

Palestine 2030

A Decade of Clarity and Renewal

Mapping the Transformations in the Three Spheres of Influence: Israel, the Region, and the International

Palestine Strategy Group

June 2020



Oxford Research Group
Strategic Peacebuilding Programme

مجموعة فلسطين للتفكير الاستراتيجي
PALESTINE STRATEGY GROUP



PalThink
FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES
بالثينك للدراسات الاستراتيجية
مؤسسة تفكير وعمل فلسطينية

MADAR

THE REPRESENTATIVE OFFICE OF NORWAY
TO THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY

Cover image: PalFest 2016 / Flickr Creative Commons

This version of the report has been translated from Arabic to English.

Disclaimer: *'This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is the sole responsibility of PSG in partnership with ORG, MADAR, PalThink and I'lam and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union. The views expressed in this document are those of the PSG and do not necessarily reflect the views of the other partners.'*

Executive Summary:

Palestine 2030 – A Decade of Clarity and Renewal

This is not the first report from the Palestine Strategy Group. For over a decade, we have convened Palestinians from all walks of our fragmented reality—in Palestine (West Bank, Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip), in Israel, in our refugeedom, and our diaspora. Over the years, we explored in our research, confirmed in our conversations, and reported in our previous reports major milestones that were to befall the Palestinian struggle for freedom and independence.

We previously reported of the utter failure of the U.S. monopolized Oslo Accords' "peace" process long before it was buried. We reported on the need for the Palestinian cause to be returned to the United Nations, its origins, to finally hold Israel accountable, as well as to hold nation-states to their obligations under the rules-based world order they created. We also reported on how Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line are engaged, each in their way, facing the same oppressive state of Israel.

This report is the culmination of three years of effort, from 2017-2020, a period throughout which all the parts of the conflict were in motion. These moving targets and their impact on Palestine are what this report attempts to analyze. The three spheres we focus on are Israel, the region, and the international community. The research that informed this effort was based on professionally commissioned research papers. Each paper was vigorously debated in a context that included Palestinians from all their geographic locations—Palestine, Israel, refugeedom, and the diaspora.

1. Structural Changes

The year 2020 started with the White House announcing its vision for the future of Palestine and Israel: *"Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People"*. This so-called "Deal of the Century" was a much-anticipated event that required a sober reflection of its details and implications. The Palestine Strategy Group (PSG) views the "deal" as clear evidence of long-standing Israeli plans, in absolute collusion with their U.S. ally, but lacking international support, except for a few marginal international political right-wing governments.

The US "deal" is an existential threat to the Palestinian national project. It threatens to eliminate it. The expectation of those who produced the US document is that, despite initial protests, the international community will acquiesce in this plan, and that Palestinians will accept political defeat in exchange for economic gain.

The Palestinian strategic response in this "Palestine 2030" report is to reject the US "deal" in its entirety.

In light of all that has befallen the Palestinian people since 1948, culminating in this latest U.S.-Israeli aggression against Palestine and Palestinians wherever they reside, the Palestine

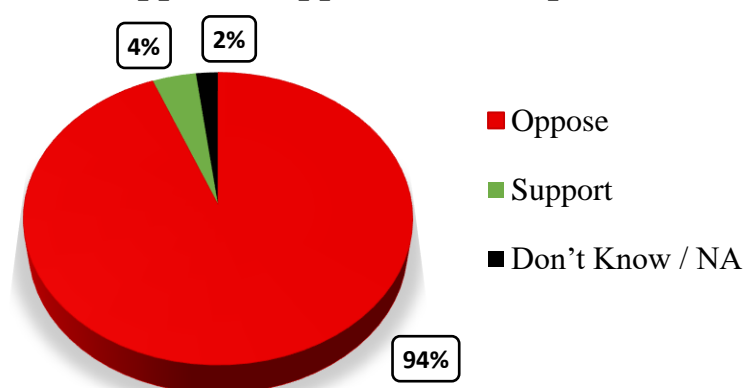
The announcement of the “deal”, while meant to completely tip the balance towards the Israeli side... returned Palestine to the top of the list of global priorities.

Strategy Group believes that this coming decade is one of clarity for all stakeholders and engaged parties, and renewal for Palestine, its people, and its struggle.

We, as Palestinians, can view the details that were announced and the fanfare accompanying the “deal’s” announcement as another attempt to liquidate the Palestinian national project. It is a grand political and media attempt to damage the faith of our people in the justice of

our cause and the possibility of obtaining our rights, rights that we have made great sacrifices for. With this, we recommend that we view this recent flurry of political activity as an opportunity to actively draw on our historical experience of steadfastness and resilience and restore the national well-being and international energy around Palestine on the regional and global stages. The announcement of the “deal”, while meant to completely tip the balance towards the Israeli side, and to provide electoral support to the Trump administration and the Israeli right, returned Palestine to the top of the list of global priorities.

Do Palestinians, together in the West Bank and Gaza, support or oppose the Trump Plan?



Source: Poll taken from 5-8 February 2020 by
Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research

The conclusion from these efforts is that given the current balance of power there is a lack of effective venues to immediately realize national independence, the State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders and a just resolution to the issue of refugees as defined in UN resolutions. The effort concluded that, in light of developments in Israel, the region, and the wider world, the next decade will leverage the clarity that has come to the surface from all stakeholders while pressing forward for: **first**, independence and freedom, **second**, realistically unifying and renewing the Palestinian national polity, in all its forms, to collectively define the way forward. These strategies put together have the potential to dramatically redefine Palestinian self-determination, as well as dramatically revisit the entire military occupation paradigm as the framing of our struggle.

...realistically unifying and renewing the Palestinian national polity, in all its forms, to collectively define the way forward.

1949-1967 de facto borders



2020 US Administration's “Deal of the Century”



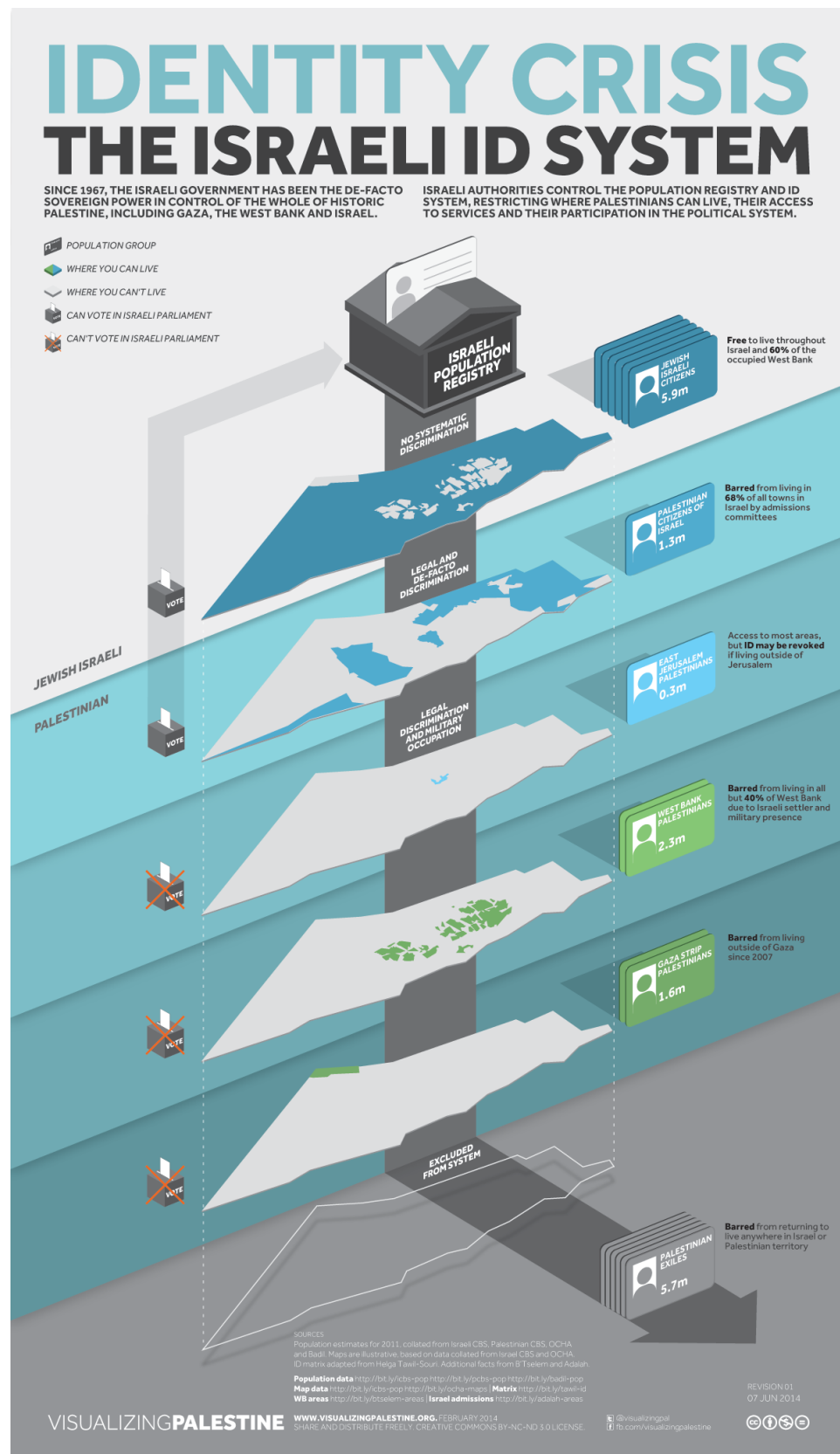
The following are the most important conclusions of the discussions and strategic thinking regarding the three spheres under study:

Palestine and Israel

The Israeli side has made up its mind on laying the foundation for the status quo in historical Palestine between the river and the sea, making the situation permanent and deepening its colonization, control and acquisition of territory by force. This was embodied in the Israeli “National Unity” government that was sworn in during May 2020. This new Israeli government was brought together on a political platform which includes provisions to annex additional lands of the occupied West Bank and impose Israeli sovereignty so that the Jordan River becomes the eastern border of Israel. All of this is happening with the backdrop of the continuing Israeli policy of besieging and trapping Palestinians in their ghettos, building more walls, and dividing and dismembering Palestinian land and society.

At the end of 2018, the Israeli Knesset passed the Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People. This law states that “the right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people.” The law grants advantages and privileges uniquely to Jews within the areas of Israeli sovereignty and where Israeli law is applied over any other population groups, no matter their number. In the foreseeable future, this law may

be the precursor to further lowering the formal status of Palestinian citizens in Israel, from the ostensible status of citizens with full rights and equality to the position of Palestinians living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip – merely subjects under Israeli colonial rule and sovereignty. As such, Israel is installing and finally legislating in broad daylight a political system based on blatant discrimination and racial segregation.



Inherent in these significant developments are two transformations happening in Israel: 1) Israel is withdrawing from a liberal ideology and from a Jewish ethnic democracy, which seemingly guaranteed citizenship to a part of the Palestinian people who remained in their homeland after the Nakba, with the political, social, and economic rights that these entail. The result of such transformations is that Israel moves steadily toward a nationalistic and extreme Jewish fortress that survives based on its animosity towards its regional environment and its rejection of understanding or dialogue with it, in any form; and 2) Israel is withdrawing from the Oslo Accords and the understandings that were produced by the negotiations track since the beginning of the 1990s until today. The U.S. “Deal of the Century” openly affirms

...fragmenting the putative Palestinian State, leaving it without substance, and disposing of the Palestinian civilians in the Triangle area from Israel by unilaterally shifting the land border.

Israel’s unilateral abandonment of the principle of dividing the land within the scope of a negotiated settlement with the Palestinians, as endorsed by the United Nations in its Partition Plan for Palestine in 1947. It also signals Israel’s shift to unilaterally imposing sovereignty, without negotiation, over historical Palestine from the river to the sea. These transformations place Israel at odds, not just with Palestine, but with the Arab World as a whole.

The Palestine Strategy Group foresaw, in its previous discussions and reports, these transformations at the geographic, demographic, and political levels. We painfully watched, day in and day out, Israel’s hollowing out of East Jerusalem while tearing apart Palestinian Jerusalemites’ social fabric. Likewise, the strangulation of Gaza has been unrelenting, undertaken in broad daylight for all to see, reaching a point that a UN agency has deemed 2020 the year Gaza will be “unliveable.” Today, these transformations are articulated through policies that call for the annexation of more Palestinian land, centred on what was known as “Area C” in the Oslo Accords, fragmenting the putative Palestinian State, leaving it without substance, and disposing of the Palestinian civilians in the Triangle area from Israel by unilaterally shifting the land border.

Palestine and the Region

The Middle East region is characterized as being extremely fluid and has been since the beginning of the Arab Spring. This fluidity has destroyed or weakened the Arab power centres surrounding Palestine, with serious implications for its strategic depth and sources of support. It has also undermined the Palestinian cause due to rounds of destructive violence erupting throughout Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen, leaving Palestine alone in the face of a comfortable Israel. Regional interests align or conflict with international interests, which has created a regional system that is difficult for Palestine to operate within.

Palestine cannot rely on the support of the region, due to its cause only being as important as its service to a certain axis

The region is preoccupied with itself and its conflicts. Consequently and politically, it could turn into a region that becomes unfriendly towards Palestine, which would add a burden to the Palestinian reality. Thus, Palestine cannot rely on the support of the region, due to its

cause only being as important as its service to a certain axis, conflict, or area. On the other hand, Palestine must take into account the potential for the development of the region's conflicts, where they are headed, and possible scenarios of what could happen, thereby developing its capacity and preparedness to deal with this future. Despite the above, the Arab people's second wave of 'spring' in Lebanon and Iraq, for example, and the beginning of stability in Tunisia, have given hope in Palestine. It is this hope that will help nurture the region until it grows, and Palestine grows with it.

Palestine and the World

The international system seems similar to the regional one, in that it is extremely fluid as a result of rapidly progressing developments, which have completely scrambled the map of interests, resources, and geo-strategic considerations, especially with regards to the main axes of influence. Since the end of the Cold War there has been an increase in the prominence of neoliberal capitalism, which has become, over time, more brutal. This new reality has caused real damage to the idea of democracy and national economies, especially in countries where natural resources are plenty, but power centres are weak. The same happened with regards to the distribution of wealth within states and between them, and this has become very clear with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has spread worldwide and has caused extreme tension in international relations, which could lead to further conflict.

The COVID-19 crisis adds, in turn, other possibilities to the international system, especially since it has started new debates or conflicts, or at the very least uncovered them. The most prominent of these is the US President and his administration taking advantage of the crisis to carry out frequent media attacks on China, the World Health Organization (WHO), and various American media outlets, in an attempt to avoid blame for his mishandling of the pandemic. In this vast space, the feuding within the allied axes is active, with their interests aligning or clashing with the regional axes, postponing issues that are not, in their opinion, ones that might boil over, like Palestine, for instance. Instead, they are focusing primarily on the issues that are more of a priority for their interests, like Iraq, one of the most important sources of fuel, and Syria and Libya, or focusing on "accomplishments" on larger issues related to their direct interests.

On another level, international legitimacy, as a system of restraints, customs, agreements, and international laws, has seen a decrease in influence. After World War II, the international community created many conventions, treaties, and agreements that affected all aspects of international relations during times of peace and war. Yet, it seems like the powers in control, which are returning to conflicts and are attempting to reposition themselves, have put off using these restraints and have started to evade their responsibilities. They have moved towards a looser and more extreme interpretation of the activities of the impulsive market forces. These, in turn, are damaging, and in some cases destroying, everything in their path, especially weaker entities, and the rights and vital interests of people when these interests

...international legitimacy, as a system of restraints, customs, agreements, and international laws, has seen a decrease in influence.

clash with what these forces see as their own interests. A compelling example is the "Deal of the Century" which views the Palestine issue as one of power balances, without at all taking into consideration the people impacted by this plan, whose national rights are once again subjected to injustice.

2. Nurturing hope and creating change

To adhere to the pressure of these Israeli, regional, and international systems, and the way they are trending, is to give in to despair, and surrender. This despair is being intensified by internal Palestinian divisions and the interference of regional axes to strengthen the status quo in Palestine. Additionally, there are daily attacks by Israel against the national rights of Palestinians. The "Deal of the Century" attempted, as one of its objectives, to damage Palestinian's belief in their inalienable right to self-determination and sovereignty, as well as to hinder their confidence in their ability to be resilient, aiming to instil in their collective consciousness the idea that they are going to lose in any case.

Given the impasse in achieving national independence and securing the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people through the negotiation process, it is important to maintain and strengthen the centralized and legitimate representation of the Palestinian people and their just cause (represented by the Palestine Liberation Organization). This needs to be in conjunction with the utilisation of international law as a political and legal reference. Elements of all three scenarios may be strategically necessary at various points in the ongoing struggle for the realization of Palestinian national rights, depending on opportunities and circumstances. Palestinians are not giving up any of their lawful individual and collective rights. Nor do they accept that they have to choose between them at this stage.

The three potential scenarios are:

First: Reciprocity: A matching response – Returning to what came before the Oslo Accords. This return would start with an announcement of immediate withdrawal from the Oslo agreements and subsequent obligations, as a result of the Israeli withdrawal from them, with structural implications on the immediate termination of security coordination with Israel. It would also include stopping the implementation of the Paris Protocol and its amendments, ending all relations with the Israeli side, withdrawing the Arab Peace Initiative, and suspending the recognition of Israel. The processes might need to include the dissolving of the Palestinian National Authority, considering that it is a result of the Oslo process, whereupon the Palestinian political system could be rebuilt so that the Palestine Liberation Organization would reaffirm its national and political role as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people wherever they may be, and based on democratic renewal and rejuvenation of the leadership. This, in addition to other steps in this direction, would place on Israel once again – and not the national authority – the full responsibility for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as was the case before Oslo,

...would place on Israel once again – and not the national authority – the full responsibility for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as was the case before Oslo

in its role as the occupying state. At the time of the writing of this report, developments have already started in this direction.

Second: Renewal: Build capacity and impose national independence – This is based on a strategic doctrine that states that national independence can be achieved and embodies the right to self-determination and return outside the scope of a negotiated political settlement process. Through an accumulated process on the ground and in foreign policy, it would aim to curb Israel's colonial expansion and impose a Palestinian presence and sovereignty in innovative ways. This would necessitate rebuilding the political system and formal, national, and popular Palestinian institutions so that they can escape the impasse of the requirements and obligations of the past two decades, which has become a part of sustaining the status quo instead of imposing independence and national rights.

...rebuilding the political system and formal, national, and popular Palestinian institutions so that they can escape the impasse of the requirements and obligations of the past two decades

Third: Full Circle: One de-colonized state – The one-state solution became prominent during several stages in the history of the Palestinian struggle. It now returns in numerous iterations that take into account geographic and demographic developments, culminating in a struggle for one state, from the river to the sea, that embodies the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people based on absolute equality between all citizens. The state would be civil and democratic so that it is devoid of its colonial tendency and aims to implement the principle of transitional and historical justice to ensure compensation to the Palestinian people and an equitable solution to the issue of refugees based on the right to property, the right to compensation, and the right of return.

3. Everything Starts with the Palestinian People

Against the physical, psychological and rhetorical aggression against Palestine, which has reached a new peak during the “Deal of the Century” and the language and discussions that it promoted, our people are standing with their historical experience and their inalienable rights. This once again proves its great capacity and ability to withstand any crisis or difficulty. Our people have proven, with their awareness and experience, a supreme ability to refuse plans to subjugate and marginalize them, and they have ensured the failure of these plans no matter who was implementing them.

All options available to Palestinians would restore vitality to Palestine as the cause of a people and a nation, making it more able to produce, nurture, and export hope to its people, its allies, and all those concerned with Palestine. A renewed and clear Palestinian will, one that is embodied in a spirit of all forms of effective resistance and nation-building, is necessary to build upon in Arab and foreign societies and countries. By this, we mean that during this stage the Palestinian collective will must be formed by strengthening it and practicing it. The Palestinian collective will is one of the most important characteristics of the Palestinian

people and provides the foundation for their strategies to oppose the new project to liquidate and subjugate them and their cause.

Although the Palestinian people and struggle are at a serious fork in their road to emancipation, we are confident that our just struggle will forge new paths forward to achieve their freedom and independence. A prerequisite to maintaining our struggle will be the unifying of the home front and genuine acceptance of plurality in the Palestinian political system.

We have absolute confidence in the long-term success of the liberation struggle, the universally recognised justice of the national cause, and the indomitable resilience and resolve of the Palestinian people. “Palestine 2030” looks forward with hope by humbly contributing this report to inform our struggle moving forward.