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### Menachem Begin and Ronald Reagan: US-Israeli Relations in the 1982 Lebanon War

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#### Abstract

The article analyzes how relations between Israel and the United States occurred during the 1982 Lebanon War, during the governments of Ronald Reagan and Menachem Begin. Palestinian professor Walid Khalidi attributes Washington's Middle East policy to the dominance of domestic and global concerns. In his opinion, national and geopolitical strategies have been allowed to play primordial roles, at the expense of the regional variable. This is why the US policy toward the Palestinian Question and the Arab-Israeli conflict since the 1940s has been consistently erratic. The Lebanon War of 1982 is an emblematic episode of this relationship, still within the spectrum of the Cold War, as it is considered controversial in Israeli society in the military and political aspects, leading to direct interference by the USA and by the United Nations (UN) and changed the course of Lebanon and the Palestine Liberation Organization

(PLO). Still in 1982, during the conflict in Lebanon, Ronald Reagan launched the "Reagan Peace Plan for the Middle East" to extend the Lebanon project to the rest of the region. However, the previous conclusions of the article are that the Plan supported Israel more than the other countries and the PLO. Reagan's plan reaffirmed the Palestinian Question, but at the same time offered little support for their rights and self-determination to be exercised. This article develops research classified as qualitative, due to the methods used to carry it out that differ from those used in quantitative research. The information was collected mostly from secondary sources (books, articles), but also primary sources (surveys on public opinion in Israel from different sources). Therefore, research in its essence of the type of indirect observation.

**Keywords:** United States-Israel Relations, Lebanon War 1982, Cold War

#### Introduction

Even before the 1970s, the decade in which relations between Israel and the United States intensified, the United States had developed a policy that manifested its broad and deep commitment to Israel's security. Commitment was evidenced not only in repeated public declarations of support by successive administrations such as Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter and Reagan, but also by declared support in Congress through economic and military aid, special privileges granted to Israel and its citizens, and a close coordination between the two countries in economic, diplomatic and military matters.

Palestinian professor Walid Khalidi attributes Washington's Middle East policy to the dominance of domestic and global concerns. In his opinion, national and geopolitical strategies have been allowed to play primordial roles, at the expense of the regional variable. This is why the US policy toward the Palestinian Question and the Arab-Israeli conflict since the 1940s has been consistently erratic (IBRAHIM, 1986).

Since the issuance of the Balfour Declaration in 1917, Western and Arab writers have often reminded us of the power and influence of the Zionist lobby on decision-making in great power capital, especially in the representative governments of pluralistic societies. The contention of these writers, however, is that decision-making in Washington about the Middle East is a purely endogenous process, which is directed by an all-American establishment. Thirty years ago, C. Wright Mills dubbed this establishment "the power elite," a term still appropriate today to describe the very rich corporations, their top executives, industrial tycoons, arms producers, and their apologists. The power elite today remains the sole owner of the US strategic policy. Therefore, any reference to the dominance of public opinion or pressure groups in Middle East policy-making seriously underestimates the organic nature of US interest in this relationship, as well as neglecting Israel's value to the elite as a strategic ally. Furthermore, an overemphasis on the significance of lobbyists or special interest groups can be dangerous, not only because it confuses Arab elites and policymakers, but also because it absolves the United States of responsibility to its victims, in this case, the Arabs and particularly the Palestinians. Equally misleading is the emphasis on pluralism. However, in Western democracies, there is a lot of manipulation involved in the political process (IBRAHIM, 1986).

Furthermore, public opinion in the United States, even in Western democracies, is amorphous and less interested in foreign affairs than in domestic affairs, except in times of crisis that affect society at large. Foreign policy remains the exclusive domain of the power elite.

We must remember that important foreign policy decisions with disastrous consequences for the US and other nations were made in the 1960s and 1970s by the ruling elite of Congress and the American people, decisions that included the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, the bombing of Kissinger and Nixon against Cambodia, and the Vietnam War, which consumed the energies of a continuum of presidents. Be that as it may, American and some Arab writers on US Middle East policy frequently refer to the fact that public opinion in the United States is more favorable to Israel than the Arab world for various reasons. : Jewish suffering during the holocaust, biblical sentimentality, and a deep Western prejudice against Islam that dates back to the Middle Ages.

According to Ibrahim (1986), in the United States, the issue of Jewish immigration is something that was handled very poorly during the interwar period. As with AngloZionists across the Atlantic, American Zionists also exploited the immigration issue to gain the administration's support for Zionism. Louis Brandeis, for example, expressed his concern over the Balfour Declaration about the large numbers of Russian Jews who were entering the United States year by year. The Zionist plan for Palestine seemed to him, like Balfour, the best answer to the concerns of those who wanted to restrict immigration. This perhaps explains why President Woodrow Wilson, the originator of the "self-determination" doctrine, came to endorse the Balfour Declaration even though it was a scathing refutation of his own ideals. The unspoken understanding between the Zionists and their Western sponsors endured even after Hitler's rise.

There's reason and plenty of evidence to condemn both Western immigration legislation and the Zionist leadership on humanitarian and moral grounds. To claim, therefore, that Americans and Israelis are united like no other sovereign people because a shared Jewish heritage flowed through the minds of early American settlers and helped shape the new American republic is not just an outright fallacy, a poor refuge for historians who choose to rewrite history (Ibrahim, 1986) <sup>[4]</sup>. Whatever importance we attach to images, perceptions, misperceptions, and prejudices against other cultures and peoples, the guiding principle in the formulation of foreign policy remains the sphere of national interest defined by the power elite. Pro-Jewish sentimentality, or, for that matter, hostility toward Muslims, is a convenient diversionary tool used to help rationalize certain policies. What counts is the *raison d'être*, that ancient doctrine long ago described by Machiavelli and since then employed by European diplomats, which is still very much appreciated by the politicians who today work in the chancelleries of the great powers.

In contrast to some analysis found of US-Israel relations, Israel was far from being established for serving as a US outpost in the Middle East, or even representing Western values in the region. Initially, the European powers remained largely indifferent. Britain's position in particular, seeing its colonial power wane, has been amply described. Furthermore, both the Conservative and Labor governments in London opposed such policies. In the years before Israel's creation, several policies denoted this opposition to the

creation of the State of Israel, including the British political declaration opposing the partition of Palestine (1938); the White Paper of May 1939, limiting Jewish immigration to a total of no more than 75,000 personnel over the next five years, the antagonistic post-war disposition of the Labor Government 1945-1948, and the Minister's particular dislike of Foreign Affairs Ernest Bevin and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in not only continuing to oppose the creation of a Jewish state (Lieber, 1998) <sup>[6]</sup>.

Instead, Ben-Zvi (1997) <sup>[3]</sup> demonstrates that the policy change actually began under the Eisenhower administration, with gradual recognition of changes in the region, and especially after the July 1958 crises in Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan. During that time, Iraq's pro-Western government was overthrown. The Hashemite monarchy of King Hussein of Jordan appeared threatened, and the political situation in Lebanon appeared so unstable that the Eisenhower administration sent US Marines to Beirut (Lieber, 1998) <sup>[6]</sup>. During this period of severe instability, and particularly in Jordan's case, Israel proved to be the only staunchly pro-Western power in the region. Ben-Zvi (1997) <sup>[3]</sup> cites a very explicit August 1958 letter from Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion attesting to this recognition:

The crux of the matter...is the urgent need to strengthen the bulwarks of international order and justice against the forces of lawlessness and destruction currently at work in the Middle East. We have been pleased that Israel's actions toward this end, as illustrated by its deeply appreciated acquiescence in the use of Israel's Airspace by the United States and the United Kingdom in their mission in support of Jordan... We believe that Israel must be in a position to thwart an attempted aggression by indigenous forces, and are prepared to examine the military implications of this problem with an open mind... The critical situation in the Middle East today gives Israel multiple opportunities to contribute through its spiritual strength resources and determination of purpose, for a stable international order (DULLES apud BEN-ZVI, 1997, p. 76) <sup>[3]</sup>.

Before the crises in Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon, Israel's claims to a shared religious legacy had not been enough by themselves to spur a more favorable American policy. Rather, it was only after the Eisenhower administration began recognizing the strategic dimension and to appreciate how other pro-Western governments in the region were, that it began adopting a more explicitly cooperative policy toward Israel.

In another study, by Kenneth Organski (1990) <sup>[7]</sup>, conclusions were consistent with Ben-Zvi's (1997) <sup>[3]</sup> on the basis of US policy toward Israel as ultimately derived more from foreign policy than domestic policy reasons. In Organski 's (1990) <sup>[7]</sup> analysis, most US policy decisions regarding Israel have been made by presidents and foreign policy makers, both for themselves and for reasons entirely their own.

While the shift to a US-Israel strategic relationship had its origins as early as 1958, the US initially took only modest and hesitant steps. The relationship slowly expanded and then deepened after the 1967 Six Day War and especially after the 1973 Yom Kippur War and the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty. Recent research has shown that while

US foreign aid to Israel amounted to \$3.2 billion between the years 1949-1973, it grew to a total of \$75 billion in the period 1974-1997 (Lieber, 1998) <sup>[6]</sup>.

### 1. Lebanon War

On June 6, 1982, Israel finally marched toward Lebanon, and it was announced that the operation would last 48 to 72 h at most. However, the IDF <sup>1</sup>after four months was still on Lebanese soil. As discussed earlier, the Israeli objectives were so comprehensive that the troops ended up advancing to Beirut, the capital of Lebanon, instead of remaining in the southern region as initially proposed; ending up fighting battles not only with the Palestinians, but also with the Muslim factions of the Lebanese civil war and Syrians. However, the situation became so uncontrollable, taking into account the war that was already going on inside Lebanon, and the Israeli, Palestinian, and Syrian participation did nothing to improve the situation. In fact, it worse, causing Israel to be unable to leave for three years, making Operation Peace for Galilee the biggest Israeli military failure in history. To understand what caused this failure, it is necessary to analyze the core of the Israeli decision-making process, and identify its flaws thanks to the enormous militarization of decision-making.

One of the most used arguments to explain the situation is given by cognitive analysis, considering the personal ambitions, for example, Ariel Sharon.

(Ariel Sharon was) a cynical, dogged enforcer who regarded the IDF as his personal tool for achieving sweeping - and not necessarily defensive - conquests, and a minister prepared to play the national interest game in his struggle for power (YARI *apud* SCHULZE, 1998, p. 215, our translation) <sup>[9]</sup>.

This argument credits the military operation because of the ambition of a group of reckless men; however, what is intended in this monograph is a contrary line of argument. It is assumed that the Israeli invasion and its failure were the result of group thinking conditioned by structural factors of the decision-making process, with emphasis on militarization; this hypothesis is corroborated by the arguments in the work of Kirsten Schulze (1998) <sup>[9]</sup>.

The author describes how decision-making occurs in crises, in which the decisions and the groups would be prone to an estimated risk. A factor that influences the propensity for high-risk decisions is the planning process because risk policies are commonly accompanied by broad planning, which involves a range of possible decisions to be taken, based on assumptions, guidelines, and fields of action.

Here, the decisions taken for the Israeli invasion functioned as an anchor point, which had little adaptability to new realities and the interpretation of facts. Schulze (1998) <sup>[9]</sup> mentions, for example, that Israel predicted that the war would change the *status quo* of the international system, mainly in the Middle East, with the establishment of peace with Lebanon, if the Christian faction was victorious in the civil war, the dismantling of the Palestinian presence on Lebanese soil, victory over the Syrians and the decline of Palestinian nationalism in the West Bank and Gaza territories. The decision-making environment made it conducive for the riskiest choices to be elected, partly due to

the lack of strategic intelligence, mentioned earlier, of the democratic decision-making institutions that were attracted to choose the strategy taken, without having all the necessary information, such as the extension of the invasion to more than 40 km from the Lebanese border. This mitigation of risk gave a false sense of control to Prime Minister Menachem Begin's cabinet, leading to decision-making. Decisions such as provoking Syrian troops into possible combat and expanding military action beyond Beirut seemed less risky for the group. The phenomenon of increased risk-taking by groups can also be explained by the tendency of individuals to transfer responsibility to the group, reducing individual risk.

Schulze (1998) <sup>[9]</sup> also mentions another important element when it comes to understanding Israeli decision-making for the Lebanon War: the overestimation of the opponent, described as another symptom present in groupthink. The author explains that this element is based on two aspects: the illusion that Israel was extremely superior and not vulnerable to the consequences of the conflict, and the belief that the group's decision had a moral character (concept of just war) <sup>2</sup>. The first aspect, as said, came from the confidence in Israeli military superiority on the part of decision-makers and that this would be enough to also generate political gains. Schulze (1998) <sup>[9]</sup>, considers that dependence on military force as a foreign policy mechanism, widely used by Israel in its short history, would refer to the policies used by Ben Gurion <sup>3</sup>, who believed that the Arabs would only respond to force, leading to the war of 1948 using military force when diplomacy failed. This mentality has been institutionalized in Israel since Ben Gurion, causing the militarization of the State. Militarization and its results in foreign policy were observed too much in the 1970s and 1980s, mainly through the policies used by Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon, leading to the total conviction that a war would be much better to achieve the desired political results than diplomacy, which historically never happened, since Israel was never successful in turning military gains into political ones.

The author corroborates the previously presented arguments of the effects of militarization within the Israeli decision-making process:

Defects in Israel's decision-making process evolved around a series of factors: little information, inadequate expert advice, superficial evaluation of alternatives, and a clear definition of objectives (Schulze, 1998, p. 220). <sup>4</sup>

The decision-making process in the 1982 Lebanon War was evaluated as poor and unsatisfactory and the discussion was limited because the decision for a land incursion had already been taken in 198; thus, only the military strategy was discussed and not the possibility. That the war was controlled. Schulze (1998) <sup>[9]</sup> cites three aspects that

<sup>2</sup>The concept of a morally accepted war, from the Latin, *Bellum iustum, or jus ad bellum*.

<sup>3</sup>Israel's first head of government, a leader of the Socialist Zionist movement and founder of the Israeli Labor Party.

<sup>4</sup>The defects in Israel's decision-making evolved around a number of: limited information, inadequate expert advice, superficial evaluation of alternatives, and no clear definition of aims.

<sup>1</sup>Israel Armed Forces – Israel Defense Forces

contributed to the choice: confidence in the Christian victory in Lebanon, the concept of just war, and military superiority (which is often not enough). The lack of strategic intelligence by decision-makers is evident when we analyze the relations between the Israelis and the Lebanese Christian faction, the former believed that they would have immediate support from the latter just because they had a common enemy, a mistaken and even amateur strategy. However, even the Mossad<sup>5</sup> supported the decision taken, even though it was the most intelligent state agency, when the incursion was put into action, there was a surprise when the Christians refused to cooperate and the Israeli forces were left alone in a divided war on three fronts in Lebanon, resulting in a high number of Israeli casualties and an uprising of public opinion. civil. Taking into account the illusory Israeli military superiority that would result in invulnerability only increased the failure of the operation, insofar as the Lebanon war (1982) had a psychological impact on Israel similar to that of the Vietnam and Iraq wars (2003) in the U.S.

Another very relevant aspect for this analysis is the stereotyping of the enemy, as mentioned earlier. The author argues that this aspect is quite common in risk decision-making groups, especially in conflict scenarios, since in these cases, it is usual for the opponent to be seen as inferior in all areas compared to the image itself. Stereotyping is worrying in terms of the ideologization of decision-making, a model that is very present in the Israeli case, and the author is aware of the repetition of this system in high-level decision-making processes. "High-ranking members will like their high-ranking peers more than other group members and will initiate communication with high-ranking individuals" (COLLINS *apud* Schulze, 1998, p. 221)<sup>6</sup>. This aspect is best demonstrated by a closer look at the stereotyped view of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as Israel's main enemy in this conflict, reinforced both ideologically and by the guidance of Prime Minister Menachen Begin's cabinet.

The Palestine Liberation Organization was stereotyped by almost all decision makers in Israel, that is, it was seen as a terrorist organization whose objective was the end of the State of Israel and the Jewish people, in addition to being inhumane and militarily incompetent. A member of the prime minister's cabinet, Rafael Eitan<sup>7</sup>, even wrote a book that illustrates the stereotyping of the PLO, and he writes about the enormous Israeli superiority, even in the moral sphere, once again repeating the concept of just war.

Contrary to the claims of some scholars, the assassination attempt on Argov<sup>8</sup> was not used as an excuse to start the war. In fact, our response was not designed to serve as a trigger. We bombed terrorist bases because the government felt it was time to explain to the PLO that its interpretation of the ceasefire agreement was unacceptable and all acts were considered violations of the agreement. What brought the war on was the severe response to our

attack, during which terrorists bombed northern Israel with great intensity (EITAN *apud* SCHULZE, 1998, p. 222)<sup>9</sup>.

Eitan's view, believing that the PLO was an impediment to a better relationship between Israel and the Arab countries. As seen previously, achieving the pre-established objectives, mainly the weakening of the PLO, its effect on the Arab countries would decrease and peace in the region would be achieved. However, while Eitan and Sharon resorted to dehumanizing the PLO, Begin went further, demonizing the organization as, according to Schulze (1998)<sup>10</sup>, murderers of women and children (a curious fact, widely addressed today by organizations such as Hamas in relation to Israel).

What do they - the so-called PLO - do? They make the civilian population the target of their bloody attacks against men, women, and children. They never regret or feel sadness when they succeed in killing an innocent Jewish man, woman, or child. In contrast, they rejoice. And that is the difference between warriors and assassins (BEGIN *apud* SCHULZE, 1998, p. 222, our translation).<sup>10</sup>

The author concludes that shared stereotypes directly feed a process of collective rationalization, the main responsible for decision-making regarding the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. The decision-makers in the analyzed case, namely Menachen Begin, Ariel Sharon, Yitzhak Shamir, and<sup>11</sup> Rafael Eitan, operated within a closed ideological system, which made them ignore the advice of most experts. Without considering the political reality of Lebanon, because in the predetermined objectives, the Lebanese civil war would end and the Christian faction would rise to power, making peace with Israel almost immediately. The author claims that demographic data on Christians had been submitted to confirm that they were outnumbered by Muslims, but were ignored by decision-makers.

Mossad support was essential for conducting the operation; however, this was not surprising considering the hypothesis presented here, both of militarization and the ideological and stereotyped view of the enemy. Furthermore, it is important to point out that Menachen Begin began his career as a commander of the Irgun paramilitary group, which predisposed him to work closely with the Mossad and listen

<sup>5</sup> Israeli government secret service.

<sup>6</sup> High - power members will like their fellow high - power members more than other group members and will initiate more communication to individual fellow high power.

<sup>7</sup> Israeli general, former head of the Israel Armed Forces (IDF).

<sup>8</sup> Israeli Ambassador to the United Kingdom in the 1980s.

<sup>9</sup> Contrary to the claims of some academics, the Argov assassination attempt was not used as an excuse to begin the war. In fact, our response was not designed to serve as the opening blow. We bombed the terrorist bases because the government felt that it was time to explain to the PLO that their interpretation of the cease-fire agreement was unacceptable and all such acts were to be considered violations of the agreement. What brought the war on was the severe response to our raid, during which the terrorists bombarded northern Israel with great intensity.

<sup>10</sup> What do they--the so-called PLO--do? They make the civilian population the target of their bloody attacks on men, women, and children. They never regret or sorrow when they have "succeeded" in killing an innocent Jewish man or woman or child. In contrast, they rejoice in it. That is the difference between fighters and killers.

<sup>11</sup> Israeli politician, the seventh Prime Minister of Israel.



to it above all else. In the Irgun, Menachen Begin had intelligence functions, similar to those developed by Mossad agents (Schulze, 1998) <sup>[9]</sup>.

Ariel Sharon saw Israel under constant threat from the surrounding Arab countries, whose aim was the complete destruction of the country. The only way to combat this threat was by force. Here, his opinion coincided with that of the Chief of Staff, Rafael Eitan, who had often stated that it was better to exterminate the Arabs. The idea of intervention in Lebanon within the decision-making elite was very similar. Christians were seen as allies and were at the center of Israel's interventionist policy; Christians were believed to be the righteous, the victims of hatred, persecution and murder and therefore believed it was the duty of the State of Israel to support them. Still, Ariel Sharon based his assessment on his personal relationship with Bashir Gemayel <sup>12</sup>, and anyone who mentioned Gemayel's faults was rebuffed with arguments about the Christian leader's new maturity. In January 1982, long before Sharon had presented his plans to the Cabinet, he met Gemayel and discussed the idea of helping him reach the presidency. The miscalculations resulting from such common views are uncritically reflected in later events. None of the decision-makers believed that Gemayel had deliberately sought a confrontation with the Syrians to woo Israel. No one considered the possibility that some Christians were convinced that direct Israeli intervention would help them break free of Syria. With these views shared among the decision-makers, it is easy to see that there would be no downvotes when the invasion plan was put up for choice. It's also not hard to see how objections to the plan were brushed aside. The 1982 invasion of Lebanon was not an aberration in foreign policy, but the culmination of which, it was not one person implementing an abnormal idea, but a political elite collectively bent toward foreign interventionism.

In this way, the 1982 Lebanon War is a clear example of how the decision-making process at the highest level of the Israeli government is formulated, showing its flaws that in turn led to the failure of the military operation, despite the well-known Israeli superiority in war conflicts.

## 2. Ronald Reagan and the Middle East

On the night of September 1, 1982, President Reagan delivered a major public address, now known as the Reagan Middle East Peace Plan. A loosely worded document, Reagan's plan, was designed to attract broad support from all concerned, and thus, like many of its predecessors, it lacks a solid foundation of substantive principles.

It was based on the Camp David formula, and its success or failure depended on the nature and extent of Jordanian participation in "autonomy" talks with Egypt and Israel, which in turn depended on a green light from the Palestine Liberation Organization. While the Likud government categorically rejected the plan, the Israeli Labor Party and the Peace Now Movement supported it. Tacit support has already been given by conservative Arab governments (ARURI; Moughrabi, 1983) <sup>[2]</sup>.

The salient features of Reagan's plan were:

- Peace can be achieved neither on the basis of the formation of an independent Palestinian state nor on the

basis of Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip or its continued control.

- The final resolution of the Palestinian problem must be sought in association with Jordan, which is designated as the representative of the Palestinians in the negotiation.
- Israel's withdrawal in the context of Security Council Resolution 242 applies to all fronts, but the final borders will be determined by "the extent of true peace and normalization and the security arrangements offered in return."
- The city of Jerusalem is indivisible (Aruri; Moughrabi, 1983) <sup>[2]</sup>.

Official US government approval came after the Israeli bombing of Beirut, Lebanon in the 1982 Lebanon War. Instead of emerging as the major power responsible for Lebanon's devastation, through this slick public relations appeared as peacemakers. Reagan focused on the "opportunity" presented by destructing Lebanon: "With the agreement in Lebanon, we had an opportunity for a more comprehensive peace effort in the region and I was determined to seize this moment" (Reagan apud Aruri; Moughrabi, 1983, p.11) <sup>[2]</sup>. Key features defining the context of the speech were: US responsibility, Arab inaction, US public disgust at the death and destruction inflicted by Israel, the willingness of European allies to impose sanctions on Israel, and the threat of increased violence across the region, especially by Islamic groups aided directly or indirectly by Iran.

A classic example of politics as a symbolic action, the speech was intended to defuse growing criticism and channel public perception in a different direction. In this, he was enormously successful. New York Times columnist Anthony Lewis praised the administration, which he described as the most "pathetic and inept in the twentieth century" (LEWIS, 1982). Leading television commentators, who reacted favorably, had previously suggested that the United States, in the words of John Chancellor, was Israel's "full partner" in the indiscriminate bombing of Beirut. Although every Arab head of state knew the extent of the US government's involvement in events in Lebanon, they never mentioned US culpability at any point.

The main objective of the Reagan Plan was to reconcile Israel's legitimate security concerns with the legitimate rights of the Palestinians. The juxtaposition of Israeli security needs and the legitimate rights of the Palestinians differs widely from the opinion of many knowledgeable observers that the conflict in Palestine is a conflict between two rights, both equally valid and not mutually exclusive. Reagan's proposition that the solution to the Palestinian problem must lie within a framework of absolute Israeli security agrees with a long-standing Israeli thesis, which Henry Kissinger once observed, that there is no such thing as absolute security. Any State that insists on this would be paving the way for future conflicts (Aruri; Moughrabi, 1983) <sup>[2]</sup>.

According to the authors (1983), Reagan's choice to use the words "legitimate rights of the Palestinians" is significant. If the Palestinians have rights, they are legitimate. So why use a tautology if it does not imply that some rights are illegitimate. This is precisely the main flaw of the Reagan plan: the exclusion of the word "national". The US President seemed to be saying that the Palestinians' inalienable right to self-determination is illegitimate because it contradicts

<sup>12</sup> Lebanese politician, assassinated days before assuming the presidency of Lebanon in 1982.

Israel's security interests. Furthermore, concern and assurances for Israel's security are not balanced by a corresponding concern or assurances for Palestinian security. It's true that Reagan's comments about the Palestinians show some compassion. He spoke of "the homelessness of the Palestinians" (Reagan, 1982)<sup>[8]</sup>, of the feeling that "their cause is more than a refugee issue" (Reagan, 1982)<sup>[8]</sup>. He referred to the Camp David Accords, which "recognized this fact when it spoke of the legitimate rights of the Palestinians and their just demands" (Reagan, 1982)<sup>[8]</sup>.

However, the text was quite flawed. Ronald Reagan detailed Israel's security requirements, down to the number of miles from the border the Palestine Liberation Organization must settle, but when it came to Palestinian rights, he offered only ambiguous generalizations. The President has also paid little attention to the issue of displaced persons, generally considered to be at the heart of the Palestinian Question. In fact, the only Palestinians that Reagan care about are the West Bank and Gazans. The rest, who were scattered throughout the Arab world, would be condemned to permanent exile. Trying to express compassion for the Palestinians, the President made a triple statement on the need for negotiations. Reagan recognized a strong yearning among the Palestinians for their own identity. He then kindly offered them a quick fix, joining an Arab country through an association with Jordan. Ronald Reagan seemed to believe that, given the chance to escape the Israeli yoke, the Palestinians would breathe a sigh of relief and gladly accept reintegration with Jordan, even at the price of their right to self-determination (Aruri; Moughrabi, 1983)<sup>[2]</sup>.

Israel has always defined security in territorial terms, even when land barriers no longer provide adequate guaranties. For a modern garrison state equipped with the most sophisticated American weapons, insisting on a nineteenth-century concept of land barriers as security is a strange anachronism. Security was being used as a smokescreen for Israel's desire to annex what some Israelis claim is their ancestral homeland. The same insistence on security that brought Defense Minister Ariel Sharon to Beirut serves Israel's desire to impose itself on the Middle East as a mini-superpower capable of dictating the region's map. The Reagan administration was convinced, as were most Arabs in the State Department, that Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin would not succeed in integrating Israel into the region on its own terms through force of arms.

The Reagan Plan incorporated a key element of the Allon Plan: the concept of secure or defensible borders. The term first gained currency during the decade following the Six Day War of June 1967, when it was used by Labor Party leaders as shorthand for territorial expansion. It reflected, in turn, the Labor Party concern about the potential demographic problem that the annexation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip posed.

Since the Likud party's rise to power in 1977, that phrase has been abandoned in favor of "historical" or "biblical" boundaries. The Allon plan stated "UN Security Council Resolution 242 already recognized, in its original English text, the need to endow Israel with secure and recognized borders - i.e., what changes should be introduced to the old lines of the agreements of armistice." Reagan stated: "It is the position of the United States that, in exchange for peace, the withdrawal provision of Resolution 242 applies to all

fronts, including the West Bank and Gaza" (Reagan, 1982)<sup>[8]</sup>.

Under the Reagan plan (1982)<sup>[8]</sup>, then, Israel was required to make some withdrawal from the occupied territories: "We will not support annexation or permanent control by Israel." Secretary of State George Shultz added a demographic caveat, which resembles the classic Zionism of Abba Eban and Yigal Allon: "It is not Israel's long-term interest to try governing the more than one million Palestinians who live in the West Bank and Gaza" (Allon, 1976)<sup>[11]</sup>.

While Israel would be guaranteed defensible borders, permanent control of the West Bank would be unnecessary, if not counterproductive. Menachem Begin and his supporters, on the other hand, were determined to maintain permanent control over the land without its inhabitants. Almost immediately after the conclusion of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, Begin proclaimed that Israel would never return to the 1967 lines. Earlier, he had declared that Israeli troops would remain in the West Bank forever. As Israeli troops pulled out of the Sinai Desert, Begin decreed that withdrawal from the West Bank was not even an option, as he asserted that the area would not be "occupied" within the meaning of international law. Recourse to security was not necessary. His version of the biblical story sufficed:

Our nation was born in Judea and Samaria, not Jaffa and certainly not Tel Aviv. In Judea and Samaria, our prophets prophesied [...] Judea and Samaria are occupied territories? Judea and Samaria were territories occupied by the Jordanians, who conquered the western part of Israel's land [...], but it is not occupied territory now [...] it is Israel's land. (BEGIN, 1982).

Ariel Sharon proposed that the West Bank and Gaza be emptied by forcing Palestinian inhabitants to flee across the Jordan River, unilaterally decreed by Sharon as the Palestinian homeland. Ronald Reagan proposed instead that Israel returns some of the land in exchange for absolute guaranties. The US plan did not accept the separation of land and people, but it did accept the Israelis' stated need for absolute security. Reagan thus maintained a proposition made by nearly all previous administrations in their dealings with Israel, that a militarily secure Israel is more likely to make compromises. The difficulty with this view is that Israel's security was out of the question. Israel has emerged as one of the world's leading military powers, in large part because of the American largess. The US government seemed determined to ensure absolute Israeli military superiority over its Arab neighbors for years to come. As the invasion of Lebanon indicated, Israel is the only serious military power in the region and therefore would dictate the policy of the entire area (ARURI; MOUGHRABI, 1983)<sup>[2]</sup>. No observer doubted Israel's ability to defend itself. Very few observers seriously think that a Palestinian state, wedged between Israel and Jordan, would pose any threat to Israel. For all practical purposes, the Arab-Israeli conflict was by 1982. Most Arab states, apart from Egypt, accepted Israel as fact. The Fahd plan confirmed this. Arab states may want to contain Israel, to prevent it from appearing as the major power in the region, but they cannot do this militarily. Its only hope of containing Israel lies with the United States, assuming that the latter agrees.

Reagan's insistence on absolute security guarantees for Israel was therefore not justified by the facts or the historical evolution of the conflict. As the Arab states moved toward the acceptance of Israel, it became aggressive and expansionist to the point where security guarantees are actually necessary for the Arab states. Reagan's plan, however, assumed that the Palestinians were an angry giant who must be kept chained up in elaborate security devices to prevent him from attacking Israel. The Palestinians posed no credible military threat to Israel, so it is not Palestinian acts or even intentions that Israel fears, but Palestinian rights. This is the crux of the matter. Palestinian rights represent a formidable obstacle to the realization of *Eretz Yisrael* (Land of Israel), rights are only powerful to the extent that the injured party has the means, freedom, or means to defend those rights and correct the injustice.

Thus, the Reagan plan asserted that the Palestinians have a case, but at the same time maintained that they must be prevented from doing anything about it. This is why the option of "self-determination" for the Palestinians was excluded from the Camp David Accord and Reagan's peace plan.

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