

The effects of the Trump presidency on US/Palestinian relations from a Palestinian perspective



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I. Introduction

The period of Donald Trump's Presidency has been filled with controversies, shock and harsh rhetoric. Donald Trump stunned the political world in 2016 when he became the first person without governmental or military experience ever to be elected President of the United States. His four-year reign of power revealed the clear domestic polarization. It also startled many societies, governments and leaders internationally (Ahmad et al., 2017).

While Donald Trump is in the process of being held accountable for his (allegedly anti-democratic) actions in the US at the moment, this research project is set out to take stock of the consequences his Presidency had for other contexts, too. In specific, the impact of Trump's presidency in one of the oldest current international conflicts, namely the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Some say his unconventional diplomatic approach in the Middle East could have resulted in a lasting solution to the conflict, while others have deemed it 'a smokescreen for annexation' (Ubale Yahaya, 2020). Whatever may be the case, the "Deal of the Century"- peace plan by the Trump administration has influenced local dynamics, international involvement, and American diplomacy greatly.

One of the most outstanding acts had to be the symbolic yet formal recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of the Israeli state; thereby ignoring the claims of the Palestinians and other religious groups on this city (Asseburg, 2019). This set off a wave of protests across Palestine and Israel and upset the Arab world and Western allies alike. At the same time, many other pro-Israeli gestures were implemented from the United States simultaneously, such as the withdrawal of their financial support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) (Erdogan, 2020). These actions, I argue, have left a long-lasting footprint on US-Palestinian relations on both the diplomatic level as well as on local grounds. As Andrew Natsios, the former USAID Administrator under President George W. Bush stated: "I predict we will pay the price. We will pay the price for the poorly thought out and ill-considered organization changes that we're making, and cuts in spending as well" (FP, 2017).

Presently, data on how these gestures and actions have impacted or changed the overall Palestinian perception regarding the involvement of external actors (and specifically the US) is limited. Especially the practical consequences that foreign involvement, or in this case foreign dis-involvement, have had on local humanitarian (better maybe: non-governmental?) or private organizations that have had an – often longstanding- relationship with the foreign actor in question (Congressional Research Service, 2018). This research explores various aspects of the assumed transformation of US-Palestine relations after the symbolic effects of the peace plan of the Trump administration by researching local organizations with (former) financial, social, or other ties to the US.

Scientific and societal relevance

Against this socio-political background, this research is based on the connection between top-down approaches from external governmental institutions and the consequences of these approaches on the ground within areas of conflict, in particular the symbolic gestures exerted from these foreign organizations. It therefore can be framed within two major academic debates which will be described more extensively in the literature review. First, the use of symbolism by politicians. The Deal of the Century included several important symbolic gestures, such as the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, as well as the formal legitimization of settlements, contradicting and denying international law.

Second, third party interventionism and the Western 'liberal peace'. The relation between the symbolic gestures and succinctly behavioral or perceptual changes by the Palestinian organization could alter the relations between their foreign partners. Third party interventions, or foreign 'interventionism' is referred to as a political practice of intervention, particularly by governments to interfere in political affairs of other countries. These including peacekeeping interventions, but also economic or military

interventions. This term often goes hand in hand with the liberal peace agenda, which is the concept that revolves around the idea that liberal democratic principles and institutions can promote peace and stability in other countries as well. It suggests that a liberal market, democratic governance, and securing human rights could reduce the likelihood of conflicts. However, third party interventions – and specifically the Western ‘liberal peace’ ideal – within interstate or domestic conflicts has both supporters and critics in the academic field of conflicts. The definition of ‘third parties’ in this case include both state actors and outsiders, such as international organizations (IOs) and private donors.

As Beardsley (2012) argues, UN peacekeeping missions or interventions increase the chances of reaching a compromise and democratization processes after civil war (Doyle, 2000) as well as can ensure safe elections in war-torn countries (Smidt, 2020). However, over the last decade, a growing number of studies have also reported the adverse effects and negative outcomes associated with third party interventions (Kuperman, 2002; Crawford, 2005; Rauchhaus 2000). It is therefore crucial to critically examine the role of external actors, whether state or non-state actors, their motives and the consequences of their interference specifically in conflict – and post-conflict- areas.

Especially relevant is the promotion of the US-initiated overarching ‘liberal peace’ agenda in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. The liberal peace agenda holds Western values of democracy, safety, politics and human rights and comprises many variations to interventions that have been constructed, implemented and promoted to different degrees in different contexts. Supporters of the liberal peace claim that intervention is vital in facilitating the social development and security for instable states and regions (Chandler, 2004; Paris, 2010). However, opponents argue that the liberal peace concept camouflages Western interests and is therefore used a legitimate label to continue their influence in a region (Mac Ginty, 2007).

The main debate examines how external actors are broadly involved with grass root organizations in the developmental arena, ranging from the private sector to civil society agencies and how that relationship can be susceptible to change from both sides. As classical top-down approaches often inflame conflict (Brockington and Igoe, 2006), civil society and local organizations are, as I argue, a great way for foreign actors to execute their own agenda (Valenza & Trobbiani, 2019). In addition, utilizing local organizations and the legitimacy they enjoy also gives third parties influence in the area without being physically present themselves (Kaldor, 2003). This perspective often centers around concerns related to neo-colonialism, cultural imperialism, and the potential for external actors to influence domestic policies and priorities under the guise of supporting civil society development (Davis & McGregor, 2000). Local organizations might be compelled to align their activities with the donors' priorities to secure ongoing support as financial dependency on Western funding can create power imbalances (Cooper, 2018). Thus Western agencies through supporting civil society and other local organizations can enforce certain policies and thus have great influence on local decision-making.

This claim in part has been supported by authors discussing the politicization of the ‘responsibility to protect’ in which it seems international actors are free to intervene in sovereign countries when there is a clear need for humanitarian aid, but simultaneously also use their -what should be solely humanitarian and neutral- presence to exert influence (Saxer, 2008). As Duffield (2023), describes, humanitarian aid is also often used as a ‘smokescreen’ to hide political failure as was the case in Bosnia, where instead of negotiating lasting political resolutions or developing strong institutions, humanitarian aid for relief purposes was the main international involvement.

This is also widely believed to be the case in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, in which financial relief aid is often heightened after another atrocity from the Israeli against the Palestinians with large – often infrastructural- damage. The international community has regularly stepped in with economic assistance to restore the damage that has been done, instead of politically condemning Israeli actions and reinforcing that with clear opposing actions (Arab center, 2022; Gawerc & Lazarus, 2016), such as

sanctions on the Israeli government even though in different states such as Ireland this nation was put on the table (Dáil debate, 2023).

Interestingly, the growing trend in the attitude of the US state department, including USAID, involved more localization and locally led development. USAID clearly states that they recognize local leadership and ownership. Both are, according to them, essential for nurturing sustainable outcomes across their development and humanitarian assistance activities. Also, USAID is used as a political tool to 1) visibly demonstrate America's concern for Palestinians in occupied territories and 2) use their economic assistance as a way to broker a peace-deal between the Palestinians and Israelis (USAID, LLD factsheet).

However, their financial withdrawal from the Palestinian civil society and local organizations does in a way contradict their above statement regarding 'sustainable outcomes' as their contribution to USAID Palestine is variable to the administration in power in the US. If US agencies dominate the funding landscape, local ownership and agency in civil society initiatives might be compromised by the conditionality of such aid. Therefore, Palestinian entities are increasingly distancing themselves from American sources of funding to more sustainable, reliable and less-conditional funding entities, thereby threatening the key role the US has had over the years as a mediator in the conflict (Nakhleh, 1989).

Thus, this thesis aims to provide American-led institutions that have pre-existent collaborations with local parties insights in the dynamics of those relationships and will determine how the 'action-reaction' mechanism behind policies of both actors (foreign and local) could have lasting impact on these relationships. This paper argues that even symbolic actions, meaning actions and policies that have no official or physical consequence, could incite real change and thereby transform the social or financial relationship that American and Palestinian partners had. By doing so, this research has a clear societal relevance beyond solely the scope of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

This research contributes to the -so far limited- understanding of top-down approaches from external state actors within conflict areas and in particular how these have affected their relationship with local grass root organizations. It will describe and analyze how American state and non-state actors that have exerted their influence through Palestinian organizations now face a transformation of their previous relationship following certain policies from their overarching entity, such as the US government. The case of Israel and Palestine has undergone significant changes during the Trump presidency as his policies have altered the relationship that US led organizations and departments (e.g. USAID) have had with their Palestinian counterparts. This research focuses on how those altered policies have influenced Palestinian grassroots organizations and their perspective on their involvement with American entities. In addition, it has evidently discovered which – symbolic- interventions have had the largest impact on these relationships and how this has influenced any future relationships as well.

Ultimately, this research concludes how the 'Deal of the Century' has been a critical juncture in the American/Palestinian relations both diplomatically as well as in terms of local collaborations. Critical juncture, as stated by Capoccia (2015), entails a pivotal moment or period in time when significant decisions, actions, or events occur that can have far-reaching and lasting effects on a particular process. It represents a crossroads where certain events and actions can shape the future direction of a given context (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007). This paper will show that the Trump presidency was a critical juncture in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict overall considering the fact that - even though the Deal was denied on the Palestinian part- many aspects of the deal were and are to this day being executed anyways, portrayed by for instance a steep increase in the number of settlements directly after his admission into office (New York Times, 2017).

However, it also portrays how this inevitable transformation has the potential to bring about new opportunities for the Palestinian organizations as the role of the US could be and has been replaced by other actors after the effects of the Deal of the Century on Palestinian organizations. I argue that some organizations were forced to seek for other international partners due to the withdrawal of American funds. In addition, Palestinian organizations with less dependency on these American partners have also shown to minimize their partnerships in the future and seek sustainable and more stable international actors.

The conclusion of this research

This manuscript will provide an overarching framework for understanding the short and long-term consequences of external unilateral (symbolic) approaches that have impacted their local counterparts and partners on the ground. The case that will be discussed thoroughly is that of the United States' involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during the Presidency of Donald Trump. It specifically focuses on the question if and how the American foreign policies during that time have affected any ties with Palestinian organizations.

This research has been conducted in primarily the Westbank region of the Palestinian territories and has included thirteen Palestinian organizations, including civil society organizations, private organizations, humanitarian/developmental NGO's and a municipality. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with representatives of each of these organizations.

The research focused primarily on the role of the Trump presidency, and specifically, his Deal of the Century on the relationship with these Palestinian organizations. As all of them had previous ties with the United States, either directly with governmental agencies such as USAID, or indirectly through US charities etc., they intensively spoke about the emotional and financial impact the policies of the Trump presidency had on their organizations, the relationship with their American counterparts and their perceptions as individuals.

Evidently, all organizations deemed the Deal of the Century as being harmful to the Palestinian cause. However, the most harmful policies were considered to be the symbolic recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel as well as the withdrawal of a large portion of financial aid from USAID and subsequently UNRWA, compromising the delivery of services to thousands of Palestinians. This confirms the hypothesis that symbolic gestures as well can have real impact on the ground and be expressed through different (practical) means, such as the transformation of a donor/receiver financial relationship.

This research has shown that the emotional impact of the Deal of the Century was great as these organizations – who already had negative sentiments towards the US as a player in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict- now were confirmed and elevated in their negative perceptions with the harmful policies of the Trump presidency and lost their trust in the US as a broker. Their negative perceptions towards the US has caused organizations, that were financially able to do so, to move away from US funding and in the process of finding more reliable, neutral and sustainable donors, such as European countries.

It is therefore that the Trump Presidency has caused a critical juncture and long-lasting impact on the US relationship with Palestinian organizations. As the Joe Biden administration has pledged to restore former US/Palestinian bonds, the manuscript will offer insights into the evolving local Palestinian landscape and their perception towards US- involvement in their organizations.

The structure of this thesis

This thesis is organized to provide a coherent and comprehensive exploration of the subject matter. Firstly, a brief historical context (chapter 2) will be provided highlighting the thematic terrain of this thesis which will present the most important events in the Israeli/Palestinian relationship as well as their separate relationships with the United States. In addition, an extensive section will be dedicated to the financial role of the US in the Palestinian territories as well as the perceptions of Israelis and Palestinians towards the US and President Trump.

Secondly, fundamental principles of the literature will be discussed regarding the two main debates of this research, namely the utilization of political symbolism as well as the role of external actors in the context of developmental/humanitarian aid. Afterwards, the objective, research questions and theoretical framework will be described and visualized in order to provide a clear understanding of the underlying mechanism of this thesis.

In addition, the methodology of this research will further be elaborated upon in a separate section, followed by the results of this research. The results will be categorized into three categories, namely: the financial, social and emotional dimension. The answers to the research questions are overlapping in these parts and will be discussed thoroughly and placed into their broader academic discourse. A clear conclusion can be drawn from these results which will condense the findings and collective insights. The discussion that follows will encapsulate the limitations of this study as well as offer interesting points for future academic exploration.

The final chapters include the bibliography, the coding process and analysis, all (anonymous) interviews and a lay-out of the interview itself in the appendix.

2. Palestine, the Near East conflict and its foreign relations: an introduction into the context and historical overview

To understand the dimension in which this research resides, a clear understanding of the context of Palestine, the historic development of the Israeli-Palestine conflict, and Palestine's external relations need to be addressed first. In this chapter, we will briefly discuss the historical complexity of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict as well as their relations with the United States, including important events affecting/having affected these relations. As this research focuses specifically on the Donald Trump Presidency, this will be highlighted as well.

2.1 The Israeli/Palestinian conflict: a brief historical background

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a long-standing and complex geopolitical issue centered around the contested territory of historical Palestine, located in the eastern Mediterranean zone. Both Israelis and Palestinians claim the land as their rightful homeland, leading to prolonged violence, territorial disputes, and ongoing political tension. This chapter will discuss some critical historic aspects as well key events in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The roots of the conflict can be traced back to the late 19th century when Jewish nationalist movements, particularly Zionists, began encouraging the idea of establishing a Jewish homeland in their ancestral lands of what then was Palestine. The movement was born as a response to increasing anti-Semitism and persecution of Jewish communities in Europe, which caused mass Jewish migration to Palestinian lands in the 20th century. As a result of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, the British Empire took control of the region. It soon after issued the Balfour Declaration in 1917, which expressed support for a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine.

The declaration was contained in a letter from the British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour to Baron Rothschild, a leader of the British Zionist movement. The letter confirmed that the British

Empire would “use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object”. Under British rule, Jewish immigration to Palestine increased significantly and led to demographic changes, thereby intensifying tensions between Jewish and Arab communities in the region (National Army Museum, n.d.).

The growing Arab unrest resulted in armed rebellions against both the British colonial forces as well as Zionist militia groups. In an attempt to ease the Arab turmoil, Britain started to put limitations on new Jewish immigrants arriving in the country. As a response, Zionists are alleged to have launched a series of terrorist attacks on British authorities which eventually led to the transfer of the issue to the United Nations. In 1947, the UN proposed a partition plan of Palestine into a separate Jewish and Arab state. However, at this moment the Jewish community in Palestine only retained control of less than 5.5% of the country. Yet, under the proposed plan, they were assigned 55% of the Palestinian territory. Naturally, Palestinian citizens, the Arab League and other Arab leaders rejected the plan (Aljazeera, 2008).

Soon after British rule ended in 1948, Jewish leaders declared the establishment of the State of Israel, thus provoking a large conflict with neighboring Arab countries who, in turn, responded with a military invasion. This conflict, known as the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, or the War of Independence, resulted in an Israeli victory as Israelis eventually defended and secured its borders. They even gained control over territories beyond its initial boundaries. During this period, Palestinians faced mass slaughters, and demolitions of their homes and of over 500 Palestinian villages. More than 750,000 Arab Palestinians fled or were expelled, leading to a massive Palestinian refugee crisis (Palestinian Land society fact sheet, n.d.).

This period is referred to as ‘Al-Nakba’, which translates to “The Catastrophe” in Arabic. To this day this event remains a deeply emotive and contentious issue in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Palestinians commemorate Al-Nakba Day annually on 15th May, the day after the declaration of the State of Israel, as a day of remembrance and protest. The duality of this period is affirmed as for the Palestinian people and refugees, it represents a significant historical trauma, while for Israelis, it is often presented as fundamental in securing their right to self-determination. As for what is frequently claimed in historical reports and documentation, there is a prevalent belief that Jewish people have a legitimate claim and right to live in these regions due to their ancient (both religious and historical) ties to the area (Koldas, 2011).

In 1967, tensions were escalating again between Israel and its neighboring Arab states, including Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. This brought about the Six-Day War. Fearing an imminent attack by the Arab states, Israel launched a preemptive airstrike severely damaging the Egyptian and other Arab air forces, thus neutralizing their air capabilities. This was quickly followed by a large-scale ground offensive by the Israeli against Egypt in the Sinai Peninsula, Jordan in the West Bank, and Syria in the Golan Heights, thereby gaining control over additional Arab-dominated territory. Eventually, Israel captured the entire West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which was previously under Jordanian rule. The capture of East Jerusalem led to the reunification of the city under Israeli rule. Also, the Gaza strip, the Sinai Peninsula, and the Golan Heights came under Israeli control (Washington Post timeline, 2023). Gaining control of the Golan Heights was of significant importance to Israel, and this region should therefore be highlighted briefly.

The Golan Heights mark a region between Israel and Syria with crucial political, societal, strategic importance. It allows the Israeli state to closely monitor movements in Syria and provides a natural buffer zone for any military action from that direction. In addition, the Golan Heights has fertile ground and is one of the main agricultural regions in the country, as well as a key source of fresh water, which flows into the Jordan river (BBC, 2023). Internationally, the Golan Heights are recognized as Syrian territory occupied by Israel: “The international community maintains that the

Israeli decision to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration in the occupied Syrian Golan is null and void and without international legal effect” International Labour Office, 2009, p. 23).

After the Six-Day War, Israel began their annexation and military occupation of large proportions of Palestinian land. Their strategy involved establishing military settlements in the region for security purposes and control over the territory, and afterwards starting the expansion of settlements deep into Palestinian territory. The chart below shows the increasing Palestinian loss of land (or the expansion of Israeli settlements, respectively) from 1946. A process which continues to this day.



Fig. 1. Palestinian Loss of Land 1946-2010.
Source: Palestinian National Council, fact sheet, n.d.

It is noteworthy that Israel’s policy of settling its civilians in occupied Palestinian territory and displacing the local population is considered illegal in international humanitarian law. Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention states: “The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.” It also prohibits the “individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory”.

The United Nations and International Court of Justice (ICJ) have repeatedly affirmed its position on deeming the Israeli settlements illegal. However, a crucial element to this story is the fact that Israel disputes this interpretation of international law and argues that the Fourth Geneva Convention does not apply to the West Bank and East Jerusalem as the territories are "disputed" rather than "occupied" (Roberts, 1988).

2.2 US-Israeli relations: a historical overview

The history of the U.S.-Israeli relationship dates to the early movements of the Zionist organization, in which American Jewish organizations, philanthropists, and political figures advocated for the establishment of a Jewish state. Only hours after Israel declared independence in 1948, President Harry S. Truman officially accepted the proclamation as the first country to recognize Israel as a state.

From that point onwards, Israel and the US have increased their strategic, financial, and military partnerships on multiple levels.

Regarding military assistance, the US has significantly supported Israel in several important events, including the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the Six-Day War of 1967. This was also the case during the Yom Kippur War of 1973 when Israel encountered a sudden assault from Egypt and Syria. By extending essential military support to Israel, which included military equipment and weaponry, Israel managed to turn the tide. In addition, both countries have various forms of military cooperation, including joint exercises, the development of defense systems, and advanced military technology and cybersecurity. Funded with U.S. assistance, Israel has even purchased multiple F-35 Joint Strike Fighter aircrafts, considered to be the most technologically advanced fighter jet ever made. It became the first international operator of these jets (CRS, 2023).

The US justifies these strategic alliances by acknowledging that both countries have shared interests in the Middle East, including ensuring regional stability, counter-terrorism, and addressing common security challenges in the region. Also, their avowed mutual commitment to democratic values and historic ties further strengthens their bonds. Therefore, safeguarding Israel's military advantage over potential adversaries in the Middle-East is crucial for the US.

In terms of financial aid, Israel remains the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. foreign assistance since World War II. To date, the United States has provided Israel with \$158 billion dollars in bilateral assistance and missile defense funding since then. In addition, the U.S. and Israeli governments have signed several Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), outlining the terms and conditions of US financial assistance to Israel over a period of time. The US financial aid obligation to Israel as of 2023 amounts \$3.8 billion dollars (CRS, 2023).

On the political level, American presidents and governmental officials have often withheld staunch criticism on the Israeli government in relation to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. The U.S. Congress has consistently shown strong bipartisan support for Israel, despite continuous Israeli raids, bombardments and human rights violations with regards to Palestinians. Most American presidents have had close (personal) ties with Israeli Prime Ministers as well. Even when Israel leveled an 11-storey building housing the media offices of Al-Jazeera, President Biden reasserted his unequivocal support for Israel.

However, several American presidents also expressed concerns regarding Israeli involvement in the conflict. For instance, even though Nixon's administration eventually provided extensive military aid to Israel during the Yom Kippur War, President Nixon himself was initially quite reluctant to do so and insisting on a ceasefire. Also, both President Obama and George H.W. Bush were critical of Israel's settlement expansion in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, considering it an obstacle to the peace negotiations (Al Jazeera, 2021).

In conclusion, the American/Israeli relations are characterized by a mix of cooperation and disagreements, particularly concerning Israeli settlement policies and in light of regional instability. Though, despite the tensions, the partnerships between these countries are unmistakably broad and reflect their intensive long-term alliance.

2.3 Historical developments on the Palestinian side

Naturally, on the Palestinian side, there was great resistance to the Israeli occupation from the beginning as the first Jewish settlers arrived in the country.

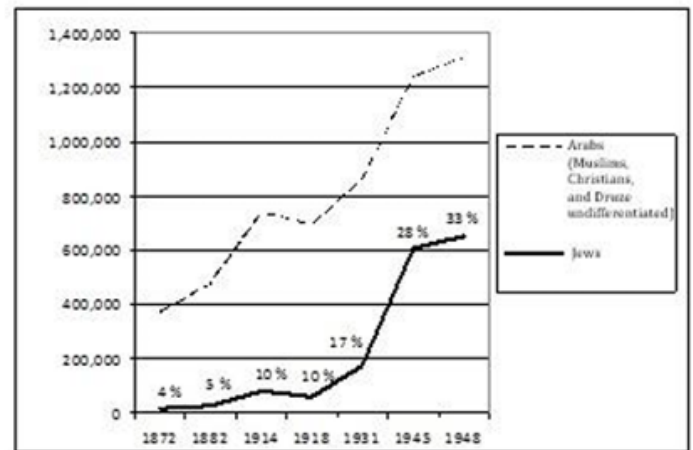
As the League of Nations granted Britain a mandate over Palestine in 1920, in turn promising the Jewish population a land of their own on Palestinian territory in the Balfour Declaration, Arab protests intensified against large influxes of Jewish migrants and land purchases.

There were vast concerns in the Arab world that the Jewish immigration would lead to the displacement of Arab communities and undermine their rights and interests.

Historically, during the Ottoman empire, the Jewish community in Palestine was about 3% of the total population, thus representing a small minority. Muslims represented the largest segment of the population, followed by Christians (Bachi, 2001).

After WWI, the Jewish population already grew substantially, as can be seen in Figure 2. Due to rising antisemitism in Europe, some 250,000 Jewish newcomers migrated to Palestine between 1932 and 1939, allowing for 46 percent of Jewish people to emigrate from Europe. This was followed by another peak after WWII (CJPME factsheet, 2013).

Figure 2. Population of Palestine, 1872- 1948



* The percentages indicate the proportion of the total population that was Jewish.

Sources : Scholch (1985) for the Arab population between 1872 and 1882. McCarthy (2001) for the Arab population between 1890 and 1948 and Gresh and Vidal (2011) for the figures on the Jewish population.

As the immigration of Jews increased, so did Palestinian nationalism and resistance. At first, nationalist groups were built around Palestinian and other Arab notables. These were a group of urban elites at the center of economic and political power which dominated Palestinian Arab politics throughout the British Mandate period. Later on, several political and militant organizations emerged with the goal of achieving long-sought sovereignty and statehood, such as Fatah, Hamas, and the Palestine Liberation Organization(PLO).

Fatah was founded in 1959 by Palestinian leaders including Yasser Arafat who led the faction till his death in 2005. Fatah to this day plays an important role in the Palestinian nationalist movement and has been a key player in military, political and diplomatic efforts to establish an independent Palestinian state. Both an ally and rival of Fatah at the same time, another major political faction is Hamas which was founded in 1987 during the First Intifada). Hamas is engaged in many activities including charities and social work, but is particularly known for their militant undertakings. Therefore, it is considered a terrorist organization by e.g. the EU and the US (CFR, 2023).

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was founded in 1964 to unite various Palestinian factions and officially represent the Palestinian people on the international stage. Especially after the creation of the state of Israel and 'Al Nakba', which left a deep impact on Palestinian society, nationalistic Palestinian incentives rose and a strong desire developed for self-determination.

Though, early on, when Yasser Arafat assumed leadership of the PLO in 1968, significant changes in the organization's objectives were made and recorded in the PLO National Charter. This proposition vastly rejected the legitimacy of the state of Israel stating that it has "no legal or historical basis" and therefore called for its destruction. In addition, it emphasized on using armed force as the central method for achieving an independent Palestinian state. In the years after, the PLO engaged in various forms of armed resistance, including guerilla warfare and hijackings of airplanes. Naturally, the charter did reflect the overall Palestinian sentiment right after the perceived injustices of the 1967 Six-day war (UN, timeline, n.d.).

However, over time, the PLO's approach evolved, and its strategy shifted towards a more diplomatic approach. As a result, many of the more extreme sections of the charter were later revised or discarded, although the charter remained a contentious point in negotiations. Eventually, in the 1990s, the PLO signed the Oslo Accords, which both recognized Israel's right to exist and established the

Palestinian Authority (PA), controlled by Fatah, as the (limited) governing entity of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. However, after a large victory in 2007, Hamas gained governance over the Gaza Strip, while the West Bank remained under the control of the PA. This political and geographical division has complicated efforts to establish a unified Palestinian government (CFR, 2023).

Importantly, there have been multiple periods of resistance by Palestinian communities and militant organizations. However, two significant uprisings were substantial, often referred to as the First Intifada and the Second Intifada ('' uprising''). The First Intifada took place from 1987-1993 and was characterized by protests, boycotts, and civil disobedience carried out by Palestinian civilians. These broadly changed the dynamic of the conflict and even forced negotiations between the two sides. It eventually contributed to the signing of the Oslo Accords as well.

The Second Intifada from 2000-2005 is also known as the Al-Aqsa Intifada, as it was prompted by Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon's visit to Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem, a site holy to both Muslims and Jews. The visit was seen as provocative and sparked widespread violent tactics, including suicide bombings, shootings, and terrorism carried out by Palestinian militant groups.

However, despite great resistance by the Palestinians and Arab countries as well as several other nations worldwide, Palestine is currently only officially recognized by 138 of the 193 UN member states, excluding the United States (World population review, 2023). Surprisingly so, as the US has granted themselves a neutral mediator from the start of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and has been a major player in various attempts to negotiate a peaceful resolution.

2.4 US-Palestinian relations: a historical overview

Political relations between Palestine and the United States have been complex and dynamic. At first, the US government considered the PLO and Fatah terrorist organizations and refrained from any official relations with the organization. It was only with President Carter that there was a shift in the attitude as he pleaded for a 'homeland for the Palestinians' and thereby advocated for a Palestinian state (Terry, 1990). However, there was no real progress on the issue at that time.

President Reagan, despite continuous opposition to the establishment of a Palestinian state and any relations with the PLO, eventually issued a presidential waiver in 1988 to allow for contact with the organization. This was only after the PLO under Arafat's leadership accepted Israel's right to exist and renounced terrorism. The US relationship with the PLO has since then been vastly fluctuating.

However, currently the US does recognize the PLO as the legitimate representative entity for the Palestinian people and the PA as the legitimate Palestinian government. As it does not recognize it as a state, though, there are no diplomatic US offices in the Palestinian territories.

Historically, the United States has often positioned itself as a mediator in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Striving for a peaceful resolution, the US has initiated multiple diplomatic initiatives and hosted numerous negotiations aiming at a two-state solution, where Israel and a future Palestinian state would coexist. Several peace interventions were crucial in this process.

Under the mediation of President Carter, Egyptian and Israeli officials signed the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty which established a peaceful resolution to the lasting conflict between the two countries after the creation of the Israeli state. The accords were signed at the U.S. presidential retreat known as Camp David in the US in 1978. While not directly related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the peace treaty had broader implications for the region, influencing future negotiations between Israel and other Arab states.

This was displayed in the Madrid Conference of 1991, as it brought together officials from Israel as well as its neighboring Arab states and the PLO for the first time. This was a historic moment in the conflict and even though the negotiations during the conference were largely exploratory and aimed at establishing a framework for future peace initiatives, it did lead to direct bilateral negotiations between Israel and other Arab states.

Another groundbreaking event that inevitably changed the dynamic of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, were the Oslo Accords of 1990-1993 initiated by the Clinton administration. These accords listed a series of agreements between the PLO and Israel aimed at establishing a form of Palestinian self-determination and planning a gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Westbank and Gaza. The PA was created as a self-governing body that could handle education, healthcare, and civil affairs in the Palestinian territories. The Accords furthermore divided the West Bank into three zones with varying degrees of Palestinian control. Zone A gave the PA full control over civil and security matters, Zone B granted civil control and joint security control, while Zone C remained under Israeli control. In addition, the PLO was granted the PLO Mission office in Washington D.C. In return, the PLO would recognize Israel's right to exist and the lands that were under Israeli control including Jerusalem (Council on foreign relations). It also preserved Israel's exclusive control of the borders, airspace and waters. In addition, Israel maintained overall security control in most of the West Bank.

For the Palestinians, the Oslo Accords were the first step in creating a Palestinian state and to preserving their right to sovereignty. However, since the Accords, there has been no real progress to reach these goals. In contrast, Israeli confiscation of lands and continued occupation and settlements have been in evidence. The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), a faction of the PLO, has even stated that the accords 'have drawn the Palestinian people into a dark tunnel, which negative consequences continue to unfold' (The New Arab, 2022).

3. The role of the US in the context of Palestine as a financial actor

The United States has provided financial assistance to Palestinian territories for various purposes, including for humanitarian aid, development cooperation and peacebuilding. However, funding from the US has been periodically suspended and fluctuating depending on political and diplomatic dynamics. American financial assistance was often accompanied by a list of conditions that influenced certain Palestinian policies and therefore was used as a political tool to insert pressure.

Before the Oslo Accords, most of the aid was channeled through Palestinian NGOs or INGOs. After the Oslo Accords, much aid was also channeled through the PA. Also other Palestinian political factions have been receiving economic assistance from foreign governments. A special committee (Ad Hoc Liaison Committee or AHLC) was created in order to oversee the coordination of international aid efforts and provide a forum for the PA and Israel to discuss economic development, and security issues (OXFAM, 2019).

3.1 The role of the US in UNRWA

Regarding humanitarian aid, the United States has been a major contributor, particularly through organizations like the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). This was set up in 1949 to provide humanitarian relief to Palestinians displaced by the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, and since has been directed towards the 5 million Palestinian refugees in and outside of Palestine and encompasses a broad range of essential services such as education, emergency relief, and food assistance.

In 2010, the biggest contributors for the budgetary of UNRWA were the United States and the European Commission with \$248 million and \$165 million respectively. Sweden (\$47m), the United Kingdom (\$45m), Norway (\$40m), and the Netherlands (\$29m) also delivered significant donations

(UNRWA, 2011). The donations to UNRWA have been very variable depending on the (American) political landscape as well as geopolitical developments in the region. During the Trump administration, UNRWA experienced one of its largest cuts ever as the US decreased around one third of their contribution in 2018. This caused a great financial strain and the organization and jeopardized the continuation and scale of their (vital) services to Palestinian refugees. As the chart 'Pledges to UNRWA's Programmes' shows, the US has been one of the biggest contributors to the organization (UNRWA, fact sheet, funding trends).

Pledges to UNRWA's Programmes (Cash and In-kind)
2017 - 2023
In US\$

| 2023 as of 30 April 2023 | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------------|------------|---------------------------------|------------|
| Donor | Programme Budget | Non Programme Budget | | | | TOTAL |
| | | oPt emergency appeal | Syria Regional Crisis emergency appeal | Projects * | Syria Flash Appeal - Earthquake | |
| European Union | 87,888,532 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 87,888,532 |
| USA | 40,400,000 | 0 | 0 | 9,323,854 | 3,400,000 | 53,123,854 |
| Sweden | 40,575,790 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 40,575,790 |
| Japan | 3,582,686 | 4,183,693 | 14,511,155 | 16,724,197 | 500,000 | 39,501,731 |
| Germany | 18,806,428 | 8,583,361 | 8,611,683 | 1,223,053 | 0 | 37,224,525 |

When the cut occurred, other countries and organizations stepped in and increased they annual budget to UNRWA to help fill the funding gap. This included, but was not limited to, the European Union and its member states which collectively expanded their contributions, Germany, the UK, Canada and Japan and also several Arab states like Qatar and Saudi Arabia. However, since Arab states have also been called upon their comparatively low financial contributions. According to Philippe Lazzarini (Commissioner-General of UNRWA in 2020) there is a discrepancy. Solidarity with the Palestinians is big, but at the same time, funding has dropped (SWI, 2023).

3.2 The role of USAID in Palestine

In addition to their involvement in UNRWA, the US embassy and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) are intensively engaged in developmental projects inside the Palestinian territories including agriculture, water resource management and sanitation projects. The majority of this aid is, however, allocated to infrastructural projects, which has been met with much scrutiny. US developmental assistance has been widely criticized for mostly sponsoring projects that eventually benefit Israeli settlers and the Israeli state instead of Palestinians. For instance, many projects on building new roads actually encourage segregation and lay the groundwork for future annexations (NRC, 2022).

This is for instance affirmed with the fact that cars with Palestinian license plates are not allowed on Israeli roads, whether or not the driver has an Israeli identification card. Even on Palestinian roads, cars with Palestinian plates have restricted access, encounter multiple checkpoints and are subjected to regular road blocks. The infographic of Figure 3 displays the restricted mobility of Palestinians in their own territory (Visualizing Palestine, 2012). It is therefore also important to examine to which extents international funding reflects Palestinian priorities. As Shadid (2002) has portrayed, donor interests and Palestinian allocation of funding seem to deviate significantly.

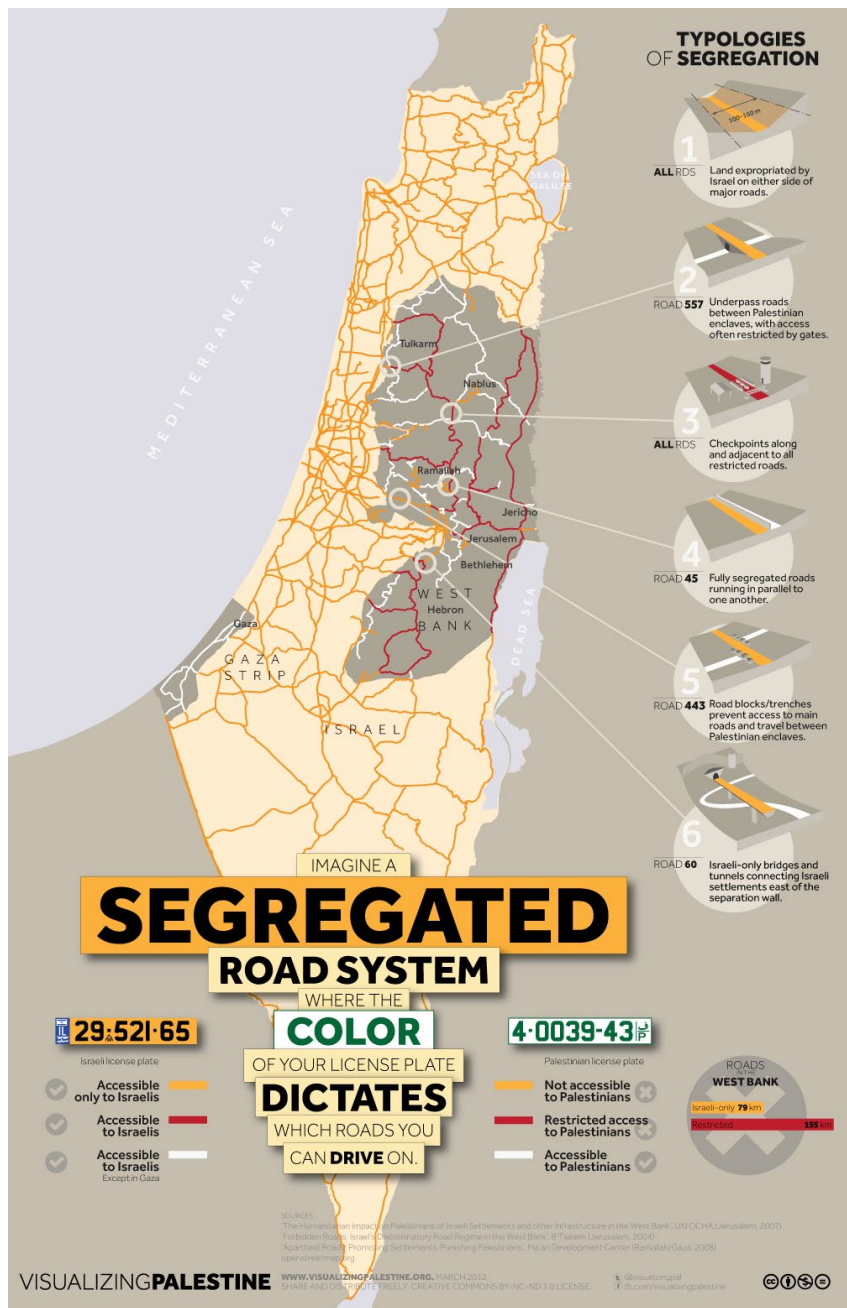


Figure 3: ‘Segregated Roads’

Source: Visualizing Palestine, 2012.

USAID also directly funds various Palestinian organizations and, as mentioned before, the Palestinian Authority. Financial assistance from the donor community has been essential for the survival of the PA in multiple occasions. Especially, in the aftermath of the Second Intifada when the Palestinian economy experienced one of its deepest economic recessions (World bank, 2004). However, American financial aid has often come with a list of conditions, threatening the neutrality and impartiality of many Palestinian NGOs. One of the greatest obstacles is the Anti-Terrorism Act, which has increasingly become more strict and restrictive (Congress, 2006). For instance, Trump issued an order allowing Americans to sue recipients of U.S. foreign aid, including the PA, over alleged complicity in acts of terrorism. Therefore, these organizations might be subjected under American law and at risk for paying millions of dollars in retributions (CFR, 2023).

In addition, the Anti-Terrorism Act prohibits the receivers of aid any engagement with individuals and organizations deemed as ‘terrorist’ or engaged in ‘terrorist activities’. This includes any humanitarian aid to families from which a member has been or is incarcerated, regardless of the crime. However, the definition of terrorist in this matter is ambiguous. Terrorism charges are often used to issue severe

indictments on Arab citizens by Israel (US dep of State, 2022). In 2018, the Israeli government deemed six Palestinian organizations as terrorist organizations to the dismay of international organizations like the United Nations, who stated it was ‘an unjustified attack on Palestinian civil society’ (UN, 2021). Joplin (2004) has shown that even though Palestinian leaders and NGO workers disagreed with the Anti-terrorism act, some still signed the certification in order to receive financial support and therefore continue their work in the civil-society sector.

A very neglected issue in the donor-Palestinian relationship is the location of donor offices, which are located in Israeli-controlled areas (mostly in Tel Aviv and West-Jerusalem). This has become even more problematic after the construction of the Israeli West Bank Barrier built by the Israeli to protect against Palestinian violence. However, it is deemed as an apartheid wall by the Palestinians. Importantly, this wall prohibits Palestinian organizational officials from accessing foreign donor entities, leading to difficulties in obtaining crucial information regarding grants, resources etc. as they miss out on direct guidance from donors (Gawerc & Lazarus, 2016).

Also, the donor agencies typically communicate solely through the primary partner, which in this case is Israel, and therefore completely take Palestinian organizations out of the loop. Thus, instead of having official communication channels to their donors, the Palestinians are dependent on the information they get from their Israeli ‘partners’. This also goes for their budgetary, as Palestinian organizations depend on the Israeli’s for payment and need to account for their expenses as well ((Gawerc & Lazarus, 2016).

In conclusion, the frequency, amount and type of financial aid that has been provided by the United States to Palestine has been unpredictable, complex and has been dynamic over time considering geopolitical and diplomatic relations. Critics have considered this aid as conditional to pressure Palestinian leaders into undertaking specific actions or policies and also leading to dependence by the Palestinian state instead of developing a self-sustaining Palestinian economy (Hever, 2006; Berzeit University, 2005).

4. Contemporary US-Palestinian relations

4.1 The Trump Administration’s Deal of the Century

Donald Trump’s administration initiated a period of provocative rhetoric and a harsh stance in the Israeli/Palestinian issue, contrary to the silent diplomacy previously enacted by American presidents. In 2019, he ordered his orthodox Jewish son-in-law and Middle East advisor Jared Kushner to unilaterally craft a Middle-East peace plan alongside Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and thus unveiled the "Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People" in 2020. The plan was received with much skepticism, criticism and support from various groups. Whilst there was much support from Israel and US Jewish advocates, officials from various countries pointed out how the peace deal could potentially undermine the prospects for a negotiated two-state solution and could even exacerbate the conflict (Reuters, 2020).

The plan was deemed ‘a conspiracy’ by the Palestinians (BBC, 2020) and widely rejected by Arab states and the international community. It furthermore endangered the US position as a broker in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict as Trump has so bluntly stated that ‘Israel has never had a better friend in the White House than him’ (the Guardian, 2019).

The peace plan had several significant aspects and actions directly relevant to the Palestinian issue.

1. **Recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's Capital (December 2017):** In late 2017, President Trump announced the United States' recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. An act that was

met with widespread international criticism as it abandoned decades of US policy which considered Jerusalem to be resolved through negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. Trump reminisced that Congress already authorized the Jerusalem Embassy Act in 1995 which would both relocate the American embassy to Jerusalem and recognize it as an Israeli capital. However, every previous American president since has issued a waiver refusing these actions. Trump stated: ‘ This is nothing more, or less, than a recognition of reality. It is also the right thing to do.’ (US Embassy, 2020).

2. **Relocating U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (May 2018):** The next year, the U.S. officially opened its embassy in Jerusalem. The move was strongly condemned by Palestinians and the international community, who deemed it as undermining Palestinian aspirations for a capital in East Jerusalem.

3. **Closing the PLO Office in Washington, D.C. (September 2018):** In response to the PLO's petition to the ICC to investigate alleged Israeli war crimes, the US State Department closed the PLO office in Washington stating that the office ‘has not taken steps to advance the start of direct and meaningful negotiations with Israel’.

4. **Deeming Israeli settlements in the Westbank as legal:** the peace-plan confirms Israel’s claim to- and continuous expansion into- Palestinian territories: ‘ It [Israel] will not have to uproot any settlements, and will incorporate the vast majority of Israeli settlements into contiguous Israeli territory’ (Peace to Prosperity, p14, 2020).

5. **Rejecting the Palestinian refugees right of return:** the peace plan rejects the right of return or right for fair compensation of Palestinian refugees and states that neighboring Arab states should actively seek to incorporate the refugees in those areas into their state: “Their Arab brothers have the moral responsibility to integrate them into their countries as the Jews were integrated into the State of Israel.” In addition, the plan mentions that “the State of Israel deserves compensation for the costs of absorbing Jewish refugees from those [Arab and Muslim] countries” (Peace to Prosperity, p31, 2020).

Being displeased with the Palestinian Authority’s formal rejection of the proposed peace plan, the Trump administration turned to different means in order to persuade – or force– the Palestinians into accepting the deal. For instance, the Trump administration had already significantly reduced funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which provides assistance to Palestinian refugees (the Guardian, 2018) in order to put financial pressure on Palestinian officials. In addition, they consulted Arab officials in the region to influence Palestinian decision-making and encourage acceptance of the plan. The administration also promoted the deal at various UN conferences. However, despite these efforts, the peace deal could not exert local, regional or international support and ultimately did not lead to any breakthroughs in the conflict.

4.2 Perceptions towards Donald Trump

Unfortunately, there is little known regarding the perceptions of international actors or the general public towards the Donald Trump presidency. Contrary to the domestic perceptions of American voters towards Donald Trump as a presidential elective and later as president, fewer studies have considered the perception of the international community towards the president. Also, studies on how locals, civil society, and the humanitarian/developmental sector in specifically conflict-affected areas have remarked his actions and foreign policies remain limited as well.

On the other side, there have been multiple studies regarding the Trump administration’s attitude towards conflicts and the US’ international involvement. During his campaign, Trump already marked himself as a president with an outspoken communication style and unfiltered and unconventional methods. Several authors have put forward the notion that foreign policy in the Trump era has transformed the role of the US to being an ‘isolationist’ with little enthusiasm towards global

governance institutions (Rahajeng, 2020; Curran, 2018). In his own words, Trump has proclaimed that ‘Americanism, not globalism, will be our credo’ (Blake, 2021).

These words were quickly followed by actions as the administration retracted America from several international accords and American involvement, like the sudden withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, but also the Paris Climate Change Accords, the Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and the Iran nuclear deal. Agreements that were forged during the Trump era were mostly in favor of America’s allies and particularly Trump’s allies. For instance, the Deal of the Century.

In addition, Trump’s approach to foreign and strategic policy has been labeled ‘transactional’, much like his business endeavors (Leslie and Roselle, 2022). This has been displayed in Trump’s close relationship with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who during the process of cultivating the deal of the century, have been close allies. In 2020, Netanyahu even called Trump ‘the best friend Israel has ever had in the White House’ (Clingendael Institute, 2020). However, when the Israeli government formally congratulated President Biden with his presidential victory, Trump accused his former ally of ‘disloyalty’, stating that he had saved Israel from destruction (BBC, 2021).

Wike et al (2020) described how the 64% of the public from 32 countries did not show any confidence in the President to do the right thing in world affairs, whilst 29% did. These negative sentiments towards the president were especially present in Western Europe (~75%) and Mexico (89%). This also partly reflected the global opinion towards American in general which also declined in numerous countries. Unfortunately, no details are shared regarding the Palestinian perception towards the president. However, many symbolic visuals were visible in several areas of the Palestinian territories (Figure 4). Interestingly, 7 out of 10 people in Israel did express confidence in Trump’s international decision making.



Figure 4. Donald Trump ‘hugging’ the separation wall in Bethlehem.
By Yalda Alam, April 20th 2022

4.3 US-Palestinian relations under the Biden Presidency

When President Joe Biden and his administration came to power in 2020, many believed this would be a turning point in the world as he would restore America’s leadership role in global affairs and rebuild trust and relationships with American allies. During his campaign, Biden pledged that the US would focus on the protection of human rights globally and reclaim their role as mediator. Regarding the Palestinian issue, however, many did not have high expectations of the self-proclaimed Zionist president. Though, there was hope that at least some of Trump’s policies would be reversed (Al Jazeera, 2022).

As was the case. Biden quickly reinstated economic assistance, humanitarian relief, and diplomatic ties. The President announced a total of \$618 million in funds to UNRWA to continue delivering critical services to Palestinian refugees and thereby promoting regional stability. This re-confirmed America’s status as the largest donor once again (The White House Fact sheet, 2022).

However, other important issues to the Palestinians remain difficult. For one, Biden did not relocate the US embassy from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv or re-open the PLO office in Washington, leaving the Palestinians still without formal diplomatic ties directly to the US. In addition, criticism towards the expansion of Israeli territory through settlements has rarely been expressed. The US has in some occasions voiced opposition to settlements by stating it ‘strongly opposes’ this act and finds it ‘concerning’ (Al Jazeera, 2021).

II. Literature review

As mentioned before, the main debates in which this research will situate itself in is the political use of symbolism which directly correlates to second debate regarding the role of external actors in the context of developmental/humanitarian aid. As literature on both issues separately is abundant, there is little information regarding the direct correlation of these elements. Therefore, the overall question of this paper is framed around whether political symbolism can in fact lead to physical and practical changes on the ground, aimed specifically at the role of international donors. In the case of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, that would be the US as one of its largest donors. Both debates will be intensively discussed below in a separate manner.

I opt to show that symbolic actions could have practical consequences in different forms and ways. In the US/Palestinian relationship there have been different relations to start with, for one the extensive financial dependence of Palestinian organizations towards the US government and governmental institutes such as USAID. Secondly, the social ties that Palestinian organizations or officials could have with American individuals, such as embassy workers, charities, governmental officials etc. However, as discussed before, the official ties between these organizations and their American partners are constrained by the location of the American offices in Israel. Therefore, I argue that the social ties- already being limited- are influenced in a lesser manner than the financial component of their relations. Thirdly, the emotional sphere is often underexposed in these relations. The perceptions, feelings, and thoughts that the Palestinians have towards their US partners could be intensively impacted by the Deal of the Century and its inherent symbolism. Especially, since – as mentioned before- the overall perceptions towards the American governmental organs by the Palestinian organizations already were quite unfavorable.

All-in-all, I argue that mostly the financial relationship between these Palestinian organizations and their American partners will be impacted by the Trump administration in a two-way street. One, as President Trump has withdrawn a large portion of the aid provided by American governmental institutions like USAID, this will have negatively affected Palestinian organizations as they were now forced to redirect their foreign relations to other (inter-)national actors. Secondly, I also presume that reluctance from these organizations to further cooperate with these American partners in the future will be the case as well, thereby influencing their relations in the long term. Not due to the pre-existent variable nature of US funding, but due to the underlying political manipulation by the Trump presidency related to this funding in combination with the non-negotiable peace plan issued by his administration.

This research will portray that the perceptions towards the Americans are negatively affected by the emotional impact from the Deal of the Century on Palestinian organizations and relative to the dependency of the organizations on their American associates will also result in some practical consequences, such as limitations by the Palestinian organizations on future partnerships, grants allocation and collaborations. As I argue, the practical consequences from the Trump Presidency on local grounds will mostly be grant-related- so in the financial domain- and thus this will be examined further in the second debate.

Political symbolism

The overall use of symbolism in areas of pre, post- and contemporary conflict is widely seen on many platforms. Symbols are a way to transmit meanings from micro connections (person to person) or macro connections (government to its people), even though the multivocality of symbols makes defining the term in itself ambiguous (Dittmer, 1977). For this thesis, I define ‘symbolism’ as ‘a physical, abstract or figurative sign which carries meaning’.

Besides having a positive impact on people’s sense of belonging, patriotism and other beliefs, symbolic gestures are also implemented with a political undertone (Klatch, 1988). The media, conflict-stakeholders, policy makers and also NGOs use symbolism extensively to pursue their personal interests and/or to transform the dynamics of a conflict. During his Presidency, Trump’s language and speech were deeply grounded in (white) nationalist, masculine and political strongman-romanticizing symbols and narratives, thus instigating violence and division (Leslie & Roselle, 2023).



Figure 5. Jerusalem Road.
By: Yalda Alam, May 15th 2022

There are many examples from which this can be derived. Interestingly, the use of symbolism takes a variety of shapes and forms. For instance, the controversial Israeli flags on every side when entering Jerusalem thus representing a were visible, nationalistic portray of symbolism (Figure 5). Or the reluctance to use the term ‘occupation’ by the state of Israeli, thus calling it ‘Israeli rule’ (Haaretz, 2021). Even the installment of multiple torture protocols and privacy violations in the United States under the umbrella of preventing (domestic) ‘terrorism’ is a clear example of how much impact, power and consequences symbolism in word, writing, speech or visuals could have (USA Patriot Act, 2001). As Klatch argues: ‘the potency of symbols rests not simply in their ability to represent, but in their ability to instigate action’ (p.2).

Klatch build upon the theories of Marx and underlines this exact mechanism: the way symbolism is used for political manipulation and is used to justify the policies of those in power (Karl Marx, 1976). In the framework of this thesis, this tool is continuously being utilized in this aspect as well. For instance, the symbolic recognition by the United States on Dec 6. 2017 to declare Jerusalem solely as the capital of the state of Israel which turned into direct action of ordering the relocation of the US diplomatic mission from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (Presidential documents, 2017). This led to condemnation by world leaders and much dismay in particular the Arab and Palestinian people. In addition, this decision led directly to the Israeli operation of intensifying anti-Palestinian rhetoric and violence (NY times, 2021). Furthermore, strong resistance emerged from the critique of the American

role as broker in the conflict, jeopardizing their status of self-proclaimed 'neutrality' in the conflict (NY Times, 2020; Council of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

Where the symbolic gestures of Trump's peace plan could indicate a stronger incentive for the Israeli side to pursue their perceived religious rights upon the Holy Land, the same symbol means further oppression and more distance to a viable solution for the Palestinians. Therefore, symbols are multi-vocal, having different meanings for different people (Gill et al, 2018). However, it is evident that symbols are a central element of power struggles. This essay will contribute to the understanding of the visible impact and consequences the American symbolic actions from the Deal of the Century imposed by the Trump Presidency have had on Palestinian organizations and their willingness or reluctance to further establish/enhance cooperation with the Americans.

Humanitarian aid in the developmental context

The aim of humanitarian aid in essence is to alleviate suffering and help communities transverse periods of crisis. It is defined as assistance that's used to relieve suffering during emergency situations and based on the humanitarian principles as written in humanitarian law and incorporates the following: 'Humanitarian aid is channeled impartially to the affected populations, regardless of their race, ethnic group, religion, gender, age, nationality or political affiliation. Humanitarian law describes four core principles that should be upheld by 'humanitarian' organizations, such as the notion of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality (UNHCR, 2023).

Though, humanitarian aid has also shown to be a paradox in itself as it could have direct or indirect consequences which were not originally intended, such as (e.g. benefitting armed groups (Wood, 2015), prolonging the conflict (Narang, 2015), or disrupting local systems already in place (OECD, 1996, chapter 7) . These consequences could be marginal or instigate larger issues depending on the manner in which aid in emergency situations has been utilized. Especially in the situation of conflict, aid could become -and often has become- a stake in war (Terry, 1998).

This phenomenon has been described by scholars as the 'politicization of humanitarian aid', in which – as I argue - the core values of 'humanitarianism' seem to be put aside. This ranges from putting strict conditions on donor countries or agencies before receiving said aid, but also vice versa where local stakeholders use the narrative, resources, public opinion and consequences of external interference in pursuit of their own agenda (Terry, 1998). Conditionality on aid could simultaneously act as an insurance policy by donors for ensuring that the aid is channeled to achieve stated goals, yet also safeguarding (other) economic and political interests (Qarmout et al, 2012). Also, humanitarian assistance has often been used as an excuse for politicians claiming to be addressing the issue by providing aid, whilst being reluctant to pursue a political solution (Bywater, 2021). Medicines Sans Frontières criticized this as well, stating that 'doctors can't stop genocide' (MSF, 2014).

Different contexts portray different means in which the notion of 'humanitarian aid' could be debatable. For instance, the self-proclaimed 'life-line' from the Turkish border into Syrian territory by the United Nations allows the UN and other aid agencies to deliver services in these areas deeming it necessary for the protection of human rights, however, in doing so the UN is also ignoring the sovereignty of the state and defending the external interference on humanitarian grounds (UN, 2023). Similarly, in the Israeli-Palestinian context the withdrawal of the United States funds for UNRWA and USAID in Gaza was a direct attempt for pressuring the Palestinian Authority into accepting the Trump's administration one-sided 'peace-plan' (Ocampo et al, 2020; Nakhleh, 2004)). Furthermore, Atmar (2001) outlines how international approaches to humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan have been filled with conditions as a way to overturn certain Taliban policies and promote Western idealism, but eventually proved ineffective and negatively impacted the Afghan population instead.

Secondly, humanitarian actors have proliferated immensely since the 1990s and coordination among agencies has shown to be troublesome (Smith, 2015; De Lauri, 2020; Baranyi, 2012). The great influx of aid agencies in conflict settings and at times as active stakeholders, thus have the capacity of transforming the dynamics of the conflict at hand (Taghdisi-Rad, 2010). Brautigam (2000) illustrates that long term and high influx of aid provisions create incentives to reduce local ownership, accountability and cause both donors as recipient governments to disengage. Therefore, providing basic public services, structuring bureaucratic institutes and adequate governance by recipient governments is left to the humanitarian field. This was the case in Palestine, when after the First Intifada donor aid increased to the region and stimulated the evolution of Palestinian civil society which was much needed in order to provide services to the population (Abdel Shafi, 2004). This influx of Western aid was later criticized as it promoted Western democratic ideals, instead of promoting locally-led initiatives (Challand, 2008).

Swedlund (2019) also raises concerns regarding budget support (aid provided directly to an external government's budget) as a means for increasing donor influence in recipient countries. This is similar to the points made by Qarmout et al (2012), who mention that the aid delivery by the international community in Gaza has been extremely influential in shaping the socio-economic status of the region. They show how, within the context of the Israeli occupation, international aid has allowed Israel to sustain its occupation without carrying the expenses of providing for the basic humanitarian needs of those living under occupation. Thus, donors play a direct role in the conflict by easing any sense of urgency to end the occupation.

Other have acknowledged that it is difficult for donors to adhere to national ownerships, especially when the donors show lack of trust in their national institutions (Manning et al, 2010). In light of aid agencies often upholding certain conditions on this aid and simultaneously recipient actors being dependent on this support, allows for a collective problem with high complexity in the field of partner and (international) donor relations.

Thirdly, another interesting aspect of humanitarian aid in its role in conflict settings, is the consequence of disruption or adjustments in scale/length of humanitarian aid by external donors. Naturally, one could imagine the devastating aftermath for aid-dependent recipients in society and the general population. However, the consequences for the private, civil society and NGO network on site who are also dependent indirectly on this budget support are equally worrisome. Swedlund and Lierl (2019) also describe that frustrations from recipient agencies arise when donors cannot make credible commitments for delivering budget support even though they should vindicate the common framework for development. Though, seemingly the aid modality is very vulnerable to politics and specific events.

Naturally, the rejection of the Palestinian Authority to Trump's peace-agreement evidently falls into this category. Especially when in the case of Palestine, Israel plays a major role in the developmental plan and coordination between donors/recipients. Turner (2011) argues that the initially bilateral aid agreements between the donors and Palestinians in the 'Oslo coordination structures' quickly were intruded by Israel as well. The Oslo Accords continued Israel's control over key factors of natural resources, production as well as handed over control over Palestinian state-building resources including trade and fiscal revenue. The Accords proved to be detrimental to the economy of the Palestinian territories as it left the PA with no control over macroeconomic policies.

Baranyi (2012) presents large evidence in the matter of donor-partner cooperation and how those relations affect developmental efforts. Even though local recipients of direct or indirect donor funding are largely dependent on this aid for their survival as well, reinforcing donor states or actors to continue the influx is often a losing battle. Therefore, aid recipients need to find other strategies in order to maintain their status when large beneficiaries withdraw. After the election of Hamas and the subsequent boycott of Western allies for funding Hamas and difficulties into delivering aid to other Gaza-installed organizations, independent agency fundraising mechanisms were installed in which

each organization aimed to raise their own funding. However, this had complicated the situation on the ground even more, as the local authority now was surpassed by the international community and an extra burden was placed on civil society for the delivery of healthcare and educational services. Donors therefore prioritized politics over aid provision, which limited the government's autonomy and led to long-term instability (Qarmout, 2012).

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a massive decline in international developmental finance both due to restricted travel options as well as economic hassles in nations. Finding other donors by NGOs in Jordan seemed to be a challenge. Thus resulting in staff cuts, postponing or minimizing projects, and some had to completely shut down operations (Driss, 2020). Therefore, as a means of survival organizations, sometimes reluctantly, do sustain their cooperation with external actors, despite the conditionality (Joplin, 2004).

Vice versa, recipient grass root organizations and governments could refuse external aid as well. In the case of natural disasters, this is often seen by states that reject international assistance as a means to improve their status (Carnegie et al, 2012). In addition, declining financial aid might also be utilized to send a signal to the donors or to protect one's independency and sovereignty (Hall et al, 2023; Badil, 2020).

In conclusion, the relationship between donor and recipients in the developmental arena is one of complex, sensitive, yet relevant and important facets. Therefore, this relationship will be carefully examined in this essay in which grass root organizations will elaborate on any change in their donor relationship after the presentation of Donald Trump's peace-accords and the withdrawal of financial aid to the Palestinian Authority, USAID and UNRWA. We will determine how these organizations firstly reacted to the immediate lack of funding, their coping mechanisms, their perceptions of the conditionality that comes with donor aid, the transformation of relation with the financial donor and their thoughts on any future collaborations or donor relations with their American counterparts.

III. Research objective and research questions

The research objective of this paper will include detailed insights in the aftermath of the Trump presidency in the US/Palestinian relationship. This analysis includes the 'deal of the century' peace-plan presented by Jared Kushner in 2018 and the important aspects of this one-sided agreement (White House archives, 2020).

This paper will cover the influence of this peace-plan, in particular the symbolic actions of the plan, on multiple facets, including the financial, social and emotional dimension. Thereby focusing on the perceptions of the Palestinian organizations in the Westbank that have cooperated or still cooperate with the US, US funded agencies or other American partners.

With the lack of provision of basic services by the Palestinian Authority (PA), partly due to restrictions by the Israeli state, the local organizations and civil society network in the Westbank are often the institutes that have stepped in and therefore have taken a crucial role inside the society. They are both involved in the political dimension as well as the civil dimension and therefore form a bridge between both. Civil society is an essential building block of development and national cohesion and fills the space between the government and the private sector. In Palestine, these organizations (CSOs) have been major actors in the socio-economic and political development of the Palestinian society. Through their ability to reach out and provide needed services to the population, CSOs managed to attract the attention of the donors' community (Abdel Shafi, 2004). This allows them to carefully monitor governmental policies and actions and hold state institutions accountable. They often deliver critical services to citizens and defend their rights by advocacy and lobbying (Cooper, 2018).

Since European and American involvement often occurs through these organizations, considering their reluctant position towards the PA (Gilboa, 2010; Al-Fattal, 2010), these organizations can offer a clear picture of the effects of top-down policies from foreign actors on the ground. In addition, as the government of Palestine, the PLO, is not capable of providing all basic services to the population, including healthcare, refugee care, education, protection and other civil services, these organizations evidently have taken over these responsibilities (Worldbank, 1999) and can offer detailed explanations on how the Trump Presidency has affected their services. Therefore, this research will focus on civil society actors as well as grassroots organizations, NGO's and the private sector. In addition, these organizations can indicate how the relation between the Palestinian civil society/humanitarian network has altered because of the policies of the Trump presidency.

To allow for a clear and punctual research on the topic of key foreign policies from the US in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, I have formulated a main research question and several sub- questions. These questions are derived from the overarching framework of this research which opts to determine which foreign interventions, focused on the Deal of the Century of the Trump administration, have had the largest effects on these grassroots organization and thereby have changed particular types of pre-existing – and perhaps future- relations (financial, social, emotional) between the Americans and Palestinians.

Research questions

Main research question:

‘How do local Palestinian organizations perceive their relationship with US (non-) state partners as being affected by the policies of the Trump presidency?’

Sub questions:

‘ How do Palestinian organizations located in the Westbank perceive the Donald Trump Presidency?’

‘To which extent do the research participants report that these policies have transformed the relationship between the American entities and the Palestinian organizations?’

‘Were the symbolic foreign policy elements in the Deal of the Century key in transforming the relation with Palestinian organizations?’

‘To what extent did the transformation occur on a financial, social and/or emotional level?’

The main research question has been divided into several sub-questions trying to encompass the larger point is whether or not the Donald Trump presidency and his policies in the Deal of the Century have impacted the local organizations in such a way that there have been objective alterations in their behavior – and their perceptions- towards their partnership with the US. As USAID, the US embassy, consulate or US officials are all representatives of the US government, and therefore during that time representatives of the Donald Trump Administration, carrying out the American interests, this research is focusing on organizations that have (had) ties with these individuals or governmental bodies.

The policies that are at the core of the research question are obviously the policies suggested in the Deal of the Century peace-plan brought forward by Jared Kushner. Especially, the symbolic policies such as the allocation of Jerusalem to the Israelis, could be key in transforming any relation (financial or emotional) relation that the Palestinians had with their American partners. Since there is little evidence on the perceptions of the Palestinians on Donald Trump himself, this has been included in the research as well.

As USAID funding indicates a clear financial relationship with the Palestinian organization, this would be an interesting question, as this is a clear and objective measure in potential alterations of

these funding opportunities. Social ties could occur on an individual level with US charities (however, also funding related), US officials, US NGO's or consultants that instigate joint projects. Also, these ties could have been impacted by the Donald Trump Presidency as Palestinian organizations try to refrain from American partners in general. Thirdly, the emotional impact that the Deal of the Century could have on Palestinian individuals working in or directing the path of the organization could be shown in the behavior of the organization and their reluctance to work with American partners in the future deeming them non-reliable partners in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

IV. Theoretical framework

In this research, I build on the work of David Easton (1957) who established a theory for understanding political systems. As Von Bertalanffy (1969) states, a system in general involves the concept of a set of elements standing in some structural relationship to one another and interacting based on certain processes. This means that components of this system can influence one another and therefore a connection can be observed and analyzed. A political system, according to Easton, therefore is 'a system of interaction in any society through which binding or authoritative allocations are made'.

Overall, the system analysis states that the environment, either domestically or internationally, affects the political system through the kinds of inputs that reach the system. These inputs will then be converted into certain outputs which in a feedback-loop will return to the system. The system analysis of the political sphere thus seeks to unravel the processes through which a political system can cope with the environment. As the system that this research will try to unravel could be considered a political system, the similarities it shares with Easton's model make it a logical theoretical framework for this thesis.

The symbolic actions instigated by Donald Trump's foreign policies in the Israel/Palestinian issue have brought about certain changes in the financial, social and emotional relationships between the Palestinian organizations and the American entities. This has, as I argue, made the Palestinian alter their decision-making which immediately affects one or more dimensions of their relationship.

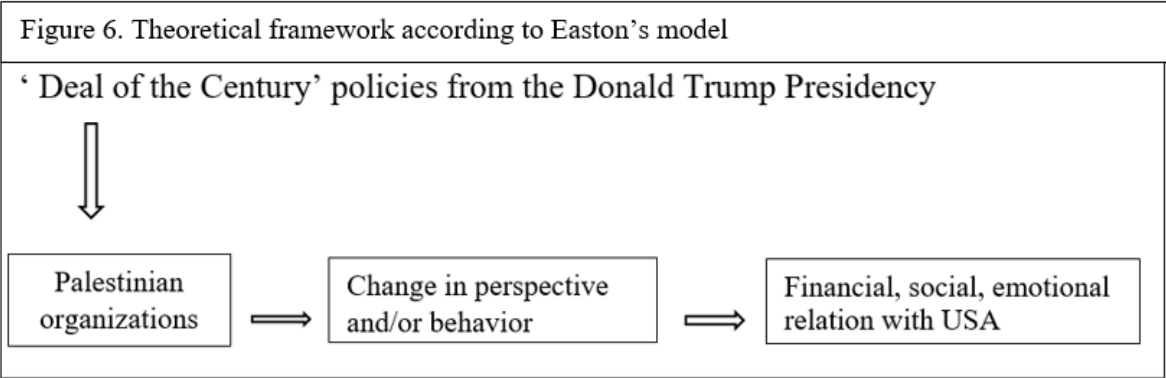


Figure 6 clearly describes on how I hypothesize that the environment, which is the international involvement of the US in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict during the Trump presidency and its policies (focused on the Deal of the Century), have affected local organizations in Palestine. In particular, in this analysis, I will pay attention to three larger categories:

1. Financially: cutting financial aid through USAID, UNRWA, direct funding to the PA and thereby ending many projects in the Westbank.
2. Socially: terminating US partnerships on the basis of mutual projects, either with the consulate/embassy or private/non-profit organizations.

3. Symbolic and emotionally: distrust in the USA and thereby reluctance to restart or renew (future) local alliances with US governmental or non-governmental bodies.

The financial, emotional, and social dimensions were specifically chosen, as they could all be influenced by the Donald Trump presidency. After the withdrawal of a large portion of the budgetary of USAID/UNRWA, many Palestinian organizations had to minimize or temporarily completely cancel their services to the people. Since the financial dependency of these organizations to the US funds could be objectively established and therefore measured, it would be interesting to see whether this important connection has been altered due to the Deal of the Century. Not solely from the American side, but also whether on the Palestinian side there were initiatives to step away from the US funding agencies as donors.

Thus the financial relationship is an important component in this research as it represents a way for Palestinian organizations to express their reluctance or withdrawal from American collaborations and funding institutes in an objective and practical manner.

The same goes for 'social relationships', defined here as having collective projects or fundraising or exchange of individuals, with American partners, as shared projects could have been harder to initiate and continue when, e.g., visa procedures were made stricter. As was discussed before, the social relationship between Palestinian organizations and their American partners was not so much on an official, government level, but rather on an unofficial and/or individual bases: e.g. with American charities, individual donors, NGOs with an American headquarters etc. The level of social attachment to these American entities is hypothesized to be high when the Palestinian organization has a direct US headquarters and merely constitutes of a country office in Palestine, and therefore not particularly influenced by the Trump presidency. The same reasoning could be used with American charities or individual donors. However, the organizations that were solely dependent on American governmental institutions for collaborations, mutual projects, consultancy etc., are hypothesized to have had more difficulties continuing their services after the Trump policies.

The third category is one that is greatly under-examined in the Israeli/Palestinian case, namely the emotional consequences on a deeper and personal level that the Trump policies had on the people working in these Palestinian organizations who, in this research, are exclusively Palestinian themselves. These organizations have often been critical of the role of the US in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, however they themselves also could have an important say in their level of involvement with American governmental institutions. Whether their personal beliefs, feelings and thoughts towards American involvement has also influenced the direction of their organization in potential financial/social collaborations with these entities, is therefore a crucial element in this research to discover the interconnectedness of symbolic politics on individuals and their corresponding institutions. Especially, since this could have affected the willingness of these Palestinian organizations to cooperate with the Americans in the future, as perhaps they lost their credibility and trustworthiness as a partner. The influence of these more human and individual consequences that could have resulted in a policy change are discussed in the 'emotional' dimension.

In addition, I also hypothesize that the type of funding an organization previously or currently receives is likely to be an important intervening variable, as it is this financial relationship that establishes the connection between the foreign policies of Donald Trump and a change in perception and/or behavior by the Palestinian organizations. The 'US-Palestinian' relationship between these local organizations and the US can therefore also be defined through several categories; the US assistance to these organizations directly through the US consulate or embassy or indirectly through the PA or UNRWA. The different funding mechanisms considered therefore include:

1. Through the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA, which receives/received funding from the USA and subsequently funded projects of Palestinian organizations.

2. Through private US organizations or NGO's located in the USA which have partnerships with Palestinian organizations.
3. Directly through the US embassy, consulate or USAID (a.k.a. US government or governmental institutions)

The organizations included in this research could all be placed in one of the above categories. Therefore, we were also able to draw conclusions on the differences in how organizations closer or farther away from US governmental organs were affected. I argued that organizations with direct ties to the US, either through the US embassy, state department, or USAID, were more affected by the Donald Trump Presidency than Palestinian organizations that cooperated with more independent American partners such as private donors, European donors and NGOs.

V. Methodology

As this study focuses on the relationship between unilateral foreign policies of major external actors and their financial, emotional, and social influence on the local level in general, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and the involvement of the United States serves as a sufficient example. Given that the United States was the greatest contributor to both 'countries,' shifts in foreign policy could cause dramatic changes on site.

Case Selection and Data Collection

This research is centered solely around the influence of foreign policies during the Trump administration in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, focused on the Deal of the Century. Therefore, this research is not applicable or particularly relevant to other contexts, however it does aim to partly portray the overall connection between political symbolism and behavioral change between foreign actors and local organizations. In addition, single-case studies have many benefits in comparison to multiple-case studies, as they could be designed to have strong internal validity for assessing causal relationships between interventions and outcomes. In addition, single-case studies are not as expensive and time-consuming as multiple case studies. Therefore, time can be spent on further deepening the understanding of the case and producing a high-quality theory more carefully (Gustafsson, 2017).

The organizations that were chosen could be categorized as private, non-profit, or official non-governmental organizations. The selection was broad due to the small number of organizations that were still present in the West Bank and eligible for this research (see 'inclusion criteria'). Therefore, US/EU/and other international organizations were also eligible to enter the research as long as their country branches were directed by Palestinians and there was/is a clear relationship with the US government, governmental institutions, or other US partners.

This research was conducted on site in the West Bank (Palestine) from April 1st to June 1st 2022. Since the location of the research was mainly the city of Hebron, with occasional visits to other places in the West Bank such as Bethlehem and Ramallah, this also remained the primary focus of the research. Most of the meetings were physically executed, but certain meetings were virtually conducted through Zoom due to security situations in specific areas and at specific times that did not allow for in-person meetings. Practical difficulties in reaching either Jerusalem or Tel Aviv (when needed) also affected the traveling opportunities to those areas, and these meetings were therefore mainly conducted virtually as well.

This research was a qualitative study using one-on-one in-depth semi-structured interviews with official representatives of local 'Palestinian' organizations. The definition of 'local' was often quite ambiguous (Van Leeuwen, 2019); however, in this research, organizations were allowed if they had a branch in the West Bank or Gaza ('Palestinian territory') and when their work was primarily aimed at Palestinian people. In this study, we have relied upon the traditional hypothesis-deductive research

approach, since the outcome of the research has already been hypothesized. Inductive coding is a bottom-up approach where you start with no codes and develop codes as you analyze the dataset.

The interviews (see appendix A) were semi-structured to allow the representatives to freely add, delete, or broaden their answers and not be directed towards a specific opinion. The one-on-one interviews, however, at times involved a Palestinian translator as per the request of the organization. The translator was an independent Palestinian actor with no personal ties to the organizations or any former involvement with the US government, embassies, UN, or other international organizations, as this could affect the neutrality and impartiality of the research. The translator was selected locally. Naturally, the translator had no records of the data and was not involved in the analysis of the research in any way or form. The translator was compensated through a market-conform salary provided by the main researcher. Eventually, the translator had not intervened in any of the interviews, as the representatives of the organizations preferred to express themselves in English.

The financial ties in this research included funding from American embassies, USAID, UNRWA, or other American donors, either private or non-profit. The social ties considered any personal relationships with American partners or the US government, such as through shared projects, exchange of Palestinian/American people, visits from or to US officials, or other American partners. Therefore, the 'social' dimension was also focused on individual ties between American and Palestinian individuals.

Lastly, the emotional dimension considered the impact of crucial foreign policies that were of great importance to the Palestinians, including the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, the refusal of the 'right of return' of millions of Palestinian refugees, and the assigned legitimacy to Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory. As pride, trustworthiness, equality, recognition, or other emotions of affected individuals inside the organization could influence the course (or discourse) of the Palestinian organizations, this was equally important to be investigated.

The on-site selection of the participants occurred through the following inclusion criteria:

- Palestinian non-profit, non-governmental or private organizations with previous or current US ties (broadly speaking; either financially, through project/fundraising cooperation, USA based headquarters etc.)
- Any size
- Relationship should have been present at least one years before Jan 2017 (the inauguration of former president Donald Trump)
- Located in the Westbank, Gaza-strip, or the state of Israel
- English speaking representatives/country directors

Exclusion criteria:

- No English representatives, solely Arabic communication

As much information can be lost in translation (called the 'blank space', and the interpretation of the data could be either communicated differently by a translator or interpreted differently by the researcher (Anokhina, 2017), this exclusion criteria was carefully followed during the search for Palestinian organizations. However, this did result in a limited number of organizations applicable for this research as Arabic was the main working language of many local organizations.

Following the inclusion and exclusion criteria above, eventually 13 Palestinian organizations were included in this research. The types of organizations have been listed in Table 1. The organizations can be categorized in either of the following sections. The 'humanitarian' section indicated organizations that primary have a humanitarian goal, though are not registered formally as NGOs internationally and/or with the Palestinian Authority.

| Table 1. Types of organizations | | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| NGO | Private Sector | Municipality | Humanitarian |
| 9 | 2 | 1 | 1 |

Table 2 mentions the characteristics of these organizations including their region of operation, size indicated by number of employees/volunteers and the type of organization. The size of the organization has been measured by above or below 20 employees/volunteers, since there is much diversity in the number of staff as well as volunteers regarding the projects, periods of time and amount of funding available.

| Table 2. Characteristics of the Palestinian organizations | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| | Region of operation | Number of employees | Type of organization |
| Organization 1 | Westbank/Israel | <20 | NGO |
| Organization 2 | Westbank/Gaza | >20 | NGO |
| Organization 3 | Westbank / Gaza | <20 | NGO |
| Organization 4 | Westbank/Gaza/Israel | >20 | NGO |
| Organization 5 | Westbank | <20 | Private |
| Organization 6 | Westbank | <20 | NGO |
| Organization 7 | Westbank | >20 | Municipality |
| Organization 8 | Westbank | >20 | NGO |
| Organization 9 | Westbank | >20 | NGO |
| Organization 10 | Westbank/Gaza/Israel | >20 | NGO |
| Organization 11 | Westbank | >20 | NGO |
| Organization 12 | Westbank | <20 | Private |
| Organization 13 | Westbank | >20 | Humanitarian |

The interviews have been recorded with a mobile phone of the brand ‘Samsung Galaxy S10’ or through Zoom on a Lenovo laptop with VPL-safe connection in case of virtual meetings. These interviews have been executed after gaining either written or verbal informed consent from the participants. Their organizations will remain anonymous and any personal data including the verbal interviews recordings was destroyed on 31st December 2022. The documents of the interviews will be stored up to 10 years in order to allow for research transparency.

Data Analysis

The data transcription has been through a Transcribing tool online, while the interviews have also been double-checked by the main researcher. After the translation and transcription process, data was coded through an inductive research approach and analyzed further by the main researcher. The results section portrays clear answers to the research questions as well as additional relevant information provided by the participants.

Using the manual inductive coding approach, I have determined various aspects from the data which are highlighted in the table. These aspects give us a clear direction towards answering the main and sub-research questions and are therefore isolated carefully.

As can be seen in Table 2 the most common reactions and responses from the participants have been combined within one single aspect. These aspects have been put together into general themes occurring throughout the research which eventually can be traced back to the overarching dimensions of this research, namely the financial, social and emotional landscape regarding the aftermath of the policies of President Donald Trump.

The coding process consisted of finding mutual or corresponding terms, analogies and elements in the different interviews and assigning them an all-encompassing word. The citations below show a negative stance towards the Americans and thus were assigned the aspect 'negative sentiment'. As sentiments are a part of feelings and thoughts towards a certain individual or entity, the corresponding theme should be 'perceptions' which in turn fits into the emotional dimension.

Interview 1: ‘..there's concern about Americans, because they have a bad reputations for Palestinians’

Interview 3: ‘...all the Palestinians they hate you...’

Interview 6: ‘He [Trump] is an idiot’

Thus these three words having similar meaning or indicating similar interpretations

As most of the aspects are isolated terms and have no overlap with one another, they have been laid upon the interviews in this manner. However, the aspect of ‘distrust’ could naturally also fall into the aspect of ‘negative sentiment’ and therefore is counted and coded as both. The term ‘transparency’ could equally be regarded as a ‘positive’ connotation, which will also be regarded as a dual code.

The coding chart has been displayed in Table 2 and visualizes the analysis of the data.

| Concept | Dimensions | Themes | Aspects |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Foreign policy consequences | Financial ties | Funding sources | USAID/gov |
| | | | UN/UNRWA |
| | | | PA |
| | | | NGOs/charities |
| | | | Europeans |
| | | Independent | |
| | Financial impact | Service delivery | |
| | | Necessity | |
| | Financial recovery | Donor switch | |
| | | Influencing donors | |
| | Social ties | Collaborations | Cooperation |
| | | Local impact | Restrictions |
| | | | Participant withdrawal |
| | | | Partner withdrawal |
| | | | Organization withdrawal |
| | Emotional impact | Perception | Negative sentiment |
| | | | Transparency |
| | | | Partiality |
| | | | Distrust |
| | | | Positive |
| Damage | | | |
| Restoration | | | |
| Symbolism | | Jerusalem | |
| Harmful | | Closing PLO | |
| | | Moving embassy | |
| | Cancellation of aid | | |

VI. Results

This section will carefully examine the data derived from the research interviews. Since the answers to these sub-questions could be overlapping, in order to avoid repetition of the data, the responses of the participants have been placed in three overarching themes, which will automatically answer the sub-questions mentioned. Firstly, a generic overview will be provided of the relation that these Palestinian organizations have/had with the American entity (Table 3). Second, the three themes will be presented in which the data will be carefully examined. The themes will have a short introduction demonstrating the conclusion of the theme, after which the data supporting this conclusion will be put forward.

As a reminding the main research question, this thesis sought to answer is the perception of local organizations on how the Donald Trump Presidency has affected their relation with US partners. The four sub-questions of this research were as follows:

1. How do Palestinian organizations located in the Westbank perceive the Donald Trump Presidency?
2. To which extent do the research participants report that these policies have transformed the relationship between the American entities and the Palestinian organizations?
3. Were the symbolic foreign policy elements in the Deal of the Century key in transforming the relation with Palestinian organizations?
4. To what extent did the transformation occur on a financial, social and/or emotional level?

Overview

The results of the interviews first led to distinctions in the kind of relationship the organization could have with American entities. This could be either through funding through American organizations/private donors (charities, community based fundraising, churches etc.) /UN commissions/US government or the Palestinian Authority, or through any social ties in terms of cooperation between the Palestinian organization and American officials/civil organizations (exchange of knowledge, invitations and/or HQ located in America) or joint projects.

Table 3 indicates the type of financial and/or social relationship(s) between the Palestinian organization and an American entity. It also depicts a percentage of US funding (from US entities in general, not only USAID) if organizations have mentioned this in the interview or an estimation of these funds when possible regarding the information provided in the interview.

| | Type of donor | Type of social connection to US governmental bodies | Portion of budgetary from US funding |
|-----------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Organization 1 | Private donors | Embassy | 100% |
| Organization 2 | USAID, US gov., UN | Congress, UN | 100% |
| Organization 3 | USAID, NGOs, UN | Consulate officials, NGOs | x |
| Organization 4 | Private donors | x | 100% |
| Organization 5 | NGOs, churches, US gov. | Consulate officials | 100% |
| Organization 6 | USAID, private donors | Embassy | 100% |
| Organization 7 | USAID | Embassy | 80% (estimation) |
| Organization 8 | Private donors | Congress | 80% (estimation) |
| Organization 9 | NGOs, PA | x | <50% |
| Organization 10 | US private donors | x | 100% |
| Organization 11 | USAID, US gov. | UN, NGOs | 50% |
| Organization 12 | x | US research-centers, NGOs | 0% |

| | | | |
|-----------------|----------------------|----------|---|
| Organization 13 | NGOs, private donors | Congress | x |
|-----------------|----------------------|----------|---|

A. The financial realm

The financial consequences, impact and transformation for the Palestinian organizations are an interesting phenomenon.

As can be seen in Table 3, from the thirteen organizations interviewed in this research five organizations, four out of five being NGOs, had direct funding from USAID (either through their American based HQ or through personal links). Three organizations also had direct ties with the US State department and could get funding through different channels other than USAID. Seven organizations were financed through private donors in America or American-based NGOs, such as Mercy Cops and churches. And only two organizations got funding through UN agencies. One organization did not receive any funding from the USA and solely depended on funds from specific branches from the PLO.

In addition, the majority of the organizations had multiple sources of funding, including European or Arab governmental donors and/or foreign private donors other than the United States.

Most of the organizations have been impacted by the financial withdrawal of the US in one way or the other. Some had to completely cancel all projects, some minimized their projects to a smaller capacity, some had to fire personnel, others had to step in to overtake the projects that were initially led by USAID. Also three organizations had to fire personnel, since there was no funding to continue their salaries and/or no longer projects in which that personnel could be placed. As one of these organizations stated: ‘Yeah, some scholarships have been cut and there was like programs that has been like funded by the USA team and it has been cut during the Trump presidency, you know. So during his presidency, some of our employees have been dismissed because of that’ (Interview 6, 00:07:38).

As USAID was the biggest contributor of funding for several Palestinian organizations, these organizations struggled to find alternative funding sources in the Arab or European countries to fill the gap that USAID had left. The majority of the organizations did try to find other, more ‘reliable’ and ‘sustainable’ donors that were less sensitive to domestic power rotations, and mentioned European countries as a possible alternative source. However, most of the organizations failed in doing so due to the lack of eligible donor institutions and emphasized the difficult financial situation they were in. Five out of six organizations were unsuccessful and one managed to replace their lack of funding by European donors, but only in a later stage.

One organization stated: ‘We are looking, but you know the USA have the huge number of amount of money to support infrastructures and other programs. And I don't think the other agencies like Europe and other agencies can do that. Only the Americans have the funds to focus on large infrastructure projects. They can't replace the Americans’ (Interview 7, 00:04:04).

Another organization mentioned: ‘It is difficult to replace one donor with another and again USAID is the biggest donor in Palestine and is the biggest donor probably around the world. It is difficult to replace that money, because globally there isn't money to be able to step in’ (Interview 2, 00:19:29).

Several organizations even acknowledged the necessity to work with US partners as a way to ensure the survival of the organization and safeguarding the number of employees: ‘In the field we have a big mission. And also I have staff. I don't want to lose some women. ... Even if it's a policy from USAID, it's opportunity for our woman. This is what I needed finally, it's activities and services and money’ (Interview 3, 00:32:01). Therefore, three out of 5 organization receiving USAID funds had

little choice in the matter and were pushed back to cooperate with USAID when these were (for a part) re-established during the Biden administration, often unwillingly.

Therefore, for many organizations it was a necessity to (re-)establish their financial relationship with USAID or the US government/consulate in order to continue the delivery of their services, since these donors had the largest grants to offer. As one organization declared: ‘ So we're trying to connect more with the USAID or other institutions in America. So we need them. We have no choice actually’ (Interview 6, 00:19:14).

The following sections will go into depth about the, for most of the organizations, transformation in the financial relation between the Palestinian organization and their US donors.

The organizations funded directly by USAID logically mentioned a large financial impact that the Trump’s presidency had on them by cutting the aid through originally channeled through this governmental body. All these organizations had to either cancel multiple projects or scale down on the size and/or content of the projects in order to still be able to execute them with little funding as organization 11 mentioned: ‘we were rethinking how we can be small project and submit smaller projects, not like the bigger projects submitted for the USAID and the American agencies’ (00:05:16).

Furthermore, out of 13 organizations, explicitly mentioned a strong preference for other donors than the US, and expressed deep concerns regarding the US funding, calling it ‘tainted’ (Interview 8) and ‘a political tool’ (Interview 10). Mostly the Europeans were mentioned as an alternative funding source. As one organization expressed: ‘ European support is more sustainable....and less sensitive for the political side and the different administrations’ (Interview 12, 00:19:13). This was confirmed by other organizations as well when asked what donor they would choose as a replacement for the Americans: ‘European, I will choose European. Because us Palestinian people, we are accepting the European more than the USAID’ (Organization 3, 00:34:00).

In addition, several organizations also proclaimed that USAID had lost credibility with a lot of Palestinian organizations, since they have become ‘an unreliable partner’ (Interview 2, 00:26:34). Another organization confirmed this statement, saying:

‘ Some people are now against it, because if you really want to take USAID money, it is a risk, because there is a cost involved. And if you're reliant on USAID money, then the consequences are huge’ (Interview 2, 00:27:30). In addition, regarding working with USAID one organization stated: ‘ I have these fears with them, you know.... Like walking on glass’ (Interview 3, 00:33:10).

Another aspect of the financial dimension would be whether the Trump administration had possibly also affected other donors and initiated a wave of donor withdrawal in the Palestinian case. None of the organizations indicated such a response from other donors, however many did mention a clear transformation of the conditions in which the, primarily European funds were distributed as they introduced regulations similar to the USAID. This was especially with regards to any anti-terrorism declarations and clauses:

‘In Arab we say if a bullet if it doesn't hit you, it will still annoy you... So I do believe like a lot of the allies of Americans, like Germany, started to ask for more aggressive papers. I don't think it's just coincidence that it happened during the eruption of Trump craziness’ (Interview 11, 00:21:34).

Another organization stated that the EU did not necessarily get pressured by the US to follow a similar approach, but in a way did change their policies slightly: ‘ I think it is the more systemically like the counterterrorism laws that now the European Union, for example, is also implementing, I think those subtle policies had greater impact on other donors..’ (Interview 2, 00:45:54).

B. Social contacts

Table 2 reveals that a majority of the Palestinian organizations had ‘social’ ties with US entities, such as American NGOs, the US embassy, consulate and/or close relationships with US local and domestic (governmental) officials. These could be potential or already existing partnerships with regards to mutual (humanitarian) projects, possibilities for entry to foreign states for the purpose of advocacy, and/or discussions on (future) donor relations. From the interviews it became clear that the social ties either vanished or lessened during the Trump presidency, remained untouched and on ‘standby mode’, or the social relationship with especially American based NGOs became stronger as they were trying to find mutual solutions for e.g. funding issues. In addition, in general Palestinian people and partner organizations did not withdraw from collaborations or participation out of principle against US involvement, even though the organization might be US based or funded.

Out of 8 organizations that had social ties with American governmental institutions (Congress, embassy, consulate), half expressed a clear deduction of communication and collaborations with the institutes. Three of the relationships ended unilaterally by the Americans, mostly since local US officials withdrew from projects and ended planned collaborations or exchanges. One of the Palestinian organizations ended the relationship with their American counterpart directly due to the deal of the century, calling it ‘out of principle’ (Interview 3, 00:37:18). Four organizations have their headquarters in the States and were in that sense completely reliable and attached to their American counterparts.

However, most of the Palestinian organization were not opposed to the American organizations, stating that they could distinguish between policies from the American government and policies initiated by the organizations themselves. Therefore, the social ties between the American and Palestinians on the organizational level did not alter in a negative sense. Because ‘we don’t blame people for their government policies’ (Interview 2, 00:28:46). Rather, some bonds deepened as they intensified their collaborations to find new sources of funding.

Thirdly, the effects of the deal of the century on the Palestinian people and subsequently their perception and behavior towards American- funded organizations were limited. The vast majority of the organizations did not encounter any participant withdrawal from the Palestinian people in their projects even though they would mention how displeased the Palestinian people were with the US during that period: ‘The public and political impact was huge... the Palestinian felt like they got a major blow from the US’ (Interview 1, 00:33:48).

C. The emotional impact

This last theme discusses the emotional impact that the deal of the century had on the Palestinian organizations, focusing on the most harmful policies of the Donald Trump presidency and the perceptions of the Palestinian organizations towards these events.

The interviews clearly display a negative picture towards the US and Donald Trump including his policies. Most of the organizations were displeased with all aspects of the Deal of the Century, with two major outliers which are largely connected, namely the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the relocation of the US embassy from Tel Aviv (the official capital of Israel) to Jerusalem. No positive remarks were made in these contexts. Also, the lion’s share of the organizations do not perceive the US as a trustworthy partner anymore and describe their partiality and bias in the Palestinian case. However, most of their perceptions regarding President Trump were very overlapping, calling him at least transparent in his pro-Israeli stance, unlike previous administrations.

Two major elements of the policies of the Trump administration were verified as the most harmful policies. Interestingly, these would often differ between the personal perception of the interviewee and the organization they are representing. When asked which policy was the most harmful for the organization, either the moving of the embassy was mentioned (complicated e.g. visa procedures, jeopardizing foreign fundraising opportunities etc.), or the large cut of financial aid. However, many participants (6/13) mentioned the symbolic recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel as the one that was the most harmful, stating: ‘...the heart of the whole thing is Jerusalem. So if you take the heart, then the rest is nothing’ (Interview 4, 00:11:44).

Another organization stated: ‘ They [Arab nations] don't accept giving up the idea of that Jerusalem. The Arab Emirates, what they did recently during the complicated situation in Jerusalem, they lowered their relations with Israel. They don't accept this’ (Interview 12, 00:57:24).

Also, the humanitarian organization stated:

‘ Because really like it means a lot for us. I'm 31 years old. I went to Jerusalem only one time... when I was nine years old. So from that time until today, I haven't been there. I applied for permission like 10 times. But I didn't get it, because I'm an activist. It's not only me, most of the activists are banned or blacklisted. So really, like Jerusalem, means a lot. If you are Palestinian you will not accept that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. It's the capital of Palestine and it will be one day. It is a deep feeling inside us (Interview 13, 00:09:59).

In addition, all organizations had negative connotations towards the Trump administration and the Deal of the century, calling the US government for example ‘biased’, ‘shameful’, and even ‘stupid’. Several organizations stated that these policies have damaged the relationship between the Palestinians and Americans on the long-term: ‘ But what is important also that this created gaps and distrust between the Palestinians and even any American government, even with the Biden administration when he tried to reverse the Trump policies’ (Interview 1, 00:33:48). In total seven out of 13 organizations reaffirmed this and stated they do not trust the US as a partner. Another stated:

‘It reinforced that you cannot trust American foreign policy. So I think it did raise questions around the commitment of the US to international treaties and agreements they reach. And now I think any government to sign an agreement to the American and say, OK, how many years is left in this administration, what it's worth signing it or let's wait for the next administration’ (Interview 2, 00:38:20).

The third element consisted of their general perception towards President Trump and his policies. An overwhelming majority of the participants (8/13) had a similar perspective and called the President: ‘frank’, ‘clear’, ‘honest’, ‘transparent’. One organization mentioned: ‘The other presidents were working under the table and Trump was working on the table’ (Interview 13, 00:40:16). This statement bringing up another important point, namely that – in the eyes of many of the Palestinians I spoke with – the Trump presidency was not perceived as being very different from previous administration. Rather it was perceived as just being more honest about their pro-Israeli stance: ‘the policies remain the same, only the puppet is different’ (Interview 6, 00:39:09). On the question whether the Trump presidency might also have had positive consequences, several organizations mentioned that at least now he ‘exposed the American policies’ and ‘people understand now what is happening’.

When asked if the participants think whether or not President Biden can restore the US/Palestinian relations on the ground, many were skeptical towards Biden’s involvement in the issue. One organization declared that ‘Biden needs to deal with us as he is dealing with the Israeli, treat us equally’ (Interview 13, 00:14:25). Another one mentioned that Biden might repair some of the damage: ‘I think so, but not as much as we hope ‘ (Interview 9, 00:20:59). A NGO with the headquarters in America stated:

‘They are saying that we are different than Trump, but on the ground there is no change. The USAID funds even if they restored some of the funding is still not enough. The political relation is still low. And the gap or the distrust is increasing, you know, between the Palestinian officials and the Americans’ (Interview 1, 00:47:53).

VII. Conclusion/Discussion

Conclusion

This objective of this research was to gain insights regarding a potential change in decision-making of local Palestinian organizations caused by the policies of the Trump presidency. The main research question therefore was defined as ‘How do local Palestinian organizations perceive their relationship with American (non-) state partners as being affected by the Trump presidency?’. For this question to be answered several sub-questions were formulated. Below I summarize what my interviews and findings tell us about each of these questions in turn.

The first sub-question was with regard to whether or not the policies of the Trump presidency in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict transformed the relationship between the American entities and the Palestinian organizations. The short answer: yes, they did. The majority of the organizations strongly distrust the American governmental institutions and would prefer not working with them anymore, a phenomenon made worse by the policies of President Trump in particular his symbolic policy of assigning Jerusalem as the Israeli capital. Importantly, they also suggested that his actions caused long-term damage to earlier American/Palestinian local relationships. When asked if the Biden administration could restore or repair those damaged bonds, the organizations in general answered they would prefer no US involvement at all if the US could not be an impartial and neutral actor that respected international law and human rights. Many of the organizations were skeptical with regards to President Biden’s involvement, stating they expect not a dramatic change from US policy over the years.

Thirdly, when asked what the key foreign policy events during the Trump’s presidency were that transformed this relationship the most, the overwhelming majority of the respondents told me it was the symbolic recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. This immediately answered the sub-question on whether or not the symbolic foreign policy elements in the Deal of the Century, namely the allocation of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital, was key in transforming the relation between the Americans and the Palestinian organizations. The participants emphasized that this was a policy that hit many Palestinians on the personal level and left many negative connotations towards the American government and its institutions. This negative picture clearly visualized the perceptions of the Palestinian organizations towards the Donald Trump Presidency as well, as interviewees highlighted the idiocracy of his policies.

Finally, the fourth sub-question asks to what extent this transformation occurred on a financial, social and/or emotional level. The results indicate that Donald Trump’s Presidency mostly impacted the financial and emotional levels. Financially, organizations with a large portion from their funding coming from USAID lost a substantial portion of their funding, had to fire personnel, and cut down on their services and unfortunately were not able to replace the funding by finding other donors. This was independent on the type or size of the organization, as most of the organizations receiving USAID were NGOs. Organizations with multiple sources of funding, including European donors and the UN, were not heavily affected by Trump’s withdrawal of US funding. Socially, in particular the relationship between the organization and US officials either was paused or limited unilaterally by the Americans, not the Palestinians as they distinguished between American individuals and the state. However, the formal relationships with other American organizations or individual ties remained untouched and in some cases even bloomed as these organizations stepped in to help the Palestinian

organizations recover from the financial blow. Finally, the emotional impact of the Trump presidency was overwhelmingly negative and clearly marked the bias of the president himself as well as the bias in his policies. The positive remarks towards his policies were with regards to the transparency of the pro-Israeli attitude that the Americans showed during the Trump period contrary to the silent diplomacy of previous administrations.

Looking back at the main research questions, we can conclude that the Donald Trump presidency has left an unmistakably large footprint on the relationships with Palestinian organizations and transformed their relationship on all three levels. The symbolic gesture of the recognition of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital and thereby denying the Palestinian claim on the holy city has left strong negative sentiments towards the American government in general, which will most likely impact their relationship on the long-term with Palestinian unwillingness to cooperate with American governmental institutes. This has confirmed there is a link between the effects of foreign policy by an external state on the perception of local organizations towards these actors which could potentially alter their behavior and decision-making towards these external actors, as we have seen in the case of the Trump presidency.

This research has opted to see whether the symbolic actions of the Donald Trump peace-plan were the most critical sections that have shaped the relationship of the American and Palestinians on a local level. Indeed, this research emphasizes the key role of symbolic gestures in these behavioral changes as they have impacted Palestinian representatives on a deeper emotional level and thus altered the direction of the organization. The transformation that occurred was largely on the financial spectrum as Palestinian organizations refuse to re-instate their donor status with the Americans.

Discussion

The conclusion of this research states that the perception of Palestinian organizations has definitely been impacted by the policies brought forwards by the Trump administration and altered their perception and in some cases their behavior towards this external actor. Therefore, the underlying concept of this research affirms that foreign policy, even if it is only symbolic of nature, could have real practical consequences on the ground.

As we can see in the Palestinian case, the symbolic recognition of Jerusalem by an external actor has had tangible impact on various aspects of governance, public perception and even policies of (former) local partners. Interestingly, this symbolic gesture had more impact on the Palestinian perspective than other physical manifestations directly derived from the Trump policies such as the withdrawal of financial aid and.

The notion of political symbolism having an unintentional legitimizing function has been acknowledged by Olsen (1983) rather than being a political instrument of manipulation or effective influence. As we can see in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, even though internationally the allocation of Jerusalem to Israel was not being recognized and the Palestinian leadership rejected the deal, the Palestinian people still felt the effects of this symbolic action. Protests in the Palestinian territories and Jerusalem quickly followed and there was much fear that Jerusalem was lost as Israel would revoke the residency rights of more Palestinians for whom Jerusalem is home.

In addition, in fact the whole Deal of the Century could be considered a symbolic plan from the United States to Israel in an effort to strengthen their diplomatic, military and economic bonds. As the deal was rejected completely by the Palestinians and the international community, the deal should have no significance. However, the symbolic legitimacy of this deal comes into play. Several participants also indicated that after Trump's deal of the century, the Israeli claim to the city intensified as the violence towards Palestinians living in Jerusalem erupted, settlements increased and Israeli cooperation with Palestinian organization inside the city vanished. As one organization called it 'it attacked the

legitimacy of the Palestinian organizations' (Interview 1, 00:12:22). Thus, it once again emphasized the practical and physical consequences a symbolic gesture could have.

Even though the literature on symbolic politics and their effects is substantial, little evidence can be found on the direct link between (symbolic) foreign policy and their effects on grass root organizations with regards to their perception towards these governmental bodies. Evidently, many Palestinian organizations acknowledged the biased nature of the American administrations and the transparency that was finally bestowed upon them in the Trump era. Therefore, the Trump presidency was a clear confirmation of US diplomacy and vision for the Israeli cause, thereby neglecting Palestinian rights.

During the 2016 campaign of Donald Trump, he gave the idea of being impartial and neutral in the matter, however once in power it became evident that he followed the policies of Israeli prime-minister Netanyahu and not coincidentally, one of his biggest campaign contributors Sheldon Adelson. As Gurtov (2020, p 40) states ' He [Donald J. Trump] seemed out to destroy strategic consistency and diplomatic tradition'.

In addition, also the Palestinian organizations perception on the American involvement in their own organizations changed drastically in terms of practical consequences. As they did not previously and do not now consider the US a trustworthy partner, the deal was a turning point in the actual behavioral changes that were implemented by the Palestinian organizations as they now preferred to limit their cooperation with American governmental bodies. As I argued in this research, the deal of the century has generated a critical juncture in the overall relationship of the US government with Palestinian organizations. Thus the theoretical implications of this research include, but are not limited to, the emotional impact that external foreign policymakers could have on internal organizations which eventually could transform the relationship of these entities.

In terms of the financial consequences of the Trump presidency, this research does confirm already existing literature on the consequences of donor withdrawal in general. On the one hand donor withdrawal threatens the mere existence of civil society and local NGOs and detrimentally influences their capacity of service delivery. However, as Pallas & Nguyen (2017) proclaimed, the loss of donor funding also encourages, I argue rather forces, local organizations to increase their autonomy and explore innovate solutions, including mobilizing other more sustainable sources of funding. Some authors even note an increasing role for the state as donors begin to withdraw their direct aid to civil society and local organizations (Appel & Pallas, 2018). However, since one of the biggest contributors to the Palestinian Authority, the governmental body of the Palestinian territories, is also the US, this could have been difficult in this context as none of the organizations mentioned turning to the state for additional funding (Shaban, 2022). Thereby, supporting literature that the effectiveness of this strategy appears to be particularly depending on the compliance and/or the possibilities within the state bodies (Appel & Pallas, 2018)..

Although, several authors do declare that the changing aid landscape affects the effectiveness and survival of local organizations and grows their frustration. Especially in an environment where there are limited alternative funding opportunities (Arhin, 2016; Kumi, 2017). As one organization expressed: ' during that period, we were not ready to change the structure of our political system, our social system, our financial or economic vision, because we had to change everything'. Thus indicating that donor withdrawal should commence steadily and should allow for time to the organizations to adjust to the new reality. Therefore, the practical applicability of this research could also inspire a change in the approach of (external) donors whenever there could potentially be a period of donor withdrawal. However, the field of aid reductions is still fairly new and their implications and consequences should be examined further.

Limitations

This research has been executed in the Westbank Palestine primarily and has been focused on organizations that, besides offering humanitarian assistance, also were often involved in pro-Palestinian advocacy programs. Thus this research may have, by means of geographical selection, included mostly organizations with an already existing anti-US, anti-Trump tendency. This is important because their perception towards the US and their involvement on a local or diplomatic level might be clouded due to negative associations of the past. A difference of their perception because of the Trump presidency might already be more negative in general, thus complicating the detailed questions on which policies actually brought about those negative sentiments.

In addition, the participatory organizations could have their own interests in complying with the research. For one, some of the organizations hoped this research would give them a 'voice' in the West and for that expectation might have used verbally harsher or more definite language to express their feelings and thoughts towards the US. Secondly, perhaps interviewees hoped that the notion of financial hardship might encourage Western institutions and humanitarian organizations to increase their aid or enhance their cooperation with either new or already existing Palestinian counterparts/partners. Media attention in the West (or in the Netherlands) in general might have been a desirable expectation to enter this research. Not only for exposure for the Palestinian cause, but also depicting the harmful policies to these organizations and their need for financial assistance.

Thirdly, as in any research there was definitely some researcher bias involved. As the core of this research focuses on the Palestinian perspective, it almost completely neglects the reality, reasons and arguments of the Americans. It thereby shapes a reality in which there is a 'perpetrator' and a 'victim' and these roles have been clearly assigned already through the language used in the interview, the cooperative stance of the researcher towards the Palestinians, and the obvious notion that the daily life of the researcher was solely in the Westbank. Therefore, there could be hints of confirmation bias throughout the research process. Besides that, there was no researcher triangulation as the main researcher collected and analyzed all data.

On the other hand, immersion within the Westbank has been enlightening to obtain a deeper understanding of the Palestinian people, their communication styles, and the Palestinian culture. Since this research already focused on the Palestinian perspective, being completely surrounded within this perspective has definitely been valuable to the quality and interpretation of the data. In addition, there has been some location triangulation as the research focused on organizations in the entire Westbank, Israel, and expanded further than solely one region.

Also, the underlying philosophical assumptions regarding the data collection, analysis and interpretation have been executed from most-likely an interpretivist approach. In this qualitative research, I have focused on in-depth exploration of subjective perceptions and opinions and context. I acknowledge the fact that as a researcher, I have had a clear say in the direction of this research, the way the interview questions were formulated and presented, verbal and non-verbal communication styles that could have acknowledge or discouraged certain opinions in the participants and thereby could have influenced the research process.

This research also offers many opportunities for future research as the direct links between external policies and local effects has not been a widely studied area. Many unanswered questions remain and there is potential for new theories as this research does not fully grasp the entire story even in the Palestinian case. Interesting would be the development of civil society and local organisations over the long term and whether the evolution of these organizations are impacted positively or negatively in response to this action. Also, it would be interesting to see if the Biden administration can indeed change the perception of the Palestinian organizations for the better, as many organizations did offer clear points of potential restoration (e.g. the re-establishment of financial aid, neutrality in their role as

a mediator, adherence to international law, human rights and formerly established treaties). Naturally, larger philosophical questions also arise with regards to the overall involvement of the US in the world and the role they have assigned/were assigned to. Many organizations did not appreciate the anti-terrorism clause as there were large concerns with respect to the overall definition of terrorism and the biased allocation of the term to certain groups rather than governments that are involved in the same practices.

Overall, this research suggests a first step in discovering the elements of the impact the foreign policy of one state could have directly on local organizations in another state.

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Appendix A. Interview Questions

A. Interview questions

Hello and welcome to the interview regarding US/Palestinian relations on the local level. My name is Yalda Alam, I will be the main interviewer. This is Ameera, the coordinator of the Palestinian Center and also your translator in case you would like help in finding the correct words in English. As we have discussed before, this interview will be max 1.5 hours. Your answers will be recorded and anonymously stored and analyzed. Importantly, your name or the organization's name will not be traceable at all so please feel free to answer as honestly and precisely as possible. This interview can be stopped at any moment. If there are no questions as of now, we will commence the interview.

1. Could you please state your function at the organization?
2. Could you state the kind of organization that you are the representative of?

NGO, non-profit organization, humanitarian, research etc?

- 2a. Does this organization have any more branches?
- 2b. Where?

3. Could you define the relation that you have with the USA at the moment?

3a. Please specify as much as possible; financial, social, individual? Do you have US partners? Who? At what level to they operate?

Financially

3b. Did you have a direct relation with the US government, the US embassy or the US consulate in Tel Aviv? Including USAID?

3c. Did you have an indirect relation with the US, e.g. through funding by the UNRWA? Or through the PA?

3d. Does the US have any saying in the policies or services of your organization?

3e. If yes, through what way?

3f. Does this relation differ between branches, specifically between Israeli located or Palestinian located?

4. How would you say was the relationship before the Trump presidency, so before Jan 2017? What was the general perception?

5. Were/Are you in any way dependent on the USA for the execution of services?

5a. Does the US relation prohibit you from certain services that you would have liked to offer? For instance, through the Anti-terrorism clause?

5b. If yes, which services, for which group?

5c. Why do you think that is?

5d. Do you agree or disagree with these 'restrictions'? Why?

6. Did your relationship (aka the relationship of the organization) change during the Trump presidency?

7a. If yes, in what way?

If financially: Did the revision of the tax cut for US charities below small amounts influence the organization?

IF symbolically: Did the harsher Anti-terrorism clause which allows Palestinians to be charged in the USA impact the work of the organization?

7b. Do you consider this change positively or negatively? Why?

7c. Is there a main event that changed your perception? If so, what?

7d. What were the consequences for the organization because of these changes? How did the organization deal with the consequences of the Trump policies?

Searching other donors? Ending partnerships? Firing employees due to lack of funding?

7e. Did it change or influence personal ties with US personnel/colleagues?

7f. In 2018 the Palestinian prime minister called for a complete boycott of US assistance. Did that event impact the organization?

8. Is there a difference between the perception of the organization and your own perspective?

9. If the recipients of the organization know that your projects are US funded, or in any other way related to US organizations and partnerships, how do they react?

10. Do people stop /start participating in your projects, because of this US involvement?

11. Have you experienced any differences in the approach by the American organizations or partnerships during the Trump presidency? How about afterwards?

12. The Trump presidency executed many different orders in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict including the deal of the century. Are you familiar with this concept?

12a. If yes, what US policy stood out to you the most? Why?

12b. What was general perception on this deal?

12c. What is the word that comes to mind first when you think about the Trump policies?

12d. What is the emotion that you feel when you think about the Trump policies?

12e. If you could choose from this list, which policy would you reverse first? Why?

Insert deal of the century proposals

13. Did you notice a change in the approach of other foreign actors towards your organization? EU, UN etc.?

14. Do you think the Trump presidency also had positive effects on your organization? And on the ground in general?

15. Do you think your organization can restore their relation with the US? How?

What is the primary element that the US under Biden has to present in order to restore these damaged relations?