

## CHAPTER 3

### FROM COLLAPSE OF OSLO ACCORDS TO UNPRECEDENTED DESTRUCTION IN GAZA: NEED FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT FOR PALESTINE

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#### 3.1. Introduction

The Palestine issue is one of the fundamental subjects of contemporary Middle East politics, and it has been part of both academic and political debates for decades. The surprise attack carried out by Palestinian forces against Israel on October 7, 2023, and the unprecedentedly harsh response of the Israeli military that is tantamount to genocide, gave rise to further discussions concerning the nature of the conflict, its origins, and its possible outcomes in the future. This chapter is a contribution to these debates.

A thorough and holistic understanding of the Palestinian issue requires tracing back not only to 1967, but rather to the ethnic cleansing of 1948, known as Nakba, to the British mandate in Palestine, and even to the late Ottoman period. The ever-developing literature on Palestine history will help understand the issue in more appropriate manners. The present chapter will not deep delve into this long history, but an analysis of the current situation requires revisiting at least the last three decades, and the so-called Oslo Peace Accords can be considered as a starting point. In this context, the chapter starts by elaborating on the Oslo process, which would gradually collapse, the Second Intifada, and the new efforts to revive “peace” during the Intifada years. It is followed by a discussion on the siege on Gaza, unsuccessful efforts of moderation of Hamas, and finally the “Al-Aqsa Flood” and its consequences. Then we try to indicate various aspects of the Palestinian issue which are relatively less discussed in academic and political debates, including Jewish settlers in West Bank, Palestinian refugees dispersed to various parts of the region and the apartheid regime practiced by Israel, to underline that Palestinian issue is not confined to the situation in Gaza, even if quite understandably it is at the heart of all the debates, and to draw a larger picture that goes beyond the “1967 borders” and helps defining a real solution

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to the issue. We finally mention the need for a paradigm shift and assert that the quest for a two-state solution can be, and arguably should be, replaced by alternative paths.

### **3.2. The Oslo Accords**

On September 13, 1993, a “historical” photo was taken in the court of White House: Leader of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), Yasser Arafat, shook hands with the then-Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Between the two figures appeared the US President Bill Clinton. Following months of direct negotiations carried out in Oslo, Norway, Israeli and Palestinian leadership had been brought together with the American intermediation to sign what would be called the Declaration of Principles, or Oslo I. It was a moment when a significant part of the international community believed that the decades-old “Israeli-Palestinian conflict” was finally coming to an end.

The agreement did not emerge in a vacuum. Instead, a series of milestone events finally led to the sealing of the Oslo I agreement. The starting point was the outbreak of the First Palestinian Intifada in the final days of 1987 in a spontaneous manner. It was followed by the declaration of the State of Palestine in November 1988 by the exiled PLO leadership in Algeria. Then, in 1991, Palestinian and Israeli representatives came together for indirect talks in Madrid, Spain, and finally the direct talks started in Oslo.

It can be argued that, within this chain of events, the one most linked with Oslo Accords was the declaration of independence. Living in exile and having no capacity to rule the occupied territories, the Palestinian leadership had in fact made a declaration of will. On the other hand, that declaration would lead to scepticism and criticism among Palestinians, or at least among one segment of the Palestinian community. The famous American-Palestinian scholar Edward Said had written in 1989 that the declaration had to be interpreted as “a distinct break with the past, as an assertion of the willingness to make sacrifices in the interests of peace, as a definitive statement of the Palestinian acceptance of the international consensus” (Said, 1989, p. 36). What had led Said to make this claim was the content of the declaration.

In effect, on that historical date, the Palestine National Council had declared, “in the name of God and in the name of the Palestinian Arab people”, “the establishment of the State of Palestine on our Palestinian territory with its capital holy Jerusalem” (Palestinian National Council, 1988). What was historically at least equally remarkable was the nature of this state. Indeed, the declaration of independence was accompanied by a call for a peace conference based on the United Nations Security Council’s resolutions 242 and 338, and for Israel’s withdrawal from the Palestinian and Arab territories occupied in 1967 (Tessler,

1994, p. 723). This means that the Palestinian leadership had abandoned the claim over all territories that were called Palestine until 1948, and that they accepted a two-state solution: one Palestinian state next to one Israeli state, separated from each other on the demarcation lines that existed until the Six Day War in June 1967. Thus, the predicted Palestinian state would cover Gaza Strip, West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Theoretically, the Declaration of Principles sealed in Washington in September 1993 had the potential to pave the way for such a state. But it can be more appropriate to say that the maximum benefit that the Palestinians could ever obtain through this agreement would be the formation of such a state which, in the period agreement was signed, was in fact no more than a wish. What the agreement actually brought was the formation of a Palestinian Authority that would initially assume the administrative responsibility for Gaza and Jericho. The Israeli army would withdraw from these areas in one year, and domestic security and public order would be assumed by a new Palestinian police force. The Palestinian Authority would expand its self-rule to other parts of the West Bank in five years (Tessler, 1994, pp. 760-761). The agreement had also another significant implication: PLO was recognized as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and PLO recognized the State of Israel. The agreement stipulated that the sides would “recognize their mutual legitimate and political rights and strive to live in peaceful coexistence and mutual dignity and security” (United Nations, 1993).

Two years later, in 1995, a second agreement known as Oslo II was signed in Taba, Egypt. Much longer and more detailed than the first one, the second agreement not only created a framework for the functioning of the Palestinian Authority but also redefined the existence of the Israeli military in Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), which were divided into three areas. Even if the text predicted an ultimate transfer of power to Palestinians, there was no concrete roadmap, and the agreement in fact consolidated the presence of the Israeli army with which the Palestinian Authority would coordinate. What’s more, Article 15 stipulated that Palestinian Authority’s jurisdiction would cover Gaza and West Bank “except the issues that would be part of later negotiations”, and in fact these were the most important and crucial issues: “Jerusalem, settlements, specified military locations, Palestinian refugees, borders, foreign relations and Israelis” (United Nations, 1995).

**Table 1**

*Map of occupied West Bank according to Oslo II agreement. As it is seen, more than half of the territories remain under Israeli control, and the Palestinian-controlled regions are totally fragmented.*

**Oslo II Map  
Outlining Areas A, B, and C**



*Note.* Kersel (2015, p. 28).

Thus, all the major issues that make up the core of the Palestinian issue and the conflict were thrown outside of a so-called peace agreement, and postponed to an uncertain future, which would in fact never come. A real and full military withdrawal did not occur either, and it was not clear if it would ever occur. What the accords brought for Palestinians were little more than the recognition of

PLO and a weak autonomous Palestinian Authority which would have limited power, and which would, as we mentioned above, cooperate with Israel in several fields, including security. In exchange, Palestinian side had recognized the State of Israel and abandoned most of their historical claims. Thirty years later, anti-Zionist Israeli activist and researcher Miko Peled would write: “Today I, along with many others, realise that the Oslo Accords were meant to deepen Israeli control of Palestine and its people while allowing Israel to look good.” (Peled, 2023) Similarly, for Ilan Pappé, “The insistence on partition and the exclusion of the refugee issue from the agenda rendered the Oslo process at best a military redeployment and a rearrangement of the Israeli control in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. At worst, it inaugurated a new system of control that made life for the Palestinians in the occupied territories far worse than it was before” (Pappé, 2024, p. 105).

Before concluding this part, it should be noted that the nature of Oslo Accords and their potential political repercussions could be noticed by some analysts and policymakers even in the initial period. In effect, Israeli political analyst Meron Benvenisti had written in Israeli daily newspaper *Ha'aretz* in December 1993 that the successful sealing of the agreement was possible only as a result of its “deliberate ambiguity”. While the two sides had agreed on the text, they had in fact, Benvenisti argues, two mutually exclusive visions and understandings concerning the agreement. For the PLO, the Declaration of Principles was “the first step” towards a real solution, as the steps required first a national authority in any area of liberated Palestine. In contrast, the agreement was part of the “functional compromise” strategy in the eyes of the Israeli government, through which Palestinians of the occupied territories were granted “administrative authority within municipal boundaries”, while the Israelis would keep a firm grip on all matters pertaining to security and the territories’ resources (Usher, 1999, p. 42). The course of the events would confirm the second vision, while it would be revealed that the first vision was overoptimistic.

### **3.3. Palestinian Objection and the Second Intifada**

The Oslo Accords also led to disagreement and strife within the Palestinian political community. Two Islamist movements, Islamic Jihad and Hamas – the former created in 1981 under the influence of Islamic Revolution in Iran and the latter created in late 1987 as the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood – openly rejected the framework of Oslo and vowed for the destruction of Israel. Furthermore, PLO as an umbrella organisation did not have a full cohesion concerning the issue. The organisation was (and is) mostly controlled by Fatah movement which was under direction of Yasser Arafat until his death in 2004. Obviously, Fatah was in favour of the Oslo Accords. But another component of the organisation, the far-left People’s Front for Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)

rejected it. Another far-left (Maoist) component, Democratic Front for Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) would declare that it accepted Oslo framework and two-state solution in 1999. This led to the removal of DFLP from the foreign terrorist organisation list of the USA. (US Department of State, n.d.) As we will see in later parts, acceptance of the two-state solution would be one of the main conditions for Hamas to be accepted as a legitimate political force by Western countries one decade later. In other words, the demarcation line between being a terrorist organisation and a political party in the eyes of the West was not essentially the methods used, but the political aims.

It was under these circumstances that the Second Intifada erupted in September 2000. The provocative entrance of the far-right Israeli politician Ariel Sharon to the compound of Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem was in fact no more than a catalyst. It was the disappointment of the Palestinians that turned the reactions quickly into a wide-based popular uprising. This time the Intifada had a clearer political colour as Hamas became the leading force of the uprising. On the other hand, it was much bloodier than the first one. Not only did Palestinians resort to weapons and bombs, but also the occupation forces acted much more harshly. Even the refugee camps were not exempt from the bloody interventions, as it was the case in Jenin in 2002, where hundreds of Palestinians were killed. During the Intifada years, Israel targeted most of the Palestinian leaders: The founder and spiritual leader of Hamas, Sheikh Ahmad Yasin was killed by a missile fired from an Israeli helicopter on March 22, 2004. Three weeks later, on April 17, 2004, the Chairman of Hamas Shura Council, Abdalaziz al-Rantisi was killed. The secretary-general of the PFLP, Abu Ali Mustafa was assassinated in August 2001. The following secretary-general, Ahmad Saadat was imprisoned in 2002 (and he's still in prison). Even the leader of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat, was put under siege when his headquarters in Ramallah were surrounded in 2002. Israel wanted Arafat to "make a choice" between remaining loyal to the Oslo Accords or supporting the "terrorists". The siege ended only when Arafat was taken to France for treatment in October 2004 when he was gravely ill and died two weeks later.

It was almost clear that the Oslo Accords had collapsed in this period. Nevertheless, a number of Arab countries still believed that it was possible to bring a peaceful solution to the conflict. First, in February 2002, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Abdullah bin Abdulaziz al-Saud revealed to the American press that they had prepared a new roadmap for Palestine. Next month, on March 27, an Arab League Summit was convened in Beirut, Lebanon. The "Arab Peace Initiative", adopted unanimously in the summit, called for "full Israeli withdrawal from all territories occupied in June 1967 and Israel's acceptance of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, in return for the establishment of normal relations between the Arab states and Israel in the context

of comprehensive peace”, and a fair solution for Palestinian refugees’ issues on basis of United Nations Resolution 194 (Podeh, 2014, p. 588). While the initial response of the USA was rather positive, the Israeli government, which was now under the direction of Sharon, did not give any response and did its best to change the mind of American administration. The pretext was the ongoing attacks against the Israeli citizens. In April, Saudi crown prince visited US President George Bush to present a “friendlier” version of the plan that did not mention the refugee problem and did not mandate Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders, and Israel refused to negotiate even this version (Podeh, 2014, p. 591). Although there would be further efforts to revive the Arab Peace Initiative in later years, all these efforts would ultimately fail.

### **3.4. Gaza Strip: From Israeli Withdrawal to the Siege**

The Second Intifada ended in 2005 without any clear political result, but one important – and surprising – decision of Sharon’s government can be at least partially linked to the Intifada: in 2005, Israel unilaterally withdrew from the Gaza Strip. The twenty-one Israeli settlements in the region were dismantled, and 38 years of occupation in Gaza ended. On the other hand, the reasons of this surprise withdrawal have been controversial for a long time, and there’s a ground to think that one of the major motivations was to consolidate the occupation in West Bank. Additionally, as Ilan Pappé indicates, Sharon had used this withdrawal for other political aims as well: while the Israeli left was celebrating the withdrawal as a step towards peace, and likening it to the withdrawal of pieds noirs from Algeria, Sharon was asking for an American promise “not to pressure Israel in the future about progress in the peace process, and to exclude right of return from any future negotiations” in exchange for the withdrawal from Gaza Strip (Pappé, 2024, pp. 126-127).

On the other hand, the withdrawal was certainly linked with the demographic issue as well. As it is widely and clearly known, one of the core objectives of Zionism was (and is) to rule as large parts of Palestine as possible with as few native Arabs in it as possible. But ruling a region such as Gaza Strip brings a paradox: it means ruling a tiny region of 365 square kilometres with almost two million Palestinian Arabs and a very small Jewish settler minority. Thus, Gaza was dispensable, especially when the settlers were under a significant “security” risk; it was even more dispensable when a withdrawal had the potential to bring advantages and benefits in other fields. It should be kept in mind that same Sharon had prepared a plan in late 1970s when he was Minister of Agriculture, according to which only a small number of enclaves densely populated by Palestinians were not to come under Israeli sovereignty (Efrat, 2006, p. 28). The same logic was applied to Gaza three decades later.

In any case, Gaza Strip was “liberated” as of 2005, but the conditions would worsen soon. The starting point of the process that ended with siege, massive destruction, and ultimately genocide was the democratic elections held for the Palestinian Authority in 2006.

After the end of Second Intifada, new elections had to be held for the Palestinian Legislative Council that was formed as part of the Oslo Accords. When the elections were completed in January 2006, the winner was Hamas, which was now more popular than Fatah. Hamas got the majority in the Council with 72 seats out of 132. Thus, Hamas was expected to form a new government for the autonomous Palestinian Authority. But the new president who replaced Arafat after his death, Mahmoud Abbas issued several decrees that gave the key functions of the PA to the leader of Fatah, meaning himself. In February, Abbas appointed the Hamas representative Ismail Haniyya to form the government, on condition that they accept all the UN decisions and all existing agreements, including the Oslo Accords. Practically, this meant that Hamas had to accept the two-state solution, recognize the State of Israel, and give up armed activities.

On the other hand, Israel, the US, and European Union declared that they would not recognize a Palestinian government that included Hamas. And when Haniyya’s government that could finally be formed in late March 2006 refused to recognize Israel and lay down the weapons, the economic sanctions started. All foreign aids to Palestinian Authority were cut.

Under these conditions, the President of PA, Mahmoud Abbas did not cooperate with the Hamas government. Hamas also formed its own security force. On December 16, 2006, Mahmoud Abbas called for new elections. The next day, clashes between Fatah and Hamas forces began, leading to dozens of casualties. The efforts of reconciliation failed. In June 2007, Abbas declared that government is dissolved and all of Gaza Strip and West Bank would be ruled solely by PA. This led to further clashes.

Finally, Palestinian rule was divided into two. Fatah and Mahmoud Abbas secured the rule in West Bank, while Hamas started to rule Gaza Strip through its own government. The new situation brought restoration of the “normal” relations between international community and the PA rule in West Bank, but the Hamas government in Gaza Strip would not be recognized by most of the states of the world. Israel also declared that they would never accept a “terrorist government” in Gaza.

Israel actively worked to topple this government through various tools, and the first tool used was a siege. After this date, Israel prohibited both the entry to and exit from Gaza. A total land, sea, and air blockade was being implemented. Only a limited number of products could enter the Strip if Israel permitted.

While the proclaimed aim was to prevent the entry and production of rockets and other weapons, the real aim was to make the living conditions in Gaza unbearable and lead the residents to revolt against Hamas rule. On the other hand, the refusal of the residents to revolt against Hamas meant that collective punishment was legitimate and even necessary. It was the same logic and perspective that led to massive air raids and destructive “operations” against Gaza, the biggest of which (before October 2023) were carried out in late 2008-early 2009, in 2012, in 2014 and in 2021, resulting in more than 4000 deaths in addition to a large-scale destruction in the infrastructure and in civilian settlements.

**Table 2**

*Milestone Events Since Late 1980’s, Compiled by the Author.*

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**TIMELINE (1987-2024)**

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December 9, 1987: Outbreak of First Intifada

November 15, 1988: Declaration of Independence by Palestinian National Council in Algeria

October 30, 1991: Madrid Conference

September 13, 1993: Signature of Oslo I

September 28, 1995: Signature of Oslo II

September 28, 2000: Outbreak of Second Intifada

November 11, 2004: Death of Yasser Arafat, to be replaced by Mahmoud Abbas

September 21, 2005: Completion of Israeli withdrawal from Gaza Strip

January 25, 2006: Palestinian national elections

June 2007: Division between Gaza Strip (Hamas) and West Bank (Fatah), imposition of siege on Gaza Strip by Israel

December 27, 2008-January 18, 2009: Israeli assault on Gaza, known as “Operation Cast Lead”

November 14-21, 2012: Israeli assault on Gaza, known as “Operation Pillar of Defence”

July 8 - August 26, 2014: Israeli assault on Gaza, known as “Operation Protective Edge”

May 1, 2017: Publication of Hamas’ new policy paper in Doha, Qatar

July 19, 2018: Adoption of Jewish nation-state law by Knesset

May 10-21, 2021: Israeli assault on Gaza, known as “Operation Guardian of the Walls”

October 7, 2023: Outbreak of Al-Aqsa Flood

January 26, 2024: Decision of International Court of Justice, stating that Israel is “plausibly” committing genocide in Gaza

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### 3.5. Contextualizing the 2017 Policy Paper of Hamas

During this period, Hamas faced serious challenges to keep ruling Gaza Strip. It is possible to claim that the new policy paper (or charter) of the movement published in 2017 was the result of these challenges and a quest for recognition as a legitimate political party. As Turkish scholar Talha İsmail Duman indicates in a recent work, “In essence, with the 2017 document, Hamas declared its intent to emphasize civilian politics while keeping the option of resistance in reserve, taking international public opinion into greater consideration, and showing a reluctance to engage in conflict with Israel in the absence of provocation” (Duman, 2025, p. 207). Similarly, Khaled Hroub points out that “While asserting the movement’s adherence to its founding principles, the document also exhibits flexibility by leaving grey areas, allowing Hamas political room for manoeuvre in the future” (Hroub, 2017, p. 100). To further clarify the shift and its significance, it can be useful to go into the details of the policy paper and to compare it with the first one published in 1988.

The movement’s first charter had a radical content. It was making plenty of references to Islam’s holy book, Quran, and it frequently used the term jihad (holy war). The charter was underlining that there was no possibility of achieving a fair solution through negotiations, and that jihad was the only way. It also included some expressions that are considered antisemitic by some people (such as “The Last Hour would not come until the Muslims fight against the Jews, and the Muslims would kill them”, which is in fact a hadith attributed to Prophet Mohammad). The declared aim was an Islamic state in all historic Palestine, with the destruction of Israel. The text was also defining the movement as the Palestinian branch of the international Muslim Brotherhood organisation (Maqdsi, 1993).

On the other hand, there was less reference to Islam and more reference to universal humanitarian principles and basic inalienable rights in the new charter of 2017. The text even used expressions such as “Palestine has always been and will always be a model of coexistence, tolerance and civilisational innovation”, and being against “all forms of religious, ethnic or sectarian extremism and bigotry”. Furthermore, instead of making references to fight against the “Jews”, the new charter underlined that “The Zionist project is a racist, aggressive, colonial and expansionist project based on seizing the properties of others; it is hostile to the Palestinian people and to their aspiration for freedom, liberation, return and self-determination”, and that “Hamas affirms that its conflict is with the Zionist project not with the Jews because of their religion. Hamas does not wage a struggle against the Jews because they are Jewish but wages a struggle against the Zionists who occupy Palestine”. The organisation also declared that they were not part of the Muslim Brotherhood anymore.

The most ambiguous part of the new charter was about the ultimate political aims. Article 20 of the charter says:

*Hamas believes that no part of the land of Palestine shall be compromised or conceded, irrespective of the causes, the circumstances and the pressures and no matter how long the occupation lasts. Hamas rejects any alternative to the full and complete liberation of Palestine, from the river to the sea. However, without compromising its rejection of the Zionist entity and without relinquishing any Palestinian rights, Hamas considers the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital along the lines of the 4th of June 1967, with the return of the refugees and the displaced to their homes from which they were expelled, to be a formula of national consensus (Hamas Media Office, 2017).*

There's no doubt that the two policy papers significantly differ from each other, and this significance can be explained within several contexts. For example, cutting the ties with the Muslim Brotherhood can be linked to the new political conditions that emerged in Middle East after the coup d'état of 2013 in Egypt and the anti-MB policies adopted by Gulf countries. On the other hand, it is almost sure that there was a certain level of disagreement within the Political Bureau in terms of ultimate political aims, which seems the main reason for the "balance" and the ambiguity of Article 20 cited above. Overall, the policy paper can also be considered as a result of the quest for legitimacy in the Western world. But we can claim that the main motivation of the Hamas leadership to prepare such a moderate text was the state-building effort: Ruling Gaza Strip for more than one decade under heavy challenges, Hamas had the intention to give up its radicalism for an indefinite period of time and focalise on the urgent needs of forming a normal life in Gaza and turn its rule into a state-like entity which would be recognized not only by its political partners, but also by a wide range of actors in the international arena.

However, to cite Duman again, "this process of moderation, which highlighted Hamas's political evolution, did not prevent the October 7 Operation Al Aqsa Flood" (Duman, 2025, p. 207). It is also possible to draw a parallelism (at least partially) between the outbreak of the Second Intifada and the launching of Al Aqsa Flood: Palestinians believed that moderation did not work and there was no ground to build a state-like entity under the existing circumstances. On the other hand, this time it was the same organisation that first prioritized politics and then chose the war. Leaving aside the speculations as to whether the political leadership even knew the decision of the military wing's leadership to launch an unprecedented war or not, we can claim that October 2023 brought the definite end of the new period started in 2017 – during which Hamas refrained from entering in large-scale conflict and even did not much take part of the hostilities that erupted in 2021 between Israel and Islamic Jihad.

### 3.6. Al-Aqsa Flood and Revival of the Idea of the Two-State Solution

Although the leaders of Hamas did not openly make detailed explanations about the reasons that led them to surprisingly launch a war on October 7, we hypothetically claim that several factors can be mentioned as possible explanations:

- Gaza Strip had already become uninhabitable and the fragile political status quo that had existed since 2007 couldn't be maintained anymore. Hamas decided to create a new status quo.
- The number of Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli prisons had reached to a record high level, and there was no other way of liberating them than a prisoner exchange (this is why more than 250 Israelis were taken as hostage).
- After a break with Hezbollah and Iran during the first years of the Syrian War, Hamas had definitely returned to what is called "Axis of Resistance", and they believed that it was possible to enter a multi-front conflict with Israel, in which the other components of the axis would take place.
- The normalisation process between Arab regimes and Israel that started in 2020 had to be stopped, and the so-called "solutions" offered by Gulf countries (such as the "Deal of the Century", which was rather a joint US-Gulf project) without taking into consideration the will of the Palestinians had to be refused.
- The Palestine issue was almost forgotten for a long time, and it had to be reminded to the world that Palestinians do exist.

Whatever the main aims and motivations are, it is not easy at all to claim that the status quo and the general equation changed in favour of the Palestinians. As of the date this chapter was being written, more than 60 thousand Palestinians were killed in a ruthless military campaign which is considered a genocide by many actors. Even the International Court of Justice stated in January 2024, as result of the address of South Africa for application of Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in Gaza Strip, that the claims of genocide are "plausible", and that protection of the rights of Palestinians in Gaza Strip to be protected from crimes of genocide and related acts identified in Article III of Genocide Convention "are of such a nature that prejudice to them is capable of causing irreparable harm" (International Court of Justice, 2024). One year later than this initial decision, Israel began imposing even a stricter blockade which included a total cut of the entry of humanitarian aid, leading to famine, starvation, and death due to hunger and malnutrition. Furthermore, as of the summer of 2025, more than 80% of the Gaza Strip was re-occupied by Israel, and there were plans and efforts to "evacuate" the population, after US President Donald J. Trump called for it instead of reviving the ceasefire of January 19, 2025, where the US was the "guarantor".

The genocide and the unprecedented destruction pushed many governments to call for the immediate implementation of the two-state solution. Ireland, Norway, Spain, Slovenia, Armenia and Mexico were the first countries to recognize the State of Palestine during the genocide, and the number of the countries recognizing the State of Palestine reached 147 at this stage. What's more, when United Nations Security Council voted the recognition of Palestine on April 18, 2024, France voted in favour of the resolution. United Kingdom did not veto, and their representative said that their country is in favour of the two-state solution, but they abstained. For the UK, "Gaza must be part of a future Palestinian State. But Hamas is still in control of parts of it and Israeli hostages remain in captivity", and "ensuring Hamas is no longer in charge of Gaza and removing its capacity to attack Israel are unavoidable steps on the road to peace" (United Nations Security Council, 2024). Among the five permanent and ten non-permanent members of the Council, it was only USA that voted against the resolution. Finally, right before and during the United Nations General Assembly meeting in September 2025, Britain and France, in addition to Monaco, Belgium, Luxemburg, Malta, Canada, Australia and Portugal, declared that they recognize the State of Palestine.

Thus, a kind of consensus seems as emerging among the international community. But the Israeli rulers – and especially the hardline members of the government – explicitly and repeatedly underline that they will not accept any kind of Palestinian state (Güldoğan, 2023). Days before the aforementioned UN General Assembly meeting, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu once again stated in a public event in the Israeli settlement Maale Adumim: "We are going to fulfil our promise that there will be no Palestinian state. This place belongs to us" (Al Jazeera, 2025). And this is only one of the reasons that obstruct the possibility of the implementation of a Palestinian state on the pre-1967 borders.

In effect, the only "liberated" part of Palestine, which is Gaza Strip, is once again under threat of a long-lasting, if not permanent occupation. West Bank is not only under military occupation but also fragmented and it includes more than a hundred Israeli settlements, of which the very existence is a violation of the international law, as the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits settling the citizens of the occupying state in the occupied territories. The settlement activities had started in 1970's and constantly increased until today. Construction of Jewish-Israeli settlements was seen as vital for the "security" of the State of Israel, and in reality, this was the starting point of a long path, with the intention to hold what the Israelis call as "Judea and Samaria" forever. (Efrat, 2006, p. 28) While these settlements turn the West Bank "into an archipelago of disconnected compartments" (Lloyd, 2012, p. 73), there are also ongoing efforts to annex large parts of the region. Another occupied region, East Jerusalem was already annexed in 1981, and it is routinely subject to efforts of Judaisation of the land and

dispossession of Palestinian natives, as it was widely discussed during the forced evictions in Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in 2021 (Kingsley, 2021).

### **3.7. The Palestine Issue Beyond OPT: Refugees and Apartheid**

There are further dynamics to add to this list, and it is crucial to underline that Palestinians do not live only in Occupied Palestinian Territories, i.e., Gaza Strip, West Bank and East Jerusalem. There are almost six million Palestinians refugees living in 58 registered refugee camps. These are the people expelled from their hometowns in 1948 and 1967 and their descendants. Even though United Nations had recognized the right of return of the Palestinians as early as in December 1948, Israel never allowed that return, and subsequent Israeli governments refrained from even discussing the right of return during any kind of negotiations. This has an “understandable” reason: in case of return of the Palestinian refugees, the Jews will lose the majority.

On the other hand, one-fifth of the Palestinians could manage to remain in their towns and villages during the 1948 Nakba, and they had become “Arab citizens of Israel”. Since that time, they never became equal citizens of the state, and in recent times, several international – and even some Israeli – human rights organisations defined the Israeli regime as an apartheid regime, underlining that the Palestinians living in both sides of the Green Line, i.e., both in OPT and in the internationally recognized territories of Israel are subject to an institutionalised segregation.

To cite some major points from those reports, the Human Rights Watch points out at the fact that that Israel exercises primary authority alongside limited Palestinian self-rule in Occupied Palestinian Territories. In these areas and inside the Israeli territories, “Israeli authorities methodically privilege Jewish Israelis and discriminate against Palestinians. Laws, policies, and statements by leading Israeli officials make plain that the objective of maintaining Jewish Israeli control over demographics, political power, and land has long guided government policy.” HRW’s report several examples of apartheid practices in the report, such as he nation-state law adopted by the Israeli parliament Knesset in 2018 that defines Israel as the nation-state of Jewish people and considers Jewish settlement as a national value; limitation of the Palestinian population seen as “demographic threat”, and Judaisation of areas having large Palestinian Arab population, such as Jerusalem, Galilee, and Negev; limitation of the ability of Palestinians to move to Israel from the OPT and from anywhere else to Israel or the OPT; as well as separation of West Bank and Gaza and prevention of the move of goods and people within OPT (Human Rights Watch, 2021). It should be underlined here that the mentioned law of “Nation-State of the Jewish People”, passed in 2018 and amended in 2022, defines the “Land of Israel” – which was called as Palestine until

1948 – as “the historical homeland of the Jewish people”, and more importantly, states that “the realisation of the right to national self-determination in the State of Israel is exclusive to the Jewish People” (Knesset, 2022).

Underlining similar points, Amnesty International claims that Israel is an apartheid regime, too. The organisation’s report also indicates that since 1948, Palestinians have been confined to enclaves or refugee camps. This both undermines the social and political ties between Palestinian communities and helps to increase the control over them. Another point mentioned in the report is the large-scale confiscation of lands and properties, which are either taken by the state or given to the Israeli settlers. Indicating that Palestinians and Israeli Jews do not have the same economic and social rights, the report says that “Palestinians across all areas under Israel’s control have fewer opportunities to earn a living and engage in business than Jewish Israelis. They experience discriminatory limitations on access to and use of farmland, water, gas, and oil amongst other natural resources, as well as restrictions on the provision of health, education, and basic services” (Amnesty International, 2022).

Finally, the Israeli human rights organisation, B’Tselem claims that Israel imposes one and same regime in both its recognized territories and Occupied Palestinian Territories, and that it’s clearly an apartheid regime. The report defines four major methods the Israeli regime uses to advance Jewish supremacy. First, any Jew living in any part of the world can very easily immigrate to Israel and get citizenship, while the Palestinians are deprived of the right of return. Second, Palestinian lands are systematically taken for Jews and Palestinians are crowded in enclaves. Third, Palestinians’ freedom of movement is routinely and systematically restricted. Last, Palestinians are devoid of the right of political participation (B’Tselem, 2021).

### **3.8. Conclusion: Towards a Paradigm Shift**

In this chapter, we tried to carry out a holistic reading of Palestine issue through a historical perspective that covers three decades and by examining several aspects of the subject in various political, sociological, and geographical axes. By interlinking these aspects to produce an original contribution to the academic works in this field, we reached to a series of conclusions. First of all, the “Oslo Peace Accords” that gave rise to hopes for a permanent solution have totally collapsed, and similar initiatives did not – and arguably could not – become successful either. Secondly, the efforts of state-building, including the ones adopted by Hamas in Gaza faced to serious challenges, and ultimately failed. Thirdly, Israel seems keen to block any kind of Palestinian statehood. Fourthly, the very existence of the Palestinians in Gaza (and in a certain degree, in West Bank) is under danger. Finally, the Palestinian issue is not limited to Gaza and

West Bank, and both the Palestinian refugees and the Palestinian citizens of Israel, or the “1948 Palestinians” face grave political and social problems although they make up rather “forgotten” components of the Palestine issue.

All these facts bring us to a fundamental question: Does the idea of two states living next to each other on pre-1967 borders still have any significance? It is extremely difficult to answer positively for two reasons: First, collapse of all the previous efforts present an important lesson, and already it seems that there’s not much ground for the implementation of an independent Palestinian state in Gaza, West Bank, and East Jerusalem in a foreseeable future (although theoretically even a shift in the US position is not totally impossible). Secondly – and more importantly – the “Palestine issue” will remain even if such a state is formed anytime.

In recent times, the idea of “One Democratic State” has been more frequently pronounced in academic and political circles alike. Basically, this means the implementation of a single state throughout the territories that were called as Palestine until 1948. This will be a democratic state in which Jews and Arabs will have equal rights, or, citing the words of activist and scholar Jeff Halper, its key element will be “establishing a constitutional democracy over historical Palestine that offers citizenship and equal rights to all the country’s inhabitants” (Halper, 2025, p. 154). This also includes the return of the Palestinian refugees. On the other hand, this is certainly not an easy task, and it requires a total shift not only in the local and regional balances of power but also in the mentality of the Israeli society, as such a state can be formed only through a kind of revolution.

Certainly, this does not mean that the world should silently wait until the conditions for a democratic state are ripe. Indeed, any effort for any Palestinian statehood should be supported *on condition that it is not offered as the final solution*. A “lesser Palestinian state” can be the starting point of the decolonisation of the whole of Palestine if the move is carried out in this perspective. Secondly, civilian efforts to isolate and weaken Israel are worth supporting. In this context, the global Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign is one of the most effective tools. Inspired from the successful boycott campaigns that were implemented against apartheid South Africa from 1960’s to 1990’s, BDS asserts that Israel should be legally held accountable for all of its crimes and isolated until three main historical rights of the Palestinians are fulfilled: Ending the occupation and colonisation of all Arab lands and dismantling the separation wall built in 2000’s; recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN Resolution 194 (BDS Movement, n.d.). This seems to be a reasonable and legitimate ground on which not only people who support the Palestinian cause,

but all those who believe in justice, human rights and the right of peoples to self-determination can agree.

Finally, the needed paradigm shift also requires a shift in the perspectives and terminology of all the sides involved. Thus, it seems appropriate to conclude by once again referring to Ilan Pappé:

*In ancient times, the dead were buried with their beloved artifacts and belongings. This coming funeral will probably follow a similar ritual. The most important item to go six feet under is the dictionary of illusion and deception with its famous entries such as “the peace process”, “the only democracy in the Middle East”, “a peace-loving nation”, “parity and reciprocity”, and “a humane solution to the refugee problem”. A replacement dictionary has been in the making for many years, redefining Zionism as colonialism, Israel as an apartheid state, and the Nakbah as ethnic cleansing. It will be much easier to put it into common use once the two-state solution has been pronounced dead (Pappé, 2024, p. 143).*

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