-Palestine. They are the ones who remind the world of its international commitments to the Palestinian people and to everyone who suffers in this conflict. Therefore, I believe they are a voice to listen to when developing any

deals which involve their beneficiaries and affect their cause. When asked if there was anything people should know about the situation when crafting a peace plan in the future, all my participants said a version of the same thing: “Unlike the one-sided deal of the century, a successful peace plan needs to involve both parties. Both Israeli and Palestinian leaders need to feel they made a compromise instead of getting the best deal for their end.” I thought this point was particularly striking, considering that scholars have said the deal of the century cannot succeed for its partiality.

VII. Conclusion

Notable scholars have pointed out major issues with this deal which prevent it from becoming a “source of peace” and a “solution” to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including: the exclusion of Palestinian leadership in its formation, the complicated nature of the Palestinian refugee issue, and its failure to consider lessons learned from past peace deal attempts. For all these reasons and more, Palestinian aid organizations feel they cannot accept the “deal of the century” in the best interest of their beneficiaries; and they would rather defer to functioning as they have before the deal’s existence.

Due to reasons such as the division and devaluation of Palestinian leadership, the massive role of UNRWA, and the authority given to their organizations by international law, Palestinian aid workers have risen to the challenge of representing “the Palestinian cause”. Yet, particularly for Palestinian aid organizations, uninformed political decisions by foreign powers have complicated their work time and time again. As advocates for Palestinians everywhere, it is imperative that their concerns are listened to and incorporated into peace deals involving the

Palestinian people. As an American, I believe my government has failed to use our influence to be impartial mediators. In the future, the international community should defer to local aid organizations on both sides of the issue when attempting to resolve the humanitarian crises suffocating the region.

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IX. Appendices

A. Interview Guide

1. Briefly speaking, what do you know about the "deal of the century"?
2. What do you think people should know about the situation when crafting a peace plan?
3. Do you believe that the "deal of the century" has impacted you or your organization? If you feel comfortable sharing any details of how it has impacted your organization, please feel free to share at this time. If you are not comfortable, please feel free to withhold any details and skip this question.
4. Do you believe the needs of Palestinian refugees will change because of this deal?
5. (In reference to Question 4) Why or why not?
6. Has your organization taken any steps to prepare for a change in Palestinian refugee status?

7. What does your organization rely on to prove the legitimacy of your work? (Follow-up, if unclear: Does your organization rely strongly on international law for validity?)
8. What do you think about the plan's claim to give Palestinians "significant territorial expansion, allocating land roughly comparable in size to the West Bank and Gaza for establishing a Palestinian State"?
9. What do you think about the plan's proposal to grow investment by 50 billion U.S. dollars in ten years for the Palestinian people?
10. Is there a need to partner with other organizations during this time?
11. Has there already been, or do you believe there will be, a change in your organization's mission or vision statements?
12. In your opinion, will other Palestinian aid organizations act similarly in terms of responding to the deal?
13. In your opinion, what, if anything, makes the Palestinian refugee cause unique?
14. Is there anything else you would like to add about this topic?

B. Participant Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of the Study: How Palestinian Aid Organizations Adapt to the Possibility of Further Annexation and Rights Abuses in the Wake of "The Deal of the Century"

Researcher Name: Nadia Wiggins

My name is Nadia Wiggins. I am a student with the SIT Master in Humanitarian Assistance and Crisis Management program. I would like to invite you to participate in a study I am conducting for partial fulfillment of my M.A. in Humanitarian Assistance and Crisis Management. Your participation is voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything

you do not understand before deciding whether to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form, and you will be given a copy of this form.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to research how organizations giving aid to Palestinians are affected by the U.S. President's plan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This study is for academic purposes only because I am interested in this topic as a Humanitarian Assistance student. The study will establish how organizations assisting Palestinians will be impacted by parts of the deal, such as the proposed territorial, political, and economic changes. Since the deal is new, information about how people feel about this deal and how they believe they will be affected by the deal is precious.

STUDY PROCEDURES

Your participation will consist of an interview in English with me online or over the phone and will require approximately one hour of your time. The interview will ask, at most, these questions: 1. Briefly speaking, what do you know about the "deal of the century"? 2. What do you think people should know about the situation when crafting a peace plan? 3. Do you believe that the "deal of the century" has impacted you or your organization? 4. Do you believe the needs of Palestinian refugees will change because of this deal? Why or why not? 5. Has your organization taken any steps to prepare for a change in Palestinian refugee status? 6. What does your organization rely on to prove your work's legitimacy? (Follow-up, if unclear: Does your organization rely strongly on international law for validity?) 7. What do you think about the plan's claim to give Palestinians "significant territorial expansion, allocating land roughly comparable in size to the West Bank and Gaza for establishing a Palestinian State"? 8. What do you think about the plan's proposal to grow investment by 50 billion U.S. dollars in ten years for the Palestinian people? 9. Is there a need to partner with other organizations during this time? 10. Has there already been, or do you believe there will be a change in your organization's mission or vision statements? 11. In your opinion, will other Palestinian aid organizations act similarly in terms of responding to the deal? 12. In your opinion, what, if anything, makes the Palestinian refugee cause unique? (End of Questions)

There will be no photography, no audio recording, and no video recording during your interview. Not every question may be asked of you, and we will skip any questions which may not apply to you. You may refuse to answer any question at any time for any reason. If you refuse participation, I will not contact you again for any reason.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study, and no penalties should you choose not to participate; participation is voluntary. During the interview, you have the right to not answer any questions or to discontinue participation at any time. You may ask me any questions about my status, purpose, and the research before our interview if anything is unclear to you. If you wish to see the information collected from our interview, I will give you access to the notes I wrote during our interview; and I will not permit any other person to see the information

gathered during our interview. If you are uncomfortable or wish to retract any of the answers you provided during our interview, I will delete them from my notes or even delete your participation entirely. The final report will not attribute any direct quotes to you and only include a summary to create a picture of the overall results. You will also be provided with a copy of the final paper at the end of December, so you can see exactly how the final product turned out.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

There will not be any benefits for your participation in this research besides receiving a copy of the final report for your own use. Access to my final report could increase your information regarding Palestinian aid organizations and your understanding of the Trump administration's peace deal. When the research is completed, I will email you the final report. If you do not have an email readily accessible, we can discuss any other reception methods you would prefer.

CONFIDENTIALITY

I cannot promise anonymity. However, any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. I will not collect any information from you unless you sign this form and consent to the interview. After you consent, I will ask you again verbally whether you would like to participate in this study on the day of the interview before we begin. I will only be using my official school email (nadia.wiggins@mail.sit.edu) for all email correspondences between us. Your intellectual property will be respected because I will not use any materials I find about you, nor any other research studies you may have participated in, nor any information you have shared outside of the single interview between us. If you are employed or were formerly employed at an aid organization, I will take care to never report the organization's details, which are not directly relevant to my research. The questions listed above are the only ones I will ask during the interview, so I will not be asking any irrelevant questions that could evoke anger or embarrassment or threaten your confidentiality. I will not record any names nor descriptive details of your situation that I observe during interviews, and I will keep my notes as general as possible to avoid identifying you. The only personal information I need to know is whether you are an adult (because I will only allow consenting adults to participate in the interview) and whether you are currently employed with an aid organization (but I will not record which organization). No matter who you are, you may refuse to answer any questions or stop the interview at any time. I will not allow anyone to see my notes about our interview. Only my advisor, Dr. Bayan Abdulhaq, will see my research paper's drafts before it is complete. Any notes, research, and unfinished copies of the document will only be stored on my personal computer at my home in Los Angeles and will never be accessed from a public computer or another's device. I will also take precautions not to share my computer with anyone else during the entire research period. My computer has facial recognition software, so no one else can access it. Once the research is complete, I will store the collected data for five years on the computer with facial recognition software. Once that time has elapsed, I will destroy all my notes (whether they were used for the report) by deleting the files on my computer. The piece will be finished by the end of December, so all data collected will only be accessed for four months, during the research period from October-December. After that period, the only data available will be that which made it into the final report, and the report will never be altered from that

period on. When the research results are published or discussed in conferences, no identifiable information will be used.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because you participate in this research study. "I have read the above and I understand its contents and I agree to participate in the study. I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older."

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's signature _____ Date _____

RESEARCHER'S CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or want to get more information about this study, please contact me at nadia.wiggins@mail.sit.edu or my advisor at bayan.abdulhaq@sit.edu

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

In an endeavor to uphold the ethical standards of all SIT proposals, this study has been reviewed and approved by an SIT Study Abroad Local Review Board or SIT Institutional Review Board. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant or the research in general and are able to contact the researcher please contact the Institutional Review Board at: School for International Training Institutional Review Board 1 Kipling Road, P.O. Box 676 Brattleboro, VT 05302-0676 USA irb@sit.edu 802-258-3132