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Title: "Obama vs. Trump- different approaches to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: win-win vs. win-lose methods and pure mediation vs. power mediation"

Abstract

This research focuses on the two most recent peace initiatives by U.S. presidents to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The examination of Obama's "Peace Vision" and Trump's "Peace to Prosperity" initiatives concern differences and similarities in vision and actions addressing the conflict's key issues, such as land and borders, Jerusalem, refugees, Jewish settlements in the West Bank, and security arrangements. The findings highlight the many differences between the two plans in detail and attitude, such as the view of the Trump administration on the legality of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank and other issues where the Trump administration heavily favored Israel interests over Palestinians. However, a few similarities emerged in protecting the Israeli demands, such as regarding the Palestinian refugees and security arrangements. When examining conflict resolution methods and third-party intervention approaches, we conclude that Trump used the "Power Mediation" method and the "Win-Lose" approach for third-party intervention. This is conversely to Obama, who used the "Pure Mediation" method and the "Win-Win" approach.

Keywords: Israel; Palestine; Obama; Trump; Conflict resolution; Third-party intervention.

Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has endured multiple wars, with the 1948 War and the 1967 War making the most impact on the conflict (Bickerton and Klausner, 2018). Tensions are still significantly heightened between Israelis and Palestinians in the region (Hendrix et al., 2021). International organizations, such as the United Nations (U.N.), through resolutions adopted by the General Assembly (UNGA) or the Security Council (UNSC), have tried to reduce hostility in the region but have failed in achieving true reconciliation between Israel and Palestinians. Multiple peace proposals and negotiations have attempted to broker peace, mainly led by the U.S. As of 2021, these attempts have been unsuccessful in accomplishing a permanent solution. In the recent two decades, these U.S.-led attempts included the "Clinton Parameters" (Clinton, 2000), Bush's "Roadmap to Peace" (Bush, 2003), Obama's "Peace Vision," and Trump's "Peace to Prosperity."

This article focuses on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by examining the two most recent peace initiatives to solve the conflict. We compare the Trump administration plan: "Peace to Prosperity," to the Obama administration plan: "Peace Vision." Thus, the research question is: what are the similarities and differences between "Peace to Prosperity" and "Peace Vision"? While doing so, we aim to focus on the key issues of the conflict and situate the approaches and actions of Obama vs. Trump in the context of theories and methods of conflict resolution and third-party intervention.

We analyzed and compared the text of primary sources that represent the two plans to answer the research question. For "Peace Vision," we included four separate speeches by President Obama during his administration.¹ In addition, we also include one speech in 2016 by former Secretary of State Kerry, which outlined Obama's principles in addressing the conflict (Kerry,

2016). As for "Peace to Prosperity," we mainly refer to a single document, an official plan published by President Trump and his administration in 2020 (Trump, 2020).

The Theoretical Framework

To better organize the theoretical framework, we would like to ask four main questions regarding the literature on conflict resolution theories and methods: Why solve a conflict? What to focus on? How to solve it? Who should intervene and how?

Conflict has been defined as the incompatibility of goals or values between two or more parties (Fisher, 1990). Sources of such conflict can be split into three categories: economic, value, and power (Katz, 1965). The Israeli-Palestinian conflict derives from all three conflict sources: competition over resources and land, incompatible ways of life and ideologies, and a power struggle to maximize influence. Such disagreements can have various outcomes, such as continuous conflict or peace. The 'control paradigm' claims that insecurity can be controlled through military force or containment, thus maintaining the status quo, which describes the Israeli policy. On the other hand, the 'Sustainable Security' approach prioritizes resolving the interconnected underlying drivers of insecurity and conflict, emphasizing preventive rather than reactive strategies. The central premise of a sustainable security approach is that we cannot successfully control all the consequences of insecurity but must work to resolve its causes (Rogers, 2007). Hence, claiming that maintaining the status quo, as suggested by the 'control paradigm,' has consequences in the shape of recurring violent resurgence, such as the case in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This gives us the answer to our first question- Why solve a conflict? It is better to fix the causes (preventive) rather than wait for the consequences of leaving a conflict unresolved (reactive). Sustainable security requires understanding the three interlinked pillars of society: the economy, the environment, and central issues for sustainable development (Khagram et al., 2003).

This gives us an answer to the second question- what to focus on? We need to focus on exploring issues regarding the sustainable security of Israel/Palestine while understanding the interconnected underlying drivers of insecurity and conflict rather than trying to control through military/security force or containment to maintain a status quo. Thus, the reasoning behind conflict resolution.

To answer the third question, how to solve it? We turn to the three methods of conflict resolution: win-lose, lose-lose, and win-win (Blake and Herbert, 1968). The first strategy, win-lose, is common amongst parties with a "fixed pie" assumption, which stipulates whatever one party gains, the other inevitably loses. There is a distinct victor and a distinct loser in win-lose situations. Despite one side winning, this method often results in everyone losing in the end. The second strategy, lose-lose, is when both parties recognize a perpetual disagreement and conflict and compromise to reduce higher losses than in a win-lose situation. A lose-lose approach requires simple compromises instead of a creative solution that results in minimal satisfaction for both sides. The final strategy is the win-win approach. For this approach, both parties must "*maximize both parties' goals through collaborative problem solving*" and view the conflict as a problem instead of war (Fisher, 2000). A win-win approach also requires both parties to cooperate with open communication and patience to satisfy compromises. This needs both parties to make short-term accommodations and long-term concessions resulting in a long-term positive relationship.

Finally, our fourth question- who should intervene and how? The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has received the attention of multiple U.S. administrations through third-party intervention. Along with the three conflict resolution methods, we need to recognize the six-fold typology of third-party intervention (Fisher and Keashly, 1991). The six third-party intervention forms are conciliation, consultation, pure mediation, power mediation, arbitration, and peacekeeping.

The first type, conciliation, features a credible third party whose job is to lower tensions between sides by encouraging them to interact and provide communication in negotiation. The second, consultation, features a facilitative third party to solve human relations and understand the conflict's beginnings and dynamics. Pure mediation is the third type and uses a third-party facilitator to negotiate through "*reasoning, persuasion, effective control of information, and the suggestion of alternatives*" (Fisher, 2001). The fourth type, power mediation, uses pure mediation but goes a step further by allowing the third party to use leverage or coercion through rewards and punishments to reach an agreement between opposing parties. Arbitration, the fifth type, requires the third party to provide a just and fair settlement through careful consideration and judgment. The final and sixth type is peacekeeping. This type offers military personnel by the third party to induce a cease-fire or agreement. Peacekeeping also includes engaging in humanitarian activities to facilitate normal relations and assist in political ties.

It is imperative to include the three conflict resolution methods and the six-fold typology of third-party intervention to properly assess and compare each administration's approach and plan to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a third party. As such, this article aims at situating Obama's and Trump's plans within this theoretical framework.

The Gaps in the literature

Following the theoretical framework, we turn to a review of the existing literature on the topic. We have focused on the following four themes we identified in the Obama and Trump approaches to peace and administrative actions on handling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through U.S. policy: 1) Approach to the conflict, 2) Administration Ties to Conflicting Parties, 3) Israeli Goals, and 4) Palestinian Goals. Table 1 in the Annex includes a summary of the literature review in these four themes.

To conclude Table 1, this research aims at filling the following gaps in the literature. While the existing scholarship provides some evidence to compare the two administrations, it does not include a thorough examination of the Trump 2020 plan. We aim to fill this gap by examining the Obama plan and the Trump plan through the lens of their approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Israeli goals, the Palestinian goals, and the administration's ties to conflicting parties. Furthermore, as of the time of publication of this article, only one publication directly compares the two plans (Falah, 2021a). We expand this comparative approach by comparing the two administrations and their strategies and approaches towards the conflict while including the critical issues of the conflict, which have not been included in single research on the topic. We wish to fill an additional gap in current scholarship by situating these two peace initiatives within conflict resolution methods and third-party intervention.

Comparing "Peace Vision" to "Peace to Prosperity"

The following sections will compare ten core issues of the conflict between the two plans: 1) Mutual recognition, 2) Land, borders, and sovereignty, 3) Jerusalem and the religious sites, 4) Refugees, 5) Jewish settlements in the West Bank, 6) Security arrangements (Caplan, 2019), 7) Palestinian prisoners (Nashif, 2008), 8) The status of Palestinian citizens of Israel (Pappé, 2011; Peleg and Waxman, 2011), 9) The effect of the conflict on international relations of Israel and Palestine 10) Economic relations (Declaration of Principles, 1993). We will first discuss Peace Vision and then Peace to Prosperity to show a chronological shift in addressing core issues in each section.

Core Issue 1: Mutual Recognition

The first core issue is mutual recognition, which seeks to establish two independent states for the two people. In addition, it addresses Israel's right to exist and recognizes the country as a homeland

for the Jewish people. On the other hand, it also encompasses the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent state in Palestine (Caplan, 2019). Mutual recognition is featured as a key factor in both peace plans.

In Peace Vision, the Obama administration aimed to "*Fulfill the vision of the UNGA resolution 181 of two states for two peoples, one Jewish and one Arab, with mutual recognition and full equal rights for all their respective citizens*" (Kerry, 2016). Similarly, in Trump's Peace to Prosperity Plan, mutual recognition is addressed: "*the parties recognize the State of Palestine as the nation-state of the Palestinian people and the State of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people*" (Trump, 2020, 37). While these peace proposals call for two separate nation-states for two distinct peoples, they differ regarding alignment with previous resolutions.

One of the main differences is that Peace Vision refers to UNGA resolution 181, while Peace to Prosperity does not. The significance of UNGA resolution 181 (1947) is by adopting the partition plan for Mandatory Palestine and creating the international legal framework for the right of the two people for their respective independent states. The Trump plan ignored resolution 181 and only referred to UNSC resolution 242 (1967), which aimed to deal with a new situation where Israel is already an independent state, while the other side, Palestine, is not. This is a significant self-telling of the approach of the Trump administration. Furthermore, Peace to Prosperity blames the U.N. resolutions for being inconsistent, not bringing peace, not being clear, being interpreted in various ways, and enabling political leaders to avoid finding a "realistic path to peace." The Trump administration explicitly distances itself from such previously adopted international documents by claiming that their new proposal "*is not a recitation of General Assembly, Security Council and other international resolutions on this topic because such resolutions have not and will not resolve the conflict*" (Trump, 2020, 5).

This approach helped the Trump administration create criteria that the Palestinians must fulfill to be recognized as independent. Instead of accepting resolution 181 with mutual recognition of two independent states for two separate people, as Obama did, Trump created a more complex situation. For the Palestinians, there is a framework in which they must first recognize Israel. Then they must do actions to meet the criteria before they have a right to an independent state that is recognized and materialized. The Trump administration distanced itself from previous administrations and, more specifically, adopted a different approach from that of Obama. This was also evident in the different approach to the Palestinian leadership than that of the Israelis. As reflected in the U.S. decision to close the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) mission in Washington, DC, in 2019.

Core Issue 2: Land, borders, and sovereignty

The second core issue is land, borders, and sovereignty. This issue relates to how the peace initiatives plan to resolve the conflict, whether through a one-state or two-state (Lustick, 2019). Other options have been suggested and include a confederation resolution (Scheidlin and Waxman, 2016). Both administrations have explicitly covered this key issue in their plans.

An accurate encapsulating quote from Peace Vision says the plan is to "*Provide for secure and recognized international borders between Israel and a viable and contiguous Palestine, negotiated based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed equivalent swaps*" (Kerry, 2016). The Obama administration's goal regarding this issue is to create two separate states, preserving a two-state solution, to enable both of its citizens the means to enjoy self-determination, mutual recognition, and peace (Obama, 2011b).

The Peace to Prosperity plan significantly shifted from this approach. It called for a "*realistic two-state solution*" that granted Palestinians an opportunity for a "*path to a dignified*

national life, respect, security and economic opportunity and, at the same time, safeguards Israel's security" (Trump, 2020, 3). This so-called version of a two-state solution claims to award Palestinians the power to govern themselves. Still, it is tied to safeguarding Israel's security: *"maintenance of Israeli security responsibility and Israeli control of the airspace west of the Jordan River"* (Trump, 2020, 3).

Peace to Prosperity also includes a conceptual map designed *"to demonstrate the feasibility for a redrawing of boundaries in the spirit of UNSC resolution 242"* (Trump, 2020, 11). The conceptual map reflects land swaps, land incorporation, demilitarization of certain zones such as Gaza, construction of transportation links designed to maximize movement between countries, and access roads for the benefit and security of Israel (Trump, 2020, 13-14). Considering the "spirit" of resolution 242, so the plan says, it is essential to note this plan does not hold Israel accountable for granting Palestinians 100% of the pre-1967 territory. This is a shift from resolution 242. The proposed borders also do not give the future State of Palestine proper entrance ports by air or sea (Trump, 2020, 12).

Another significant difference between the two plans is the eastern border with Jordan. The Trump plan suggested an eastern corridor to be annexed to Israel, including from the Jordan Valley and to the western shores of the Dead Sea. This is in line with previous demands by Israel. The Trump plan states that *"The Jordan Valley is not only significant with regard to conventional attacks against the State of Israel [...] If the State of Israel withdrew from the Jordan Valley, it would have significant implications for regional security in the Middle East."* (Trump, 2020, 48). Kerry did not directly address the final resolution in this regard. However, he did mention the ongoing injustice towards the Palestinians in that part of the land: *"Israeli farms flourish in the Jordan River Valley, and Israeli resorts line the shores of the Dead Sea— a lot of people don't*

realize this – they line the shore of the Dead Sea, where Palestinian development is not allowed" (Kerry, 2016).

This core issue is addressed in different ways by the two plans. Peace Vision and Peace to Prosperity both call for a two-state solution, but it is evident the Trump administration allowed Israel to annex more land and focuses heavily on ensuring Israel's security, even if it reduces Palestine's self-determination. The Trump plan referred to the proposal's choice to not align 100% from previous international resolutions, specifically resolution 242. The suggested map by the Trump plan shifts from Obama's approach to reaching a viable and contiguous Palestine. While both administrations include 1967 lines in their documents, the Obama administration sought to provide modest and more equal land swaps. Thus, the Trump plan is not, in fact, the known and long-discussed "Two-State Solution."

Core Issue 3: Jerusalem and the religious sites

The third core issue is Jerusalem and the religious sites, which intend to address how the resolutions recognize Jerusalem as a capital and how the city will function under the respective plans. For example, suppose Jerusalem, or part of it, is Israel's capital and/or the Palestinian capital. In that case, will it be a united city or a divided city, an open city, or other international regime considerations? (Dumper, 2014).

In Peace Vision, the Obama administration vowed to protect and provide accessibility without division to all holy places. Concerning the political implications, Kerry (2016) referred to East Jerusalem as part of the "occupied territories" while quoting multiple U.N. resolutions on this issue. Kerry also emphasized that Jerusalem, as a core issue, must meet all parties' needs and all three monotheistic faiths. This is visible in his statement: "[to] *Provide an agreed resolution for*

Jerusalem as the internationally recognized capital of the two states and protect and assure freedom of access to the holy sites consistent with the established status quo" (Kerry, 2016).

Peace to Prosperity outlined a more in-depth plan for this core issue. Like Obama's approach, the Trump administration sought to keep Jerusalem accessible to all religions and peoples (Trump, 2020, 15). Another similarity is with Trump's recognition of the three religions' holy ties that find Jerusalem a location of importance (Trump, 2020, 15-16). In contrast to the Obama plan, Peace to Prosperity commends Israel for protecting Jerusalem and its sacred sites. Therefore, it states that Israel should remain to do so: *"The State of Israel has been a good custodian of Jerusalem. During Israel's stewardship, it has kept Jerusalem open and secure"* (Trump, 2020, 9).

Regarding the political status of Jerusalem, the Trump administration choose to shift from former presidents. The detailed map provided leaves no voids, as it includes Jerusalem as part of Israel, not the future Palestine state. In line with that, Trump implemented The Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995, which puts forth the city should not be divided again (Trump, 2020, 16-17). While previous U.S. presidents did not move the embassy to Jerusalem, Trump did. As Israel's capital, Jerusalem should not be a politically divided city, the document states, but also adds that the existing security physical barrier may separate the two nation-states' capitals. Peace to Prosperity declares Israel will keep an undivided Jerusalem as its capital: *"all of Jerusalem's holy sites should be subject to the same governance regimes that exist today. In particular the status quo at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif should continue uninterrupted"* (Trump, 2020, 17). Palestine can have a section of East Jerusalem and all areas east and north of the security barrier for its capital. Palestine may choose to keep the name Al Quds or create a new one if it recognizes Jerusalem as solely Israel's capital (Trump, 2020, 19). It appears that the Trump approach intended, in a very

complex and twisted way, to accept a divided city, with Israel having West Jerusalem as its capital and Palestine having East Jerusalem as its capital. However, with a significant change from the 1967 borders as part of UNSC resolution 242. Per the Trump proposal, the city's boundaries would include the Holy Basin as an integral part of Israel and not Palestine.

This core issue is addressed differently by the two plans. The Trump administration pronounced Jerusalem as Israel's capital and asked that Palestinians must recognize it as so. As well as recognition of all holy sites under the responsibility of Israel. This differs from Peace Vision because the Obama administration accepted the claims of both sides to designate Jerusalem as their capital. The similarity in this core issue is that both resolutions supported the preservation of holy sites and respect to worship rights of all religions that may find Jerusalem a location of importance.

Core Issue 4: Refugees

The fourth core issue covers the possible solutions to the Palestinian refugees, such as the right to return to Israel, the right of return to Palestine only, or other options such as a just solution within other Arab or Muslim countries (Akram, 2002).

Peace Vision includes recognizing the Palestinian refugee question but does not have a comprehensive solution for addressing this core issue. Kerry expressed the need to "*Provide for a just, agreed, fair, and realistic solution to the Palestinian refugee issue, with international assistance, that includes compensation, options and assistance in finding permanent homes, acknowledgment of suffering, and other measures necessary for a comprehensive resolution consistent with two states for two peoples*" (Kerry, 2016). The Obama administration believed in Palestinian refugees receiving acknowledgment for their suffering, just compensation, and finding permanent homes. However, Obama's approach limited the solution to the refugees consistent with

the two-state solution. Hence, the solution will not allow the mass return of Palestinian refugees into Israel to preserve Israel with a significant Jewish majority.

Trump's Peace to Prosperity plan differently framed the discussion on the Palestinian refugees. It drew attention to a somewhat ignored issue of the Jewish refugees migrating from their Arab countries to Israel, during the 1948 war or because of it, and the Arab hostility to Israel. The Trump plan stated that despite the "*nearly same number of Jews and Arabs were displaced by the Arab/Israeli conflict. Nearly all of the Jews have since been accepted and permanently resettled in Israel or other countries around the world*" (Trump, 2020, 31). This perspective lays the ground for a similar solution suggested by the Trump administration for the Palestinian refugees. The Trump plan provided a more detailed proposal, stating that refugees seeking permanent residence have three options. These three options offer no right of return to Israel for Palestinian refugees: "*1) Absorption into the State of Palestine [...] 2) Local integration in current host countries [...] or 3) The acceptance of 5,000 refugees each year, for up to ten years (50,000 total refugees), in individual Organization of Islamic Cooperation member countries who agree to participate in Palestinian refugee resettlement [...]*" (Trump, 2020, 32). The following excerpt can accurately provide a summarization and provide a clear stance on the refugee issue: "*There shall be no right of return by, or absorption of, any Palestinian refugee into the State of Israel*" (Trump, 2020, 32). By doing so, it accepted Israeli demands and ignored Palestinian requests.

Regarding refugee compensation, Peace to Prosperity stated that funds granted will have a more significant impact if given directly to the State of Palestine. In addition, there would also be a Palestinian Refugee Trust set up to provide compensation to Palestinian refugees. The final note of this section reiterated that after signing this agreement, "*Palestinian refugee status will cease to exist, and UNRWA will be terminated and its responsibilities transitioned to the relevant*

governments" (Trump, 2020, 33). In 2019 the Trump administration decided to cut off funding to U.N. Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which is in line with their intention in this peace plan.

Eventually, this core issue is addressed similarly in the two plans- both plans aimed to provide homes for Palestinian refugees outside of Israel. However, the rhetoric of the plans differs. The Trump administration was clear-cut in asserting no right of return for Palestinian refugees to Israel, while the Obama administration was not straightforward in this issue. Other than empathy and a desire to find a solution, the Obama administration kept the solution within the two-state solution that prevents the mass return of refugees to Israel.

Core Issue 5: Jewish settlements in the West Bank

The fifth core issue focuses on the possible solutions to the Jewish settlements in the West Bank, such as whether they should be legalized, expanded, abandoned, dismantled, exchanged, or absorbed into the new Palestinian state with its residents gaining Palestinian citizenship (Falah, 2005).

Peace Vision's opinion on this issue is that the more Jewish settlements built in the West Bank, the more difficult it is to create a contiguous Palestine state. It endangers the viability of the two-state solution, they feared. Kerry's remarks were focused on explaining the U.S. decision not to veto UNSC resolution 2334 (2016), which condemned the expansion of the settlements. He also expressed that the West Bank's settler movement violates international law, and the Oslo Accords and its continued action could invite UNSC action and global persecution. In addition, Kerry argued: "*Settlement expansion has nothing to do with Israel's security. Many settlements actually increase the security burden on the Israeli Defense Forces*" (Kerry, 2016). Even previous to resolution 2334, the settlements in the West Bank were seen by the Obama administration as an obstacle to achieving peace. Obama's remarks were explicit on this issue: "*We do not consider*

continued settlement activity to be constructive" (Obama, 2011c). Thus, they pressured the Israeli government to agree to freeze settlement construction in 2009 (Bronner and Landler, 2009). The continued pressure of the Obama administration on this issue caused constant tension between Israel and the U.S. (Rogin, 2010).

In Peace to Prosperity, it suggested that "*Approximately 97% of Israelis in the West Bank will be incorporated into contiguous Israeli territory, and approximately 97% of Palestinians in the West Bank will be incorporated into contiguous Palestinian territory"* (Trump, 2020, 12). This proposal planned to change the Green Line accordingly to Jewish settlements that will then be exchanged for other lands given to the Palestinians. The Trump administration went further and changed the approach to the Jewish Settlements. In 2019, the U.S. announced it was changing its long-standing policy on the illegality of settlements supported since the Carter administration and given re-affirmation in the 2016 Kerry's speech (Hansell, 1978). According to Secretary of State Pompeo, the settlements in the West Bank will no longer be seen as illegal under international law from the U.S. perspective (TOI, 2019). This announcement, along with Peace to Prosperity, were the triggers behind PM Netanyahu's proposal in the first part of 2020 that Israel will annex the West Bank while enjoying the backing of the U.S. However, as of 2021, such a proposal was not implemented (Sher and Cohen, 2020).

This core issue is discussed in significantly different ways by the two plans. Peace Vision claims Jewish settlements in the West Bank hinder a non-scattered Palestinian state. In contrast, Peace to Prosperity directs its plan to use Jewish settlements to expand land absorption for Israel. While the Obama administration condemned increased Jewish settlements in the West Bank, it appears the Trump administration intended to legitimize the settlements through its peace proposal with land exchanges.

Core Issue 6: Security arrangements

The sixth core issue is security arrangements, which deals with two opposing desires: a demilitarized Palestine, per Israeli demands, and Palestinian demands for protection. This section also includes a discussion of other Israeli security needs (Luft, 2001).

Through the words of Kerry, Peace Vision wanted to "*Satisfy Israel's security needs and bring a full end, ultimately, to the occupation, while ensuring that Israel can defend itself effectively and that Palestine can provide security for its people in a sovereign and non-militarized state*" (Kerry, 2016). Obama frequently mentioned the U.S.' friendship with Israel and its unshakeable commitment to Israeli security, deep and enduring (Obama, 2011c). Obama demanded that Hamas recognize Israel's right to exist, reject violence, and work toward accepting essential responsibilities of establishing peace and reiterated that: "*a full and phased withdrawal of Israeli military forces should be coordinated with the assumption of Palestinian security responsibility in a sovereign and non-militarized state*" (Obama, 2011b). By doing so, Obama specified that if Palestine is a non-militarized sovereign state, Israel must withdraw all Israeli soldiers from Palestinian land (Obama, 2011b). Furthermore, Kerry outlined the approach of the Obama administration to the Palestinian militant groups by arguing that the administration: "[...] *have consistently condemned violence and terrorism, and even condemned the Palestinian leadership for not condemning it.*" In addition, the administration called for an immediate stop of "*Hamas arms buildup and militant activities in Gaza*" (Kerry, 2016). The approval of the Memorandum of Understanding in 2016 with \$38 Billion in military aid package to Israel signaled that Obama was no different from his predecessors in security matters.

Peace to Prosperity continued the same U.S. focus on Israeli security and made more concessions to the Israeli side. It directly called for a vision of peace between Israelis and Palestinians and "[...] *reduce the risk of terrorism*" (Trump, 2020, 21) and therefore supported

Israel's decision not to compromise any security measures. In addition, Israel would graciously take responsibility for Palestine's security arrangements (Trump, 2020, 21). Palestine would have to abide by a "Security Criteria" outlined in the Trump Peace plan and continue with Israel's involvement until determined otherwise. The U.S. would also act as a source of support to Palestine to meet the Security Criteria. However, if Palestine will *"fail to meet all or any of the Security Criteria at any time, the State of Israel will have the right to reverse the process outlined above."* Hence giving more power to the Israeli side in this relationship. Regarding Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups, the plan outlined Israel was not obligated to continue progression in peace talks until the "[...] *disarming of all terrorist groups.*" (Trump, 2020, 26). The "Gaza Criteria" includes stipulations and immediate concessions that must be made for Israel to partake in negotiations (Trump, 2020,25–26). The Trump plan further refers to the Palestinian security forces: *"The State of Palestine will have security forces capable of maintaining internal security and preventing terror attacks within the State of Palestine and against the State of Israel"* (Trump, 2020, 22).

Additionally, the Trump plan used the Israeli security demands to dictate many aspects of the peace proposal. It demanded that Palestine demilitarize, and all of Palestine's external defenses must come from Israel. Security considerations are behind the Trump suggestion that Israel takes over the Jordan Valley, control the airspace west of the Jordan River, and control sea access on the Mediterranean" (Trump, 2020, Appendix 2A).

In essence, the two plans handled this core issue similarly since both administrations were committed to Israeli security. The two plans satisfied Israel's security needs by agreeing to a demilitarized Palestine. Furthermore, Peace Vision and Peace to Prosperity condemn Palestinian violence in the region. The Trump administration further stated that no negotiations could occur

without Gaza fully demilitarized. Palestinian protection was placed upon Israel's responsibility per the Trump administration. In addition, Trump went further to pronounce security criteria controlled by Israel to limit progress in peacemaking.

Core Issue 7: Palestinian prisoners

The seventh core issue is the status of Palestinian prisoners, which discusses the possible solutions to the Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails and the Israeli citizens held by Hamas in Gaza (Nashif, 2008).

We found minor references by the Obama administration to the Palestinian prisoners. However, when Kerry was able to restart the peace talks in 2013-2014, Israel released a few Palestinian prisoners following the Palestinian leadership demands and the U.S. intervention. In one of Obama's remarks after a meeting with Palestinian Authority President Abbas, Obama mentioned a few problematic issues raised by the Palestinian president that cannot be ignored, including the Palestinian prisoners' status: "*In our discussion with President Abbas, I heard him speak eloquently about the difficult issues that cannot be ignored -- among them, problems caused by continued settlement activities, the plight of Palestinian prisoners, and access to holy sites in Jerusalem*" (Obama, 2013).

Peace to Prosperity did address this key issue. The plan allowed for the release of Palestinian prisoners and administrative detainees in Israeli prisons in two phases, however, only under certain concessions based on convictions. According to the plan, those released would become citizens of the State of Palestine. The first phase of releasement of prisoners would begin directly after the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Agreement. The Trump plan also required the full releasement of Israeli captives for the release of Palestinian prisoners: "*No Palestinian prisoners or administrative detainees will be released in accordance with this section if all Israeli*

captives and remains are not returned to the State of Israel" (Trump, 2020, 30). The second phase was dependent upon both parties agreeing. This section noted that *"any additional prisoner releases will be based on Israeli consent."*

Because Peace Vision did not profoundly address Palestinian prisoners, it is more difficult to compare the two plans on this issue. However, we can point to a significant difference in approach. The Obama administration pressured Israel to release Palestinian prisoners to convince the Palestinian leadership to restart peace talks. In contrast, the Trump administration tied the issue to the final solution, Israeli captives, and Israel's consent.

Core Issue 8: The status of Palestinian citizens of Israel

The eighth core issue is about Palestinian citizens of Israel. This section deals with their Israeli citizenship and how that is affected by the respective two plans (Zeedan, 2020).

Peace Vision does not touch in-depth on the status of Palestinian citizens of Israel. Still, Kerry's remarks did include reference to the *"1.7 million Arab citizens who call Israel their home and must now and always be able to live as equal citizens"* (Kerry, 2016). Additionally, the Obama administration mentioned the need to secure *"[...] equal rights for all citizens [...]"* (Kerry, 2016) as part of ensuring the two-state solution based on UNGA resolution 181.

On the other hand, the Trump administration plan disrespected the unique status of non-Jewish citizens and residents of Israel. It included a proposal for the residents of East Jerusalem and another for the Arabs of the Triangle area. Peace to Prosperity consists of a section on Arab residents in Israel's capital, which explains they have three options of citizenship: *"1) Become citizens of the State of Israel, 2) Become citizens of the State of Palestine, or 3) Retain their status as permanent residents in Israel"* (Trump, 2020, 17). This suggestion of allowing Arab residents of East Jerusalem to choose their future status is not offered to others.

The Trump administration plan wanted to make another significant change by reconsidering the status of the Palestinian communities in the Triangle Area. Peace to Prosperity suggested that the pre-1967 borders will be changed to not include these Arab localities as part of Israel. Instead, they would be included in the future Palestine state (Trump, 2020, 13). This provides a land swap to increase the Jewish majority in Israel. However, it disregarded the wishes of those citizens that consider themselves Israelis since 1948. The plan stripped them from their fundamental rights as equal citizens.

This core issue is handled in different ways by the two plans. Obama's approach aimed at securing equal citizenship for non-Jews in Israel, while Trump suggested stripping some Palestinians from their Israeli citizenship by supporting land swaps to increase the Jewish majority in Israel.

Core Issue 9: The effect of the conflict on international relations of Israel and Palestine

The ninth core issue centers on Israeli relations with other Arab countries and Palestinian relations with the international community (Podeh, 2014).

Obama's Peace Vision concentrated heavily on solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as part of the initiative to establish peace in the Middle East, therefore stated the following: "*End the conflict and all outstanding claims, enabling normalized relations and enhanced regional security for all as envisaged by the Arab Peace Initiative [...] For Israel, this must also bring broader peace with all of its Arab neighbors*" (Kerry, 2016). Such an approach focuses on the 2002 Arab peace initiative, which promised normalization of relations between Arab countries and Israel in exchange for achieving peace between Israel and the Palestinians (Podeh, 2014).

Peace to Prosperity's goal of achieving peace and being treated as a legitimate part of the international community and in the Middle East required "*Arab states [to] fully cooperate with the*

State of Israel for the benefit of all the countries in the region" (Trump, 2020, 36). The Trump administration wanted this document to help normalize relations between Israel and Arab countries, expand economic ties between them, and allow Israel to join cooperation organizations of the region (Trump, 2020, 36-37).

Peace to Prosperity states Palestine and Jordan shall have a free-trade zone based on the economic cooperation between the two countries (Trump, 2020, 26). This includes port facilities directed to "[...] *enhance Palestinian economic activity, protect Israeli security [...]*" (Trump, 2020, 27). Palestine could use and manage earmarked facilities at the Haifa and Ashdod ports, recognizing that sole sovereignty is given to Israel to guarantee Israel's security (Trump, 2020, 27-28). The plan adds that Palestine may use Jordan's port of Aqaba as an earmarked port facility while considering Jordan's security. After 5-years of signing the Israeli-Palestinian agreement, Palestine could build an artificial island off the coast of Gaza that may serve as a port facility and airport (Trump, 2020, 29).

This section for both peace proposals works toward accomplishing friendly relations with peace and cooperation between Israel, Palestine, Arab neighboring countries, and the international community. Still, Israeli security considerations were presented as a condition. Peace to Prosperity provided specific details of how trade and port facilities between Palestine and Jordan are bound to Israel's security. In addition, looking at Israel's relations with other countries and international organizations, it appears the U.S. focuses on Israeli interests. In Peace Vision, it stated the U.S. was fully committed to resolving the conflict because it would "*serve American interests to stabilize a volatile region and fulfill America's commitment to the survival, security, and well-being of an Israel at peace with its Arab neighbors*" (Kerry, 2016). Obama and his administration

also aimed to normalize relations between Israel and its neighbors while maintaining peace in the volatile region (Obama, 2011c).

Peace to Prosperity addressed the necessity of working together to counter organizations such as Hezbollah, ISIS, and Hamas (Trump, 2020, 37). The vision also declared a free trade agreement between the U.S. and Palestine and hoped for free trade agreements between other countries in Europe, the Middle East, and elsewhere between Palestine (Trump, 2020, 27).

This core issue is discussed in significantly different ways by the two plans. While both administrations hoped to achieve peace in the Middle East by improving relations between Israel and other countries, their approach differed. Obama's approach tied solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict first to normalization relations between Israel and Arab countries. Trump's approach ignored the Palestinians and went directly to Israeli-Arab peace initiatives because the Trump administration sought to focus on the regional approach. It went further than previous U.S. administrations to advance Israeli-Arab relations without waiting for the Palestinians. This resulted in the Abraham Accords and the normalization of relations in 2020 between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain, with Sudan and Morocco joining later (Guzansky and Marshall, 2020).

Core Issue 10: Economic relations

The tenth and the final core issue is economic relations. This section will provide insight into how the two administrations addressed an economic plan within a peace agreement (Wildeman and Tartir, 2014).

Under the Obama administration, the U.S. was concerned with aiding Palestinians through USAID to the Palestinian Authority to bolster its finances to "*help strengthen governance, rule of law, economic development, education, and health*" (Obama, 2013). The Obama administration supported these statements by increasing the annual average disbursement of U.S. financial aid to

the Palestinians more than three times compared to the Bush administration (U.S. Government, 2021). We found no other evidence of a blueprint for economic relations laid out by the administration.

Conversely to the Obama administration, the Trump Administration had tied economic aid to progress in peace. Even before cutting the aid to UNRWA in 2019, the annual average disbursement of U.S. financial aid to the Palestinians under Trump was decreased by about 60% compared to the Obama administration (U.S. Government, 2021). In addition, Peace to Prosperity does feature a more detailed plan that includes three distinct pillars supported for the Palestinian society, similar to Obama's statement: the people, the economy, and the government (Trump, 2020, 21). Under the Trump Economic Plan in Section Six, the Peace to Prosperity plan states it would grant more than \$50 billion in investment funds for the Palestinian people. The Trump plan included two major parts, a political framework and an economic package. Interestingly, the first part, which lays the more complex issues and details the proposed solutions to the core issues, is more than two times shorter in length than the second part detailing the economic incentives.

The first pillar in the economic plan for the Palestinians is the people pillar, which voices the Palestinian people's desires will be realized through initiatives anticipated to empower the civilians through *"new data-driven, outcomes-based education options at home, expanded online education platforms, increased vocational and technical training, and the prospect of international exchanges"* (Trump, 2020, 20). This pillar was designed to strengthen the Palestinian people, its educational system and produce a prepared workforce. The second pillar is the economic pillar which works to *"develop property and contract rights, the rule of law, anti-corruption measures, capital markets, a pro-growth tax structure, and a low tariff scheme with reduced trade barriers, this initiative envisions policy reforms coupled with strategic*

infrastructure investments that will improve the business environment and stimulate private-sector growth" (Trump. 2020, 19). The document states money will go into hospitals, schools, and homes that feature "*affordable electricity, clean water, and digital services.*" In addition to the economic pillar, the plan envisioned a Palestine connected to key trading partners such as Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and Lebanon. The third pillar, the government pillar, aimed to enhance Palestinian governance. For example, Peace to Prosperity claims it seeks to "[..]encourage laws and regulations that secure the independence of the judicial system." (Trump. 2020, 25). The plan claims these initiatives will create a system that grants transparency and accountability and provides opportunities for prosperity and prosperous economic growth through upholding legal frameworks for businesses and people. As such, together, all three pillars presented in Peace to Prosperity claim to provide a foundation for a promising, thriving future for Palestinians and a future Palestinian state.

Both peace proposals mention the ambition for a prosperous Palestinian state. However, Peace to Prosperity provided a more extensive and detailed plan to achieve this goal. Additionally, the Trump plan tied economic aid and development to Palestinian's commitment to the peace process and used it as a tool to try and convince Palestinian leaders to cooperate with the peace plan.

Discussion and Conclusions

This paper discussed ten core issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and answered how the two most recent back-to-back U.S. administrations have tried to find a solution.

The two plans are different in most core issues: issues 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10. The two plans are not much different in two core issues: issues 4 and 6. To answer the research question, we conclude that the two administrations differ on most core issues. However, they both

demonstrated a pro-Israel bias, overvalued Israel's security, and accepted Israel's demands concerning the Palestinian refugees. However, the findings suggest that the Trump plan heavily favored Israelis over Palestinians more than Obama. Although both peace proposals asked Palestinians to make significant concessions, Peace to Prosperity further legitimized illegal Jewish settlements and ignored, or asked to change, international law and previous U.N. resolutions. In addition, the peace proposals varied in how far each plan worked to grant Palestinians their goals; the Obama plan was slightly more empathetic to the Palestinian cause, and Peace to Prosperity completely aligned with Israeli interests.

The findings support some of the previous scholarships. Although Obama tried to veer away from an Israel bias slant, he could not escape from an American Israel-appeasing culture. He could not accomplish a peace deal that satisfied Palestinian and Israeli demands (Ruebner, 2019). The findings affirm that his administration only continued and furthered a one-state solution distant from Palestinian goals (Erdoğan and Habash, 2020). Regarding a one or two-state solution, we agree with scholars who claimed that even though Peace to Prosperity was presented as a two-state solution, it is more closely related to a one-state solution (Kilani et al., 2020). We endorse the works of scholars in their affirmations of the U.S.' efforts to guarantee security arrangements for Israel over other considerations (Ruebner, 2016; Lustick, 2020; Feith and Libby, 2020; Toosi, 2020; Falah, 2021a).

Regarding Israeli settlements, we support claims that Peace to Prosperity was presented as a "settler-colonial project" that authorized and permitted Jewish settlement activity and only benefits settlers instead of preserving the land for a non-scattered Palestinian state (Ghanem, 2020; Newman, 2020; Falah, 2021a). We concur that Obama struggled to find a way to defend Palestinian's concerns, in addition to claims that the Trump administration's plan set impossible

standards for Palestinians to achieve full sovereignty (Shalom, 2015; Kilani et al., 2020). We agree that Trump failed to include those most disproportionately affected in the conflict, which sorely left Palestinians with less self-determination and the ability to partake in peace (Ruebner, 2019; Ghanem, 2020). In addition, we support the accurate identification of each administration's ties of the conflicting parties, which was confirmed in our findings as affecting the U.S.' ability to resolve the conflict as an utterly unbiased mediator. Relating to humanitarian aid, we disagree that all the Obama administration did shield Israeli interests (Ruebner, 2019).

Finally, we want to refer to the three conflict methods and the six-fold third-party intervention each administration chose for their approaches. We propose the Obama administration desired a win-win method, which wanted to appease and fulfill both parties' desires as much as possible. This is evident in their approach to negotiations between the two parties. The Obama administration asked both sides to make short-term accommodations (e.g., Israel to freeze settlements in the West Bank and the Palestinian Authority to delay requests for international recognition) and negotiated long-term concessions. On the other hand, the Trump administration used the win-lose approach. The basis of the Trump administration's policy was that the resources were of a "fixed pie." Therefore, they picked a winner and a loser, where whatever Israel gains, the Palestinians inevitably lose. The Trump administration left out many Palestinian desires (e.g., the right of return to the Palestinian refugees) and moved further towards Israel's interests (e.g., declaring Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moving the U.S. embassy there).

Regarding the mediation typologies of third-party intervention, Peace Vision implementing pure mediation and Peace to Prosperity used power mediation. The Obama administration, primarily through the efforts of Secretary Kerry, acted as a third-party facilitator to negotiate between Israeli and Palestinian leaders. On the other hand, the Trump administration went beyond

purely negotiating, using leverage or coercion through rewards and punishments on the Palestinian leadership. In the Peace to Prosperity plan, they promised prizes to the Palestinians (e.g., the detailed economic plan with investments). They also threatened to punish the Palestinians and took many actions that favored Israel (e.g., closing the PLO mission in Washington, DC, defunding UNRWA, and moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem). These tools were used to make the Palestinians understand they have more to lose if they do not cooperate.

The differences in third-party intervention between the Obama and Trump administrations reveal a difference in the general approach to the conflict. Assessment of the four initial themes present in both administration's plans, the ten core issues, implementation of third-party intervention, and approaches to the conflict allow us to understand how two back-to-back U.S. presidents dealt with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Annex

[Table 1 here]

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Table 1. Literature review of the four themes identified in the Obama and Trump approaches to peace and administrative actions on the handling of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through U.S. policy

#	Theme	Obama	Trump
1	Approach to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • El-Khawas (2010), Ruebner (2016), and Gardner (2018)- Obama most fit to solve the conflict. With his new approach, tried to satisfy both sides. • Brzezinski (2010), Gerges (2012), and Klieman (2016)- Obama not fit to solve the conflict. Had a hostile relation with Netanyahu. • Anziska (2017)- Obama dealt with the core issues of the conflict. • Doran (2021)- Obama viewed the conflict as part of the effort to stabilize MENA. • Shalom (2015)- Obama pushed for the Two State solution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Erdogan and Habash (2020), Ghanem (2020), and Tschirgi (2019)- Trump’s approach similar to previous presidents, biased towards Israel. • Klieman (2016) and Anziska (2017)- Trump’s closed ties with Netanyahu and hostility to the Palestinians is further than previous presidents. • Anziska (2017) and Zureik (2019)- Trump promoted the “Economic peace” and avoided the core issues of the conflict. • Khalidi (2018) and Anziska (2017) - Trump promoted the “regional approach” (or “outside-in” approach). • Doran (2021)- Trump viewed the conflict as insignificant to the effort to stabilize MENA • Kilani et al. (2020) and Lustick (2020)- Trump’s plan was One State solution with Israeli supremacy.
2	Administration Ties to Conflicting Parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ruebner (2016)- Obama was connected to the Palestinians, have selected officials who supported the Two State Solution, and the Palestinians were part of the negotiations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Erdogan and Habash (2020), Tschirgi (2019), Khalidi (2018), Cavari (2020) and Ghanem (2020)- Trump was connected only to the Israeli side, have selected officials who were biased towards Israel and support Zionism, the far right, and the settlers. • Zureik (2019)- Trump led a US policy that mixed politics with personal business decisions. • Ghanem (2020)- the Palestinians refused to cooperate with the Trump Administration because of the administrations’ bias towards Israel.

#	Theme	Obama	Trump
3	Israeli Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ruebner (2016), Klieman (2016), and Falah (2021a)- Obama still shielded Israeli security and aided Israel. • Ruebner (2016)- Obama failed to change course on the settlements. UNSC 2334 is the only legacy left to counter Israeli goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lustick (2020), Feith and Libby (2020), Sher and Cohen (2020) and Toosi (2020)- Trump went further to protect Israeli security, moved the embassy to Jerusalem, and changed the approach by confirming the legality of the settlements. • Ghanem (2020), Newman (2020) and Falah (2021a)- Trump's plan is continuing the settler-colonial project.
4	Palestinian Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ruebner (2016) and Shalom (2015)– Obama failed to address all Palestinian goals, and failed to balance his closed ties to Israel. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Erdogan and Habash (2020), Viveash (2020), Kilani and Alawiyeh (2020), and Falah (2021b) – Trump ignored the Palestinian goals altogether. • Feith and Libby (2020)- Trump's plan is the best deal possible for the Palestinians.

Notes

¹ "Peace Vision" refers to the following four speeches by President Obama, from 19 May 2011, 22 May 2011, 21 September 2011, and 1 March 2013.