



המכון ליחסים בינלאומיים  
ע"ש לאונרד דייוויס  
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*The Leonard Davis Institute  
for International Relations*



Konrad  
-Adenauer-  
Stiftung

# Mediation in the Arab-Israeli Conflict During and After the Cold War

Saadia Touval



The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

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# Mediation in the Arab-Israeli Conflict During and After the Cold War

*Saadia Touval*

Davis Occasional Papers  
The Leonard Davis Institute

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## Introduction

A comparison of mediation efforts in the Arab-Israeli conflict during and after the Cold War reveals important differences between the two periods. It suggests that the international context, and specifically the relations between great powers, played a major role in shaping mediation efforts. This paper discusses and compares two aspects of this mediation process during and after the Cold War, namely, initiatives to mediate, and outcomes.

To be sure, the interventions of mediators and the outcomes of their efforts reflected numerous factors. I do not assume that relations between the great powers alone determined the course of peacemaking. It is, nevertheless, worthwhile to trace the influence of these relations on the mediation initiatives and their consequences.

My discussion is based on certain premises about mediation in international politics. To begin with, mediation is a foreign policy instrument. Furthermore, states resort to the mediation of other people's conflicts not only for humanitarian goals, but also in pursuit of their own foreign policy and domestic interests.<sup>1</sup> An evaluation of mediation efforts must therefore adopt a dual perspective: how well did the mediation serve the mediator's political goals, and how successful was the mediation in reducing the conflict?

In addition, the foreign policy interests pursued through mediation can be competitive as well as noncompetitive. When pursued as an instrument of competitive power politics, mediation can serve both to defend the

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1 For a detailed discussion of mediation, see I. William Zartman and Saadia Touval, "International Mediation in the Post-Cold War Era," in Chester A. Crocker and Fen Osler Hampson with Pamela Aall, eds., *Managing Global Chaos* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 1996), 445-461.

mediator's geopolitical interests and to improve its position by expanding its power and influence at the expense of a rival. But when resorted to outside the context of a rivalry, mediation can serve to assert a diplomatic presence, to promote the mediator's status, or to cultivate relations with one or both disputants.

How the disputants react to the intervention of mediators depends on their expectations as to whether it will advance or hinder their goals. Even when they do not think mediation will work in their favor, they may still cooperate with the mediator because they fear that rebuffing mediation attempts may be more harmful than accepting them. They may also cooperate because they see benefits in developing relations with the mediator. In that case the concessions they grant are meant to promote relations with the mediator, and only secondarily with the adversary. In a competitive environment, mediation efforts may be frustrated when disputants believe they can gain support from other actors who can outbid the mediator's incentives, or reduce the cost of the mediator's pressures. In a noncompetitive context, mediation may still be frustrated if disputants do not attach enough importance to complying with the mediator's aims.

This perspective on mediation can foster a set of expectations about mediation in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Assuming that the motivation to intervene is stronger when the mediator seeks to protect its security interests in a competitive context than when it aims to pursue its diplomatic interests in a noncompetitive setting, one might expect mediation attempts to have been more frequent and intensive during the Cold War than in the post-Cold War period. One might also expect mediation efforts to have been less successful in achieving settlements in the former than in the latter period, when mediation would presumably be less likely to be undermined by spoilers.

Obviously, this is a simplistic model. Reality is much more complex, and an examination of the historical record reveals a somewhat different picture. Nevertheless, such assumptions offer a useful starting point for a comparison of mediation efforts in the two periods.

## Mediation During the Cold War

### *The Interests Driving Mediation Initiatives*

The history of the Arab-Israeli peace process indicates that most of the mediation initiatives during the Cold War were undertaken by the United States. Usually it acted on its own, but sometimes it engaged the United Nations. There were a few departures from the pattern of U.S.-initiated mediation, when the two rival superpowers acted in concert,<sup>2</sup> or when other third parties provided limited assistance in the form of good offices (e.g., Romania, Morocco).

U.S. interests in the Middle East are well known, and can be summarized as access to oil, ability to deploy military forces in the region and the denial of such capability to its rivals, and a commitment to Israel's security. What needs to be clarified is how the protection and promotion of these interests were pursued by mediating between Arabs and Israelis.

The United States resorted to mediation for various reasons. Some were related to domestic politics. Thus, when facing conflicting pressures from pro-Israeli groups, oil industry lobbies, and pro-Arab groups, U.S. administrations found it convenient to position themselves in the middle as a peacemaker. This was a low-risk tactic for deflecting such pressures, while preserving an administration's freedom of action.

Mediation was also an instrument in the conflict with the Soviet Union. In the early years of the Cold War, the United States was greatly concerned that Arab resentment at Western support for Israel, reinforced by the strong anticolonialist sentiments prevailing in the Arab world, might propel some Arab states to seek Soviet backing in their struggles. Settling the Arab-Israeli conflict was seen as a way to reduce Soviet opportunities for gaining a foothold in what was then a Western-dominated region.

2 For a comprehensive discussion of great power conflict and collaboration with respect to regional conflicts, see Benjamin Miller, *When Opponents Cooperate* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

Demonstrating that the United States and the West could help the Arabs to win concessions from Israel, it was thought, would further strengthen Arab links to the West and weaken their proclivities toward the Soviets.

To counter the Soviets both politically and militarily, the United States also sought to establish a regional defense organization. The unresolved Arab-Israeli dispute made the participation of both the Arab states and Israel unlikely. The project was also hindered by the long-running dispute between Egypt and Britain. Consequently, the United States worked to resolve both of these disputes. It contributed to the conclusion of the October 1954 Anglo-Egyptian agreement on the withdrawal of British forces from Egypt. An Arab-Israeli settlement, however, remained elusive.

Initially, in 1948 and 1949, the United States was content to exert its influence behind the scenes, through the UN mediators Folke Bernadotte and Ralph Bunche. During 1949–1951, the United States mediated under the aegis of a three-nation UN Conciliation Commission (the other members being France and Turkey).

In 1955, after the Soviet Union promised to supply Egypt with military assistance, President Eisenhower sent a special representative, Robert Anderson, to mediate between Egypt and Israel. The United States apparently hoped that easing tensions with Israel would help dissuade Egypt from developing its new military relationship with the Soviets. However, these mediation attempts failed. Egypt as well as Syria and Iraq aligned themselves with the Soviet Union, and cooperated with it in undermining Western influence in the Middle East and Africa.

The outcomes of the 1967 war, and the Arab inability to regain the territories lost to Israel, gave the United States an opportunity to persuade Egypt to realign. The process began with the mediation of the 1970 cease-fire along the Suez Canal. As explained by Henry Kissinger, the purpose of that mediation initiative was “to expel the Soviet military presence” and to try “to get a settlement in such a way that the moderate regimes are

strengthened.”<sup>3</sup> Although Soviet-Egyptian relations weakened, the Soviet Union maintained its presence for three more years. It was the 1973 war, and Kissinger’s mediation of the 1974 and 1975 disengagement agreements involving substantial Israeli withdrawals, that led President Sadat to terminate the alliance with the Soviets, and helped the United States to establish a dialogue with Syria.

A further consideration contributed to the U.S. mediation initiatives in 1970 and 1973–1974: the risk that an Arab-Israeli war would escalate out of control and draw in the superpowers. The 1973 U.S. nuclear alert underlines this point. The concern that an Arab-Israeli war might lead to a U.S.-Soviet confrontation made it all the more urgent for the United States to reduce Arab-Israeli tensions.

Although these motivations were undoubtedly sufficient, mediation efforts in 1973–1974 unavoidably became linked to the embargo that had been imposed by Arab oil producers on sales to the United States. It was the opening of the Syrian-Israeli disengagement talks in March 1974 that helped persuade Saudi Arabia and other Arab states to suspend the embargo, and it was the conclusion of this agreement that led to the formal ending of the embargo in June 1974.<sup>4</sup>

In 1977, the Carter administration attempted to mediate a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement. A major motivation for this initiative was the desire to prevent another oil crisis. The initiative sought to combine the protection of U.S. interests in the Middle East with the broader goal of détente in U.S.-Soviet relations, by associating the Soviets with the U.S. mediation through the reconvening of the Geneva Conference under joint U.S.-Soviet sponsorship. Egyptian and Israeli opposition to this initiative, however, forced the United States to change its strategy and broker the

3 Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), 579–580; Marvin Kalb and Bernard Kalb, *Kissinger* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), 193.

4 Saadia Touval, *The Peace Brokers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 251–252, 362, n. 33.

Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty on its own. Although this treaty was a major achievement, it contributed to heightening Palestinian, Syrian, and Soviet anxieties.

In contrast to the 1977 Carter initiative, which sought to protect oil supplies that might be threatened by an Arab-Israeli war, the Reagan administration focused its concerns on the Soviet Union. Initially, it did not seek to protect U.S. interests through mediation, but rather through strategic cooperation with its Middle Eastern allies. It turned to mediation only when Israel's war in Lebanon threatened to harm U.S.-Arab relations. In reaction it promulgated the Reagan Plan, aimed at settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but as this initiative faltered, the United States adopted the more limited goal of mediating a Lebanese-Israeli peace treaty.<sup>5</sup>

Even as the Cold War was winding down, the United States remained concerned about the threats to the region's stability posed by the continuing Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. In seeking to design a framework for resuming the peace process, Secretaries of State George Shultz (in 1988) and James Baker (in 1989) continued to be guided by the principle of minimizing opportunities for the Soviets to influence the process through an international conference.<sup>6</sup>

The Soviet Union's responses to these numerous efforts to mediate an Arab-Israeli settlement varied according to the vicissitudes of the super-power rivalry in the Middle East. Until about 1950, the Soviet Union was strongly critical of any mediation. Viewing the UN mediators—Bernadotte,

5 On the impact of Reagan's worldview on U.S. policy in the Middle East, see William B. Quandt, "U.S. Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict," in William B. Quandt, ed., *The Middle East Ten Years After Camp David* (Washington: Brookings Institute, 1988), 361ff.

6 Ibid., 378; Abraham Ben-Zvi, *Between Lausanne and Geneva: International Conferences and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1989), 89–92; Laura Zittrain Eisenberg and Neil Caplan, *Negotiating Arab-Israeli Peace* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 66.

Bunche, and the Conciliation Commission—as seeking to protect the West’s political and military position in the Middle East, the Soviet Union called for the replacement of mediation by direct negotiations between Israel and the Arab states. Later, the Soviets tried to persuade the United States to include them as an equal partner in peacemaking efforts, either through bilateral U.S.-Soviet initiatives or through some multilateral forum. They also advocated a greater role for the United Nations, where their influence had increased at the West’s expense.<sup>7</sup>

These demands have been explained as reflecting a Soviet desire to be recognized as equal to the other superpower. They were probably also motivated, however, by the desire to protect the Soviets’ positions in the Arab world. When the United States told the Arabs that the only way to obtain Israeli concessions was by cooperating with Washington, the Soviets had difficulty countering this assertion. The best the Soviets could do was to try to persuade the United States that the Soviet Union’s influence with Syria and the Palestinians made it an indispensable partner for peacemaking.

Overall, U.S. policy was not much influenced by these claims. Instead, it was largely shaped by the conception that the two superpowers were geopolitical rivals; hence, the United States’ long-term strategic perspective was zero-sum. Only on a few occasions did the United States appear willing to associate the Soviets with its peacemaking diplomacy. Cooperation with the Soviets was deemed necessary to defuse the crises of 1967–1969 and 1973. The United States was also willing to try a cooperative effort in 1977, within the context of the new attempt at *détente* in the early period of the Carter administration, and again in the late 1980s as the Cold War was winding down.

No other states made any significant attempts to mediate the conflict. The Europeans deferred to the U.S. desire to be in sole control of

7 Touval, *Peace Brokers*, 75, 84; Ben-Zvi, *Between Lausanne and Geneva*, 92–104.

peacemaking diplomacy, and there were no other serious contenders for the role.

### *Outcomes of Mediation Efforts*

In assessing the outcomes of mediation, I shall use a simple dichotomy: a successful mediation was one that produced an agreement, a failed mediation was one that did not. The degree to which the agreement was implemented and adhered to, its durability, and its effect on the subsequent dynamics of the conflict are not considered here as criteria of success or failure.

The U.S.-Soviet rivalry was only one of several factors that combined to generate outcomes. The question addressed here is whether and how it affected the disputants' reactions to mediators' attempts to get them to change their policies. Also, were disputants able to avoid changing their policies by drawing support from other actors?

It is useful to distinguish between two periods. During the first, 1948–1953, the Middle East was a Western sphere of influence, and the Cold War influenced peacemaking in the conflict only via the *potential* of Soviet intrusion into the region. During the second period, 1954–1989, the Soviet Union was actually present in the region, actively supporting some of the Arab parties in their struggle against Israel and in their efforts to resist mediators' attempts at influence.

During the first period, Israel may have derived some encouragement from Soviet urgings that it stand firm and refuse concessions demanded by the Western-sponsored mediators. Czechoslovakia, already under Soviet domination, was Israel's principal supplier of weapons. Moreover, the Soviet bloc supported some of Israel's diplomatic positions in the United Nations, including the view that a settlement should be negotiated directly between the Arab parties and Israel rather than through mediators.<sup>8</sup> This

8 Moshe Zak, *Israel and the Soviet Union: A Forty Years Dialogue* (Tel Aviv: Ma'ariv, 1988), 369–370.

Israeli position stemmed mainly from its apprehensions that Western mediation would generate pressure on it to make concessions, whereas if direct negotiations were to take place such pressures would be greatly reduced.

The successful mediations during the first period concerned cease-fire and armistice agreements. Their success was attributable mainly to the disputants' having been exhausted from the war, and having reached hurting stalemates. The Cold War had no noticeable effect on the outcomes of these mediations. Nor did it contribute to the failure of attempts to reach a comprehensive political settlement. These attempts failed mainly because the terms proposed by the mediators fell far short of the disputants' aspirations, or because their domestic political costs to the disputants were prohibitive.

As mentioned, during the second period, 1954–1989, the Soviet Union was present in the Middle East. Some of Israel's Arab adversaries were aligned with it and received substantial military and political support from it and its allies. The U.S.-Soviet rivalry had a major impact on the region's politics, and affected mediation outcomes as well.

Given the intense rivalry between the blocs, the Soviets were interested in thwarting Western designs, including Western efforts to promote a partial or comprehensive settlement of the conflict. The failure of several major mediation efforts can to a significant extent be attributed to Soviet diplomacy.

After the conclusion of the Egyptian-Czech arms deal, the 1955–1956 U.S. efforts to reduce Egyptian-Israeli tensions failed in large measure because Egypt believed that it could rely on Soviet support and could safely reject U.S. proposals. Israel, in taking the stance of rejecting U.S. mediation unless the United States first agreed to supply it with weapons to compensate for the weapons Egypt was receiving from the Soviet bloc, may have been influenced by France's entry into the fray as Israel's ally against Egypt and provider of military assistance. France's involvement inevitably weakened the thrust of U.S. diplomacy.

France's alliance with Israel was not directly related to the Cold War. Nevertheless, the ability of Egypt and Israel to draw on the support of other actors demonstrates how mediation can be frustrated by the intervention of additional parties.

Several of the post-1967 U.S.-led mediations also failed because of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry. Up to 1970, Egypt's and Syria's confidence in Soviet support, and Israel's confidence in U.S. support, encouraged the disputants to be uncompromising in their attitudes toward the Jarring mission and toward the 1969 Rogers Plan.

A different dynamic that also emanated from the Cold War led to the failure of the Carter administration's 1977 initiative for joint U.S.-Soviet mediation of a comprehensive settlement between Israel and all of the Arab parties. Israel opposed the proposal not only because it rejected the PLO as a partner, but also because it feared that the joint superpower sponsorship would intensify the dynamic of U.S.-Soviet competition for Arab sympathy, leaving Israel isolated and endangered. Egypt objected to the proposal because it was eager to obtain the rapid return of the Sinai and this seemed within reach via U.S. mediation between Egypt and Israel, whereas a conference involving both superpowers along with all of the parties to the conflict would presumably encounter numerous obstacles, indefinitely delaying Egypt's regaining of the Sinai.

Probably the most formidable obstacle to the Reagan Plan's success was Israel's opposition. But the plan's fate was sealed when King Hussein withdrew his initial endorsement. Reportedly, he reversed his position because Soviet President Yuri Andropov warned him that the Soviet Union would use all its resources to oppose the plan, adding: "With due respect, all the weight will be on your shoulders, and they aren't broad enough to bear it."<sup>9</sup>

The 1983 U.S.-mediated agreement between Israel and Lebanon failed

9 Quoted in Quandt, "U.S. Policy," 367, n. 13.

because of Syria's opposition, which was in part influenced by Soviet support.

The Soviet Union also contributed to the unraveling of the Hussein-Arafat agreement of February 1985. According to Primakov, the Soviets opposed the agreement because they expected it would be "used in the interests of a new separate deal."<sup>10</sup> What concerned the USSR was presumably not only that its ally the PLO had made too many concessions to Jordan, which was aligned with the United States, but even more so, that the agreement might lead the PLO to abandon its Soviet patron, and open the way for a U.S.-led mediation with Israel.

Soviet opposition was only one of the reasons for the failure of the 1988 Shultz initiative. Shultz's proposal called for negotiations between Israel and a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, to be launched under the auspices of an international conference. According to Quandt, the Soviets opposed the proposal because they "wanted a real role in the negotiating process, not just an opportunity to legitimize a made-in-America initiative that would ultimately leave them on the sidelines."<sup>11</sup>

The contributions of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry to the failure of mediation efforts were to be expected. The successful mediations, however, seem more puzzling and require explanation.

In 1970, the United States succeeded in mediating the cease-fire between Egypt and Israel along the Suez Canal because the parties had got themselves into a hurting stalemate. Since the continuation of the war posed greater risks to its interests, the Soviet Union did not discourage Egypt from accepting the U.S.-mediated agreement. Continued war would have required increased Soviet military involvement and harmed relations with the United States; on the other hand, Egypt's predicament and

10 Evgeni M. Primakov, "Soviet Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict," in Quandt, *The Middle East*, 404.

11 Quandt, "U.S. Policy," 378.

dependence on Soviet aid led the Soviets to believe they would maintain their position in Egypt even after the cease-fire.

The successful outcomes of U.S. mediations following the 1973 war are easier to understand. As many have pointed out, the war demonstrated to Egypt and to Syria the limitations of the Soviet alliance. They both realized that Israeli withdrawals and other concessions were more likely to be attained by cooperating with the United States than by defying it. The subsequent success of the U.S. mediations between Egypt and Israel in 1975 and 1977–1979 were largely attributable to the new structure created by Egypt's realignment and entry into the U.S. camp. Both Egypt and Israel were now eager to cultivate relations with the United States.

## Mediation After the Cold War

In view of the Cold War's impact on mediation attempts from 1948 to 1989, one might have expected that in the absence of superpower rivalry the post-Cold War period would see fewer mediation initiatives. These few mediations would be less likely to be undermined by spoilers, and therefore more likely to succeed. In fact, in the new period the United States has taken a number of mediation initiatives, and remains the most active mediator between Israel and Arab actors.

### *The Interests Driving Post-Cold War Mediation Initiatives*

There have always been additional interests, besides the rivalry with the Soviets, motivating the United States to mediate and try to reduce the intensity of Arab-Israeli conflicts. Nevertheless, there are indeed a number of important differences between the two periods.

Basic U.S. interests remain the same as they were during the Cold War: the security of oil supplies, the ability to deploy military forces in the region, and Israel's security. The threats to these interests, however, now emanate mainly from within the region. The dynamics that might endanger

them are also different. Whereas during the Cold War the United States was concerned that the Soviet Union might exploit the Arab-Israeli conflict to undermine these interests, now the United States is worried about the threats posed by Islamic fundamentalism, by the domestic weaknesses of allied regimes, and by weapons of mass destruction.

The reduction of Arab-Israeli tensions can still serve to protect U.S. interests. This explains the U.S. initiative in convening the Madrid Conference following the Gulf War of 1991, and its continued efforts to mediate between Israel and the Palestinians and between Israel and Syria.

One of the potentially most effective Iraqi tactics to thwart U.S. efforts to obtain Arab states' cooperation in the Gulf War was the call to link Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait with Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories. Baker recalls in his memoirs that in assembling the coalition against Iraq, he "had repeatedly pledged that the United States would address the larger issues of the Middle East after the crisis had been resolved" and that "this promise" enabled him to repel efforts to link the invasion of Kuwait with the Arab-Israeli dispute.<sup>12</sup>

The ongoing tensions with Iraq after the 1991 war, and the Arab states' unwillingness to support a military operation against it in early 1998, have reminded the United States of the pressing need to settle the conflicts between Israel and the Palestinians and between Israel and Syria. It is expected that the resolution of these two conflicts would remove a major obstacle to political and military cooperation between the United States and Arab states. It might also help reduce the threat to the internal stability of Arab regimes, and remove a potential cause for a regional war with attendant disruptions of oil supplies.

Thus, new U.S. mediation initiatives, and indeed its intensive involve-

12 James A. Baker, III, with Thomas M. DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), 414.

ment in peacemaking, are explainable even in the absence of the rivalry with the Soviet Union.

A significant new element in the post-Cold War mediations is the involvement of additional mediators. Norway played the key role in mediating the Oslo accords between Israel and the PLO. The European Union has been active on the sidelines and maintains a roving ambassador, Miguel Moratinos, to assist the peace process. France (under its own flag, not the EU's) has been active in reducing Israeli-Syrian tensions, and was accepted as a member of the commission supervising the cease-fire following Israel's 1996 operation in Lebanon. Egypt has played an active role in mediating between Israel and the Palestinians. Russia, succeeding the Soviet Union as a cosponsor of the Madrid Conference, has won acceptance as a formal legitimizing patron of the peace process. Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev was one of the witnesses attaching his signature to the 1993 Oslo accords, along with U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher. In addition, several states have been actively involved in chairing and facilitating the work of the multilateral forums established in Madrid.

The EU's increased involvement reflects intensified European concerns about the spread of radical Islam, and the challenge this poses to the security of oil supplies and the stability of Arab regimes. Radical Islam is also perceived as threatening because of the presence of large Muslim populations in some European countries, and the fear that instability may increase the flow of refugees and illegal immigrants. Besides security concerns, Europeans also believe that reduced Arab-Israeli tensions would further the development of Europe's trade and other economic relations with Middle Eastern states.

The involvement of additional parties and mediators is facilitated by a more relaxed U.S. attitude in this regard. It appears that the United States is less insistent on monopolizing the diplomatic efforts than it was during the Cold War. Although the United States occasionally displays some annoyance at the EU's and France's interventions, there is no indication

that it has made a serious effort to dissuade the European states from mediation.

The most obvious explanation for the United States' acceptance of additional actors' involvement in the peace process is that the process is no longer an element in a global struggle against a dangerous rival. In other words, they are not interfering with the United States' conduct of a global strategy. Moreover, none of these actors is a military rival; nor does any of them challenge the United States' continuing preeminence in leading the peace efforts. The acceptance of the Europeans is also partly attributable to the contribution they are making by providing economic assistance to the Palestinian Authority.

#### *Outcomes of Post-Cold War Mediation Efforts*

With the Soviet rival no longer obstructing mediation efforts, one might expect peace efforts since the end of the Cold War to be more successful. The record of the past eight years to some extent bears out this expectation.

A major achievement was the convening of the Madrid Conference on October 30, 1991. The gathering was not intended to settle any specific aspect of the Arab-Israeli conflict but only to assemble the main disputants for the purpose of launching negotiations under agreed terms of reference. The convening of the conference was remarkable in view of failed past attempts to persuade Israel, Syria, and the Palestinians to agree on terms of reference and meet together.

As in past attempts, the principal mediator was the United States. Its success was largely attributable to the weakening of Syria and the Palestinians as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Recognizing that it could no longer rely on Soviet support in case of war, and impressed by the United States' diplomatic and military success in the Gulf War earlier in the year, Syria showed greater flexibility than in the past, accepting U.S. proposals. The Palestinians found themselves in much greater difficulty. Not only were they deprived of diplomatic and military

assistance from the Soviet-bloc states, but the Palestinians' siding with Iraq during the Gulf crisis and consequent loss of support from Arab states had brought the PLO to a desperate condition. In these circumstances, the PLO, too, was eager to improve relations with the United States. It made major concessions, agreeing that the Palestinians be represented in Madrid within the framework of the Jordanian delegation, and that the Palestinian delegation not include individuals formally affiliated with the PLO. Israel, though always distrustful of an international conference, found it impossible to refuse to attend. The United States was able to point to Syrian and Palestinian acceptance of U.S. proposals, and credibly to warn that refusal would lead to Israel's isolation and to economic punishments by both the United States and the EU. Thus, Israel too had nowhere to turn, and reluctantly agreed to attend. Finally, a common reason why all parties accepted the invitation was the top priority they accorded to relations with the United States.

The most spectacular reflection of the changed global situation was the Israeli-Palestinian agreement concluded in Oslo in September 1993. This agreement, too, reflected the Palestinians' lack of alternative options in the wake of the Soviet collapse and the Gulf War. On Israel's side, it was made possible by the Labor Party's victory in the June 1992 elections. Israelis' perceptions of the threats they faced had been transformed with the Soviet collapse on the one hand and the trauma of the 1991 Iraqi missile attacks on the other. The changed perceptions produced a more relaxed Israeli attitude toward the Palestinians. They also stimulated the belief that an agreement with the Palestinians would help diminish anti-Israeli sentiments in the Arab world and in Iran, which, in turn, would slow down the drive to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

No less remarkable than the Israeli and Palestinian desire for an agreement was the identity of the third party. While the United States was mediating the official Israeli-Palestinian talks within the Madrid framework, Norway provided the good offices that produced the Oslo accords. Norway's role signified a more accepting U.S. attitude, allowing other

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With the Soviet rival no longer obstructing mediation efforts, one might expect peace efforts since the end of the Cold War to be more successful. The record of the past eight years to some extent bears out this expectation.

A major achievement was the convening of the Madrid Conference on October 30, 1991. The gathering was not intended to settle any specific aspect of the Arab-Israeli conflict but only to assemble the main disputants for the purpose of launching negotiations under agreed terms of reference. The convening of the conference was remarkable in view of failed past attempts to persuade Israel, Syria, and the Palestinians to agree on terms of reference and meet together.

As in past attempts, the principal mediator was the United States. Its success was largely attributable to the weakening of Syria and the Palestinians as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Recognizing that it could no longer rely on Soviet support in case of war, and impressed by the United States' diplomatic and military success in the Gulf War earlier in the year, Syria showed greater flexibility than in the past, accepting U.S. proposals. The Palestinians found themselves in much greater difficulty. Not only were they deprived of diplomatic and military

assistance from the Soviet-bloc states, but the Palestinians' siding with Iraq during the Gulf crisis and consequent loss of support from Arab states had brought the PLO to a desperate condition. In these circumstances, the PLO, too, was eager to improve relations with the United States. It made major concessions, agreeing that the Palestinians be represented in Madrid within the framework of the Jordanian delegation, and that the Palestinian delegation not include individuals formally affiliated with the PLO. Israel, though always distrustful of an international conference, found it impossible to refuse to attend. The United States was able to point to Syrian and Palestinian acceptance of U.S. proposals, and credibly to warn that refusal would lead to Israel's isolation and to economic punishments by both the United States and the EU. Thus, Israel too had nowhere to turn, and reluctantly agreed to attend. Finally, a common reason why all parties accepted the invitation was the top priority they accorded to relations with the United States.

The most spectacular reflection of the changed global situation was the Israeli-Palestinian agreement concluded in Oslo in September 1993. This agreement, too, reflected the Palestinians' lack of alternative options in the wake of the Soviet collapse and the Gulf War. On Israel's side, it was made possible by the Labor Party's victory in the June 1992 elections. Israelis' perceptions of the threats they faced had been transformed with the Soviet collapse on the one hand and the trauma of the 1991 Iraqi missile attacks on the other. The changed perceptions produced a more relaxed Israeli attitude toward the Palestinians. They also stimulated the belief that an agreement with the Palestinians would help diminish anti-Israeli sentiments in the Arab world and in Iran, which, in turn, would slow down the drive to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

No less remarkable than the Israeli and Palestinian desire for an agreement was the identity of the third party. While the United States was mediating the official Israeli-Palestinian talks within the Madrid framework, Norway provided the good offices that produced the Oslo accords. Norway's role signified a more accepting U.S. attitude, allowing other

players to be involved, without fearing that this might benefit a dangerous rival.

The Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty grew out of decades of bilateral contacts and occasional cooperation. Much of it was negotiated bilaterally. The United States, however, contributed by helping resolve some lingering differences and conferring its seal of approval on the treaty by having President Clinton append his signature as a witness at the White House ceremony on October 26, 1994.

The 1996 cease-fire in southern Lebanon reflected a return to the more traditional U.S. role as mediator. As noted, however, a new element in this agreement was that the United States accepted the involvement of France, and agreed that it be included in the commission supervising the cease-fire agreement.<sup>13</sup>

These successes contrast sharply with the failure of the U.S. mediation between Israel and Syria and the very slow and uncertain progress of U.S. mediation between Israel and the Palestinians. Numerous factors have influenced the latter two mediations.

The Israeli-Syrian talks failed because of the sides' mutual suspicions, and concerns that concessions would weaken the respective governments' domestic support. The United States was unable to persuade Syria that Israeli concessions on the Golan Heights were significant enough to merit Syrian agreement to formal peace and the normalization of relations with Israel. Clearly, Syrian rigidity in this case cannot be attributed to the United States' rivals encouraging Syria to stand firm. The more likely reason was the mindset of President Assad and his associates, who felt more comfortable clinging to long-established beliefs than trying a new approach that they apparently perceived as entailing more risks than opportunities.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, the U.S. mediation between Israel and the Palestinians concerning the implementation of the Oslo accords has encountered many

13 Itamar Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 233.

14 See *ibid.*

obstacles. There is little doubt that the tortuous course of this mediation is mainly attributable to Israeli and Palestinian internal politics. Israel remained confident that its rigid positions would not provoke severe U.S. punishment. The Palestinians, for their part, could afford adhering to rigid positions for two reasons. One was their weakness; since the United States (as well as other major states) considered it important to help the Arafat regime survive, the Palestinians could expect international support to continue regardless of their negotiating stance. The other was the involvement of West European states (both through the EU and through direct approaches) whose diplomacy was not in full accordance with U.S. mediation efforts. Since the Europeans are not rivals threatening U.S. primacy in the Middle East, the United States has not made much of an effort to stop their interference. Their activity, however, tends to diminish U.S. influence.

Finally, a common element is President Clinton's more limited interest and commitment to foreign affairs compared to the priority accorded to international issues by his predecessor, President Bush. Although the shift in priorities undoubtedly reflects the two presidents' different personalities, it also stems from the changed circumstances. With the demise of the Soviet Union and with its own primacy assured, the United States could afford to be less energetic in mediating between Arabs and Israelis.

### Conclusion: Toward a Free Market of Brokerage Services?

Contrary to what might have been expected, the end of the Cold War did not lead to a decline in outside powers' motivation for peacemaking. The United States remains the principal mediator, and there are no rivals to thwart its efforts. But an important new feature is the entry of new actors into the mediation market. The United States, which jealously strove to monopolize this activity during the Cold War, now accepts the presence of other third parties in the field.

As for the outcomes, it is insufficient to assess success and failure only in

terms of the impact of the mediation on Arab-Israeli relations. We have assumed that mediation is also intended to serve the broader interests of the intervening third parties; hence, outcomes must also be evaluated in terms of the additional goals that mediators sought to achieve.

The historical record shows that the United States and its allies failed in their attempt to prevent the intrusion of the Soviet Union into the Arab-Israeli dispute. But the United States was successful in using mediation to expel the Soviets from Egypt and to open channels of communication with Syria. It is more difficult to assess whether mediation since the Cold War has helped advance third parties' political goals. It may be that in the absence of continuing peace efforts, radical Muslims would have been more successful, Arab regimes friendly to the West less stable, and the drive for acquisition of weapons of mass destruction more intense. But evidence to support these suppositions is lacking.

As for the contributions of mediation to advancing Arab-Israeli peace, we have seen how the Cold War rivalry impeded mediation efforts. The impediments, however, were not such as to prevent any successful outcomes, and even major accomplishments such as the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. It is still uncertain, however, whether the termination of the Cold War produced conditions more amenable to successful mediation. The record has been mixed, with both impressive successes and glaring failures. Although the Soviet Union's demise made it easier to reach some agreements, other obstacles continue to hamper the process.

In trying to discern future developments, a key question is how the multiplicity of mediators will affect the Arab-Israeli peace process. It is too early to tell whether the more intensive involvement of additional actors will lead them to compete for regional influence. Even in the absence of competition, however, the involvement of several mediators may hamper peace efforts. The disputants may find it difficult to accept terms offered by a mediator if they are tempted to try to get a better deal through another broker. "The more the merrier" may fit some situations, but it does not make for effective mediation.

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