

**Yehuda Lukacs and
Abdalla M. Battah**
editors

The ARAB- ISRAELI CONFLICT

TWO DECADES OF CHANGE

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The Arab-Israeli Conflict

Two Decades of Change

EDITED BY

Yehuda Lukacs
and Abdalla M. Battah

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For Professors
Yusuf Ibish and Alan R. Taylor,
our teachers, friends, and colleagues

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*Yehuda Lukacs
Abdalla M. Battah*

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1

Introduction

Abdalla M. Battah and Yehuda Lukacs

The year 1987 marked the twentieth anniversary of the Six Day War. The war was a turning point in the Arab-Israeli conflict, bringing in its wake numerous changes in the domestic and foreign policies of the actors involved. It also altered the regional balance of power, and led to an increase in superpower involvement in the Middle East.

This volume, which grew out of a conference organized at American University, focuses on these changes. The contributors do not provide a narrative of events, but rather offer new interpretations on the changes and processes set in motion during the last two decades.

The organization of the volume is based on our assumption that the study of the Arab-Israeli conflict has to incorporate the dynamic interaction of three levels of analysis: domestic, regional, and international. We believe that processes of conflict and conflict resolution derive their momentum from the interplay among domestic politics, regional considerations and global developments. For example, Sadat's trip to Jerusalem and the ensuing Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty cannot be fully understood unless one examines domestic politics in Egypt and Israel, inter-Arab politics, and the superpowers' strategic posture *vis-à-vis* the Middle East.

It is thus that the essays presented here, taken as a whole, provide a macro-perspective that reflects the complexity and dynamism of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

A second assumption is that there are two dimensions to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The first—the interstate conflict—involves Israel and the Arab states. The second, the intercommunal conflict, which has been much less recognized, involves two ethnic communities, the Israelis and the Palestinians, struggling over part of, or the whole of historic Palestine. (Whether the focus of the conflict is on the whole of Palestine or only on part of it—the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem—is, of course, a function of one's political perspective.)

The intercommunal conflict has two subsidiary dimensions: the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians in the occupied territories, and the conflict between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) taking place

also in adjacent Arab countries, namely Lebanon and Jordan. It is worth mentioning that unlike many other intercommunal conflicts, the leadership of one of the antagonists (the Palestinians) resides outside the disputed territory and, hence, regional and international dynamics also play an important role.

Prior to 1948, the intercommunal dimension had predominated, but this active struggle between the *Yishuv* (the Jewish community in pre-1948 Palestine), and the Palestinian community came largely to an end with the establishment of the state of Israel. This is not to suggest that the Palestinians gave up their claim to Palestine, but merely to indicate that the character of the conflict transformed into an interstate one.

From 1948 to 1967, the Arab-Israeli conflict could be described mainly as an interstate conflict. The occupation of the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights in 1967 added new elements to the interstate dimension and insured its continuation. With the 1967 war, the Israeli-Palestinian intercommunal conflict was revived and inextricably linked developments in the interstate dimension to those in the intercommunal dimension of the conflict.

Moreover, the post-1967 period bore witness to the beginning of a gradual transformation of the foci of the conflict from the interstate dimension to the intercommunal. This development resulted from the occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with a Palestinian population over a million, as well as from the fact that the defeated Arab states were discredited in their claim to champion the Palestinian cause, the PLO's rise to center stage. The role of the PLO was formally recognized by the 1974 Arab Summit in Rabat which proclaimed it as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." This declaration attested to the Arab states' formal recognition of the intercommunal dimension of the conflict by emphasizing the centrality of Palestinian participation in any negotiated settlement.

The post-1967 era could be divided into two periods: 1967–1982, and 1982–present. During the first period, the interstate dimension predominated and several eruptions occurred: the 1969–1970 Egyptian-Israeli War of Attrition; the 1973 October War, fought between Egypt and Syria, and Israel; and the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. In addition, several agreements were signed between Israel and its neighbors, such as the 1974 Israeli-Syrian disengagement agreement; and several Israeli-Egyptian agreements: Sinai I and II, signed in 1974 and 1975; the 1978 Camp David Accords; and the 1979 Peace Treaty. Notwithstanding these agreements, during this period there were no attempts at directly addressing the intercommunal conflict, excepting the Autonomy Plan in the Camp David Accords. This plan, however, was deemed inadequate by the Palestinians who argued that it would not lead to the realization of their demands for self-determination.

The first period ended with the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. This war is a prime example of how the two dimensions of the conflict coalesced. The first Israeli-Palestinian war, while taking place in Lebanon, was fought over the ultimate control the West Bank and Gaza. Although there were

instances of interstate conflict during the 1982 war (between Israel and Syria, albeit in a limited manner), the focus of the war clearly demonstrated Israel's resolve to cement its control over the West Bank and Gaza. The PLO, by virtue of the support and popularity it enjoyed in the West Bank and Gaza, was in a position to prevent Israel's implementation of the Autonomy Plan called for by the Camp David Accords. The Lebanon invasion was thus an attempt to crush the PLO and to prevent it from interfering in Israel's attempt to impose the Autonomy Plan.

The second period, which began in the aftermath of the Lebanon war, culminated in late 1987 in the Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories. While the intercommunal conflict began to escalate following the 1982 war, the interstate dimension of the conflict remained dormant. Israel and Egypt have signed a formal peace treaty; Israel and Jordan, albeit in a formal state of war, have managed to reach a *modus vivendi*, while Israel and Syria continued to be in a strategic stalemate. The future of the interstate conflict, however, is linked to the resolution of the intercommunal conflict. Should the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remain unresolved, escalation of the interstate conflict into open warfare cannot be ruled out.

It is because of all these factors that a retrospective analysis of the Arab-Israeli conflict during the last two decades must take into account the transformation of the two dimensions of the conflict as well as an understanding of the linkage and interdependence between these two dimensions.

The centrality of the Arab-Israeli conflict in contemporary world politics has led to an inordinate number of studies and books that have attempted to cover all aspects of the dispute. The conflict has been taking place not only on the battle field, but also in the halls of academia, on editorial pages, and on television. Even among scholars who are supposed to be objective observers, the conflict has engendered emotional intensity which has often led to confusion.

First is the disagreement among scholars on the basic facts of the conflict. Scholars are not immune to the passions that animate the belligerents, who adhere to differing versions of history to support their respective claims. This tug-of-war between scholars has led to a lack of consensus and has manifested itself in contradictory arguments along the same lines which the belligerents themselves use. In addition, this lack of consensus has led some scholars to hold certain factors as causes, while others see these same factors as effects. For instance, is terrorism a cause or an effect?

Second, the conflict lends itself to differing characterizations. Some see it as a clash of nationalism, others as either a territorial dispute, an ethnic or religious strife, imperialist intrusion, an extension of the East-West conflict, and so on. While different perspectives are essential in any scientific inquiry, lack of agreement on the nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict has the effect of dispersing energies in many directions.

Third, is the tendency to explain the conflict in terms of a single cause. This is often due not only to political bias but to disciplinary loyalty. For example, political psychologists overemphasize psychological factors, econ-

omists economic factors, and so on. Similarly, disciplinary compartmentalization causes many researchers to overlook the dynamic interaction between all levels of the conflict. Political psychologists and anthropologists, for example, focus on individual and group behavior often at the exclusion of everything else. Domestic considerations are often overemphasized by sociologists, economists, and political scientists, and global strategic considerations are the preoccupation of international relationists.

Fourth, like other protracted conflicts, the Arab-Israeli conflict is fraught with periodic crises such as the present uprising in the territories. While there is an urgency to diffuse the situation, often enough policymakers and analysts become too consumed by the crisis at the expense of the overall process of the conflict. The danger is that energies become misdirected and the fundamental causes ignored, and instead of a major surgery a local anaesthetic is prescribed.

A closer examination and realistic assessment requires us to take into consideration the multiplicity of causes, the multilevel aspect, and the protracted nature of the conflict. Consequently, the analyst should look at the simultaneous interplay between the actors (individual, state, non-state, regional, international) and the factors or issues involved (economic, political, social, cultural, religious, etc).

* * *

The twentieth anniversary of the Six Day War offered an opportunity to reflect upon the current status of the conflict and to assess the state of knowledge in the scholarly community that deals with the Arab-Israeli conflict. Consequently, we convened a conference at American University entitled *Twenty Years After the Six Day War: Assessments and Perspectives*. We were fortunate enough to have assembled an impressive array of scholars and policymakers who were generous enough to share their views with us.

Care has been taken to represent the various viewpoints. Scholarship was the sole criterion in the selection process, which needless to say, implied that participants—irrespective of their political inclination—analyze their subject matter as objectively as possible. We were pleased with the results.

The book is divided into three parts. The first covers the regional actors, Israel, the Palestinians, and the Arab states, and deals with issues such as domestic and foreign policy processes, the role of nationalism, religious fundamentalism, interstate relations, and changes within the regional subsystem. Part two examines the international dimension—specifically the role of the two superpowers. The third part analyzes the “peace process” from a number of different perspectives. All chapters were written prior to the uprising on the occupied territories. Publication deadlines prevented us from asking the authors for updates. However, on their own initiatives, Professors Kelman and Sahliyeh submitted chapter postscripts, and Andrea Barron provided a revised version of her chapter.

The first section deals with Israel. Avner Yaniv provides an overview of the evolution of Israeli foreign policy since 1967; Don Peretz analyzes Israeli policies toward the Arab states and the Palestinians; and Yoram Peri and

Ilan Peleg, respectively, examine the changing nature of Israeli nationalism, the dichotomy between political nationalism and ethno-nationalism on the one hand, and the impact of the Six Day War on the Israeli right on the other.

The role of the Palestinians is discussed in the second section. Naseer Aruri provides a macro-perspective on Palestinian nationalism since 1967; Emile Sahliyah discusses the process of "marginalization" of the West Bank elites, while Cheryl Rubenberg addresses the structural transformation within the PLO. Finally, Aaron Miller focuses on the relationship between the Palestinians, the Arab states, and Israel.

The third section deals with the Arab states. L. Carl Brown challenges the prevailing view of the Six Day War as a turning point in the history of the Middle East. Bassam Tibi elaborates on the dynamics of the Arab states subsystem and the changes resulting from the 1967 war. Bahgat Korany examines the dialectics of Arab nationalism, the two prevailing modes of nationalism, *raison d'état* versus *raison de la nation*; and Raymond Hinnebusch discusses Egyptian-Syrian relations and its impact on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The second part of the volume shifts the focus to superpower policies and rivalries. Steven Spiegel provides an overview of American Middle East policy since 1967; Duncan Clarke evaluates the formal American commitment to Israel and its implications for both countries. Andrea Barron examines the role of domestic factors in the American foreign policy process, comparing the activities of the American-Jewish and Arab-American diasporas and their impact on United States policy *vis-à-vis* the Middle East.

Soviet policy in the Middle East is the subject of the next section. Robert Freedman and Yahia Zoubir, respectively, offer differing perspectives on Moscow's role and position in the Middle East. Walter Seabold looks at Soviet military transactions and their role in Soviet policy in the Middle East.

The "peace process" is addressed in the last part of the book. Johan Galtung argues that what is termed the "peace process" has not been a genuine quest for peace. Herbert Kelman analyzes the changing nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict and argues that the conflict since 1967 has been "Palestinianized." Ofira Seliktar examines the state of scholarship with regard to the study of the Arab-Israeli peace process; Joseph Montville addresses psychological factors that exacerbate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Finally, changes in perceptions and political attitudes among Israelis, Palestinians, and Arabs, are analyzed by Erika Alin and Abdul Aziz Said.

PART ONE

Regional Actors

Israel

