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Bridging the gap: Palestinian and Israeli discourses on autonomy and statehood

David Newman* and Ghazi Falah**

Self-determination and autonomy are only transitional moves towards statehood and independence. A key element in the process of state formation is the crystallization of a territory which serves as the spatial focus for political power. The ability of protagonists to enter into negotiation aimed at conflict resolution is dependent on the extent to which the alternative territorial discourses reflect the ability to compromise and share territory, rather than demanding the whole territory to the exclusion of the 'other'. The nature of power relations is critical to an understanding of this quest for self-determination and autonomy. 'Top-down' models of autonomy indicate a devolution of power within the existing state structure. 'Bottom-up' models of autonomy reflect a struggle for full self-determination and new state formation. Israeli and Palestinian territorial discourses reflect their respective power orientations in that the former discusses only autonomy while the latter focuses on statehood. These contradictory discourses have moved closer together: from a position in which each side demanded the whole of the territory to the exclusion of the other, to positions in which each has been prepared to compromise over parts of the territory. This is the background to the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the context within which it is pursued.

key words Israel/Palestine West Bank autonomy self-determination power relations state territory

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Introduction

The roles of the state and processes of state-formation are undergoing increased scrutiny by geographers. Attempts to focus on the deconstruction of territory as it relates to the location of ethnic groups have been offset by the realities of the new world order which has witnessed a strengthening of nation-state and nation-dominant-state ideologies. Changing patterns of politico-spatial organization at the regional level have focused on modern versions of decolonization, ethno-spatial homogeneity and the creation, rather than eradication, of new (or dormant) political boundaries. Idealistic

notions of shared space are incompatible with the desire for independence, sovereignty and territorial separation. The discourses of territory are exclusive and compete with each other as ethnic groups seek self-rule, often at the expense of other minority groups residing within the same space.

Until recently, the ethno-territorial conflict between Israel and Palestine appeared to be undergoing resolution through negotiation and the sharing of discourse. The signing, and implementation, of the Oslo I (1993) and Oslo II (1995) Accords indicated a willingness to compromise over exclusive demands to control territory. At the micro territorial level, however, the Accords have created

separate, rather than shared, spaces, with a move towards full territorial separation in the final stage. Despite the seeming exclusivity of previous territorial claims by both the Israelis and the Palestinians, territorial relationships have not remained static and unchanging throughout the period of conflict. The current peace process and the disruptions to it are an outcome of an ongoing process of change which has taken place during the past 40 years. Although convergence is painful and far from complete, a gradual bridging of the gap between the respective territorial discourses has been a major factor enabling present dialogue to take place.

The purpose of this paper is to focus on the territorial aspects of this process of conflict resolution and the ways in which changes in territorial conceptions are determined by parallel changes in the relative power relations of the participants. Of particular interest are the alternative conflict resolution narratives of the Israelis and the Palestinians as they have changed, and partially converged since 1948, to have arrived at the present stage. From an Israeli perspective, we are interested in the concept of autonomy and the way in which this has been used in different contexts since 1967. From a Palestinian perspective, we are interested in the changing territorial definition of statehood within which self-determination can be realized. We argue that there has been a narrowing of the gap separating the territorial claims once held by each of the sides, thus enabling the onset of negotiations around a clearly defined 'default' territory, namely the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Self-determination, autonomy and state-building

Territorial changes have frequently been justified on the basis of self-determination (Frowein 1993; Knight 1985, 1994). Resulting processes of state-building often take place at the expense of the national identity and self-determination of groups residing within the territory of the state. This may involve the subordination of ethnic and other special-interest groups to fit the ideals of the dominant group (Harf 1993). At best, autonomy may be granted to national groups residing within the state and constituting a demographic majority within a given territory or region of the state. The nature of autonomy is unclear and has been defined differently in diverse political situations. It can range from autonomy for minority groups within the state, whereby the minority group remain part of

the existing state structure; autonomy which is part of the process of decolonization and new state formation; and autonomy which is part of a process of secession by which regions break away from the state and form their own separate independent political entities (Abid Al-Aliem 1992; Buchheit 1978). These scenarios are not mutually exclusive, with the first type of autonomy gradually giving way to increased demands for decolonization and/or secession during later stages of national development.

For groups such as the Palestinians seeking independence, autonomy is not an end in itself (Falah and Newman 1996). It is a political tool aimed at ensuring rights and needs (internal self-determination) but must be consciously related to the goals of the community which seeks a larger state polity (external self-determination) (Said 1994). A normal definition of political autonomy would be one in which power is partially transferred to regional government. Such power would extend to all the inhabitants of the autonomous region and would include decisions relating to both people and territory. Autonomy is not equivalent to sovereignty or independence (Dinstein 1982; Hannum 1990; Hannum and Lillich 1981) and autonomous governments should not expect to be immune from the influences of central government. At the same time, autonomy is much more than simply a form of local government. Sohn (1981, 5) notes that the concept of self-government or autonomy implies that a particular area

will remain within the territorial jurisdiction of another political entity but will possess political freedom to regulate certain of its own affairs without any interference by that entity. Granting autonomy to an area allows the people inhabiting it to exercise direct control over important affairs of special concern to them, while allowing the larger entity . . . to exercise those powers which are in the common interest of both entities.

We can identify two broad categories of autonomy dependent on the nature of power relations and on the aspirations of the group exercising self-government. 'Top-down' models of autonomy apply specifically to federal, or other power-sharing, arrangements in which regions exercise a high degree of self-government within the existing state structure. The desire to maintain regional self-government in this model is satisfied by means of power decentralization to autonomous regions. Regional autonomy is often seen as being a less

threatening and less costly alternative to war or secession (Gurr 1993). Federal solutions are closely related to this form of autonomy (Duchacek 1979; Kimminich 1993). As in all federal arrangements, regions recognize the benefits to be attained from remaining within the hierarchical structure of the federation. This type of autonomy is proposed, and implemented, by the state which, by virtue of its political hegemony, determines the agenda of autonomy. The fact that autonomy, rather than secession, is perceived as constituting the normative model for power decentralization is indicative of the power of the state *vis-à-vis* the region and/or the subordinate national group. In a discussion of different types of revolutionary ethno-nationalist movements, Heraclides (1989) contrasts policies of acceptance by the state to policies of acceptance by the movement. He notes that autonomy or federal schemes are often suitable for all kinds of separatist or revolutionary movements of minority groups that are not seeking independence. These groups are satisfied with the devolution of powers to the region within which they constitute the demographic majority. Such groups may aspire to future independence but are either too small to envisage total separation, or are too dependent economically on the existing state structure to risk the economic dislocation which would occur in the wake of state fragmentation.

'Bottom-up' models of autonomy apply to situations in which secessionist groups, aspiring to future sovereignty and independence, achieve self-government as a first stage in the process of state formation. Autonomy is perceived only as constituting a means to an end; one in which the first elements of independent rule are put into effect. The ability to articulate 'bottom-up' models of autonomy often results from insurgency and violence aimed at changing the internal agenda of the state and from influence brought to bear on the international community. The focus for self-rule is embedded in the aspiration for political self-determination and the control of indigenous territories, regardless of whether or not such a separatist arrangement is economically beneficial or detrimental. Concepts such as state viability are irrelevant for the national group intent on achieving full sovereignty within a given territory (Newman and Falah 1995). 'Bottom-up' models are common in the contexts of decolonization and 'non-state' nations (Bertelsen 1977a, 2, 1977b). The latter constitute

any entity that operates in a manner normally associated with a nation-state but is not a generally recognised nation-state. The defining characteristic of the non-state nation is its assertion or action implying sovereignty, while not being generally recognised as a sovereign entity.

The 'top-down' model is indicative of state stability, while the 'bottom-up' model is indicative of internal political instability, centrifugality and state fragmentation. Bottom-up autonomy enables the framework and structure of self-government to be installed, serving as a transition to full independence at a later stage. This involves territorial separation and partition, and the creation of a new state. Herein lies the paradox of autonomy. The same solution of autonomy may be perceived as a sufficient decentralization of power on the part of the state in satisfying demands for self-government emanating from below while, for the ethnic or national group, the acquiescence of the state to power devolution provides a stronger territorial base from which to continue the struggle for ultimate sovereignty (Murphy 1989). For the national group desiring independence, participation within an autonomy arrangement may often be no more than a tactical ploy: a means of gaining tangible, albeit limited, control in the short term, from which to build further in the longer term. Full independence, and thus separation, is rejected by the state which desires to retain the territorial integrity of the existing entity. Devolution of powers within a framework of autonomy is more acceptable. As such, the implementation of autonomy changes the very nature of power relations between the state and the ethnic/national minority. While power relations remain asymmetrical in favour of the state, the minority group undergoes partial empowerment which increases its negotiating stance in the next stage of self-determination. For its part, the state is weakened in resolving to maintain long-term control of the territory in question.

The 'top-down'/'bottom-up' argument has its parallels in the distinction between internal and external self-determination. While perceived as a principle of public international law (Rosas 1993), the former remains part of the domestic discourse concerning political rights. Nietschmann (1994) notes that self-determination is something that is taken by nations, rather than given by states. There is no automatic right to secession for all peoples desiring self-determination.¹ However, aspects of external self-determination, consisting of the establishment of new states, cannot be overlooked

in a discussion of internal self-determination, especially in cases of colonial domination (Rosas 1993). Goertz and Diehl (1992, 64) argue that, in most cases of a dependent territory being granted independence,

the conditions of that transition are largely determined by the actions of the imperial/colonial power and not by indigenous forces.

Since negotiation over autonomy is normally discussed within the framework of intra-state domestic issues and has little direct involvement of the international community, it has often led to rejection of groups whose quest for autonomy is interpreted as constituting a stage in the search for fully fledged statehood, thus threatening the territorial integrity of the state. Global restructuring and the emergence of new world and regional orders affect both the 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' processes through which self-determination is achieved. Shifts in superpower hegemony bring about new pressures being exercised on local protagonists. Where, previously, a region was no more than a local area of superpower confrontation, the emergence of a single regional hegemonic power changes local power balances. In its new post-Gulf War hegemonic status in the middle east, the United States is able to exert pressure both on Israel ('top-down') and on the Palestinians ('bottom-up') by forcing them into negotiations aimed at conflict resolution.

Power relations and territorial change

Power relations are critical to our understanding of processes of territorial change. Kacowicz (1994) argues that peaceful territorial change is most likely to occur where there is an asymmetrical distribution of power between the parties but not so asymmetrical as to allow a unilateral solution to the problem. There remains sufficient room for internal and external factors to influence the process of territorial change. Where the distribution of power is highly asymmetrical, the problem is more likely to be resolved through the unilateral coercion of the politically dominant party. Solutions proposed for ending conflict often represent the agenda put forward by those who have the power to implement decisions and who exercise political hegemony. The state, rather than the nation, has the power not only to create the agenda but to

determine international law (Nietschmann 1994) and to deny the legitimacy and/or existence of the 'other' (Heraclides 1989).

The ability to create the agenda is itself a form of non-decision-making,² by which one side can refuse even to consider proposals made by the 'other' side or even deny their very existence. According to Giddens (1987, 9),

Non-decision-making . . . is not accurately seen as just the obverse of decision-making, but as influencing the circumstances in which certain courses of action are open to 'choice' in any way at all.

Taylor (1993a, 36) adds that non-decision-making is

essentially a form of manipulation which allows decisions to be steered along certain directions normally favourable to maintaining the status quo . . . decisions on non-agenda matters do not have to be made.

Power exercised by a participant in a conflict derives not only from internal political superiority but also from international status. The institutional mediation of power to which a sovereign state has access enables it to advance its own agenda within the international arena. Since the world is organized politically around nation-states, non-state nation groups are often confronted with structural constraints which make it difficult and, in some cases, impossible for them to present their claims in the international arena. They are unable to compete with the sophisticated means of information dissemination possessed by a sovereign state, especially if the state promotes its own denial policies with respect to the legitimacy of the non-state nation group (Heraclides 1991, 1992). In order to operate in the international context,

the non-state nation must conduct itself in such a way as to make its actions the concern of more than one nation-state and thus avoid being dismissed as a domestic problem. (Bertelsen 1977a, 6)

Changing power relations are thus closely linked to processes of geopolitical change and global restructuring (Taylor 1993a). As world orders change, regional states take on different roles within their regions as their spatial and political-economic interactions with major powers and neighbouring states change (Cohen 1992). The geopolitical codes by which states operate within the international system are adapted to meet the

changing global realities. During periods of geopolitical transition, surprises can take place within the system of international relations and 'what had seemed impossible occurs and the world is turned upside down' (Taylor 1993a, 10). Regional states, which had previously been neutralized owing to their affiliation with one or the other of the cold war protagonists, have, in recent years, been able to reassert their political independence. This has not always been positive, as many new states have emerged as part of a renewed cycle of ethno-territorial wars. In other cases, the restructuring of regional relations around a single superpower has helped bring about meaningful attempts at conflict resolution. With respect to the middle east, this indicates a form of unilateralism practised by the United States in its conduct of foreign policy during the post-Gulf War era (O'Loughlin 1992, 27). In this particular region, the United States initially regained its hegemony in the immediate aftermath of the cold war era.

At the same time, new anti-systemic forces, most notably the spread of Islamic political awareness, is emerging as a new force within the region. With its stronger local roots, the 'Islamic rimland and associated "fundamentalism"' (Taylor 1992, 12) is replacing communism as a counterbalance to American hegemony within the region. Wallerstein (1993, 5) argues that the growth of the 'Khomeini option, namely the assertion of power by states in the periphery who reject the rules of the interstate system, is a major source of instability within the new world system. Thus, while shifting power balances are important to our analysis, they can be understood only as a still-life picture in a dynamically evolving period of transition during which new geopolitical structures are emerging. It is this picture which enables us to understand how the antagonists reached a point of conflict resolution but equally it does not permit us to assess the future direction of the negotiations. In consequence, our discussion of the Israeli and Palestinian territorial discourses centre around a comparison of the respective historical narratives.

Self-determination and autonomy in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Concepts of self-determination and autonomy have been central to the process of Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution. Contextually, both Israel and the Palestinians have continually denied

the legitimacy of the other for much of the past 40 years. However, this was not a symmetrical form of political denial. While Israel controlled sovereign territory, the Palestinians remained stateless. As such, Israel had the advantage of controlling the political debate and of advancing Israeli proposals for conflict resolution with greater ease. 'Self-determination' is a term used by the Palestinians in their quest for state, while 'autonomy' is a term used by Israel in its search for a solution which can guarantee continued territorial presence and control. Nordquist (1985) discusses the range of solutions that have been proposed for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Four main conflict resolution categories are defined. Of these, two solutions – Greater Israel and a single Palestine – are zero sum solutions which exclusively favour one of the two sides to the detriment and subjugation of the other. They indicate asymmetrical power relations in which one of the participants takes complete control and is not subject to the influence of either internal or external factors. The other two types of solution – canton states and separate states – involve some form of power sharing (canton states) or power separation (separate states) respectively. In comparing the canton and separate state solutions, Nordquist (*ibid.*) argues that separate states satisfy all basic values except the issue of territory and offer the highest possibility of conflict resolution.

Power sharing does not necessarily derive from a symmetrical form of power relationship (in which case war is as likely an outcome as negotiation) but from limited asymmetry, in which one participant is more powerful than the other but not to the extent that it cannot be subject to internal and external influences. For both the Israelis and the Palestinians, the internal and external influences have undergone significant changes resulting in a changed system of power relations. The period of global political restructuring closely parallels the different phases of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The birth of both Zionism and Arab nationalism occurred during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the nation-state system underwent globalization. The most intense conflicts between the protagonists took place during the cold war as each side drew on support from the United States and the Soviet Union respectively. Conflict resolution appeared to be taking place in the post-cold war era. Our historical narrative will indicate how internal power orientations shape the need for conflict resolution based on territorial

separation. Internal power balances have been subject in turn to a new set of external influences which have come about as a result of global restructuring and the emergence of a single regional superpower able to exert its influence on both sides of the conflict.

Evolution of Palestinian concepts of self-determination

The Palestinian non-state nation is an example of a group which has successfully managed to raise its claims for self-determination as part of the political discourse of the international community. The inclusion of the Palestinian agenda in the United Nations' discourse on conflict resolution signalled a significant change in the political debate. However, having achieved international recognition and enjoying international support for their cause, the non-state nation is also subject to the pressures placed on it by that same community. In the case of the Palestinians, international recognition has been a major factor in furthering the cause of Palestinian autonomy and statehood. At the same time, international pressure has been responsible for the transformation of Palestinian denial of Israel's *raison d'être* and the demand for the whole of Palestine to one of acceptance of a two-state solution on part of the territory. These dual processes have had a direct effect on the course of recent negotiations and the Palestinian acceptance of the limited autonomy as defined in the Declaration of Principles (DOP) signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in 1993.

The changing power relations – both endogenous and exogenous – have resulted in a parallel change in the territorial conceptions held by the Palestinians concerning the demarcation of future statehood. From a situation in which the Palestinians were not prepared to consider anything but the whole of Palestine for a future state, the present leadership is currently prepared to accept only part of that territory, namely the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These changes have been accompanied in the political arena by a reversal of policy which initially denied the legitimacy of the state of Israel to one in which there is a begrudging acceptance of the existence of the state. As a result of the subordinate power of the Palestinians, their policies of denial and aspirations for the whole of the Palestine territory had little chance of being implemented.

In tracing the Palestinian search for statehood, we can define three periods (1948/9–74; 1974–88; 1988–96), each of which testifies to a change in the nature of the territorial solution on which to implement self-determination.

1948/9–74: Palestinian state in the whole of Palestine

The first period includes the most traumatic events of Palestinian history: the establishment of the state of Israel, the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem and the June 1967 war in which Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip. During this period, the source of power became firmly embedded within Israel, while the creation of stateless refugees removed any tangible manifestation of power which may have previously been held by the Palestinians. The events of 1967 are not seen here as constituting an important break in terms of the Palestinian perception of the whole of Palestine as a future state, or in structurally changing the nature of power relations. At most, the 1967 war increased the asymmetrical nature of power relations in Israel's favour, such that the latter was able to impose unilateral solutions in the immediate aftermath of this war (see the discussion on the Allon Plan autonomy below).

Two subdivisions may be identified for this period, with the establishment of the PLO in 1964 constituting an important date of change. Prior to 1964, the Palestinians were no more than refugees in neighbouring states, while those who had fled, or had been expelled, to the West Bank and Gaza Strip fell under the administration of Egypt and Transjordan (later Jordan) respectively. Most of the effort in this period was directed towards obtaining temporary shelter and in recovering from the trauma of the 1948/9 war (Brand 1988). Empowered by General Assembly Resolution 194, concerning the rights of the refugees to return to their homes or to receive adequate compensation, the Arab countries and Palestinians worked to facilitate the return of the Palestinian refugees to their former homes. International efforts and UN-sponsored negotiations held in Lausanne in 1949 failed to solve the Palestinian refugee issue, although Israel offered the return of 100 000 refugees (Caplan 1992). At this stage, no Arab state was ready to recognize Israel's existence and this rhetoric continued and was publicly affirmed during the 1967 Khartoum Summit of heads of Arab countries (Hurani 1983, 13).

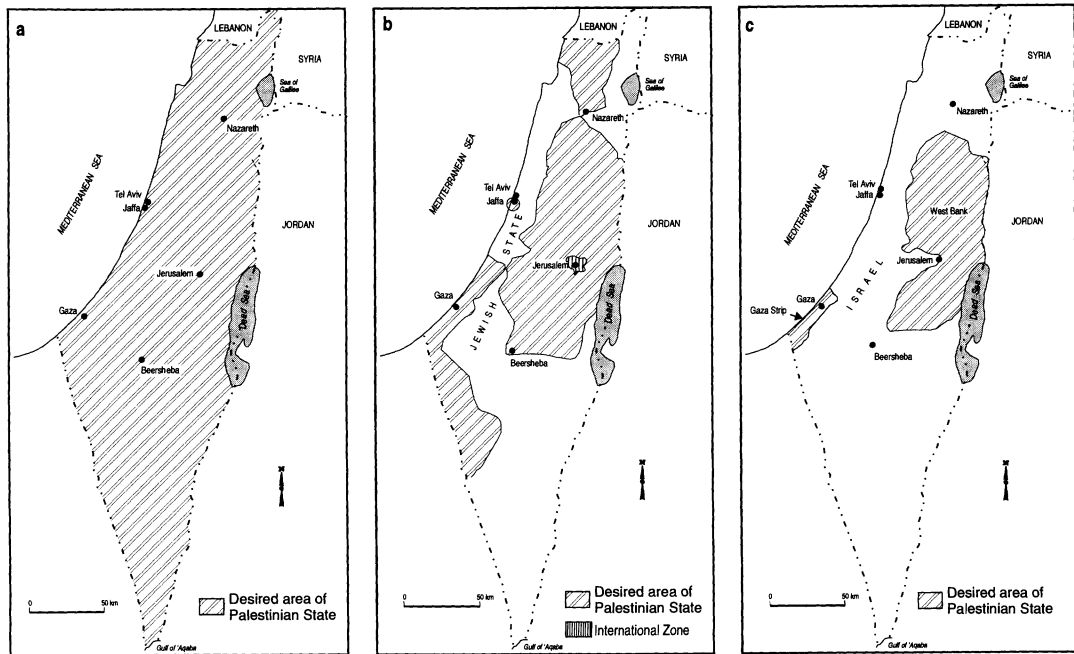


Figure 1 Changing territorial configurations of Palestinian aspirations: (a) whole of Palestine; (b) UN Partition Plan 1947; (c) two-state solution

The Palestinians demanded a return to the whole of Palestine (Fig. 1a) but there was a lack of clarity and consensus within the Arab world concerning the ultimate territorial solution for the Palestinian problem. The overall notion on the part of most Arab countries was a return to the pre-1948 status quo ante or, at worst, to the 1947 UN Partition Plan (Fig. 1b). This latter option was explicitly suggested by the Tunisian leader Bourguiba who, in a visit to a Palestinian refugee camp in Jericho in 1965, proposed the adoption of the Tunisian experience in which ultimate statehood and sovereignty had been achieved through a policy of stages. He blamed the Arabs for having rejected the Partition Plan and for having adopted a policy of wanting to get ‘the whole or nothing’. Bourguiba later proposed a solution to the Arab–Israeli conflict which would be based on the 1947 UN resolution (Abd Al-Ruhman 1982, 61). This solution would reduce the territorial share of Israel from 77 per cent of mandate Palestine to less than 56 per cent of that same territory.

The emergence of the PLO in 1964 signalled an important change within Palestinian internal power orientations. It provided a unified leader-

ship for the Palestinians as distinct from their previous dependency on other Arab countries to articulate their cause. It helped to place the Palestinian discourse in the forefront of the wider Arab–Israeli conflict. Shortly afterwards, the Palestine National Council (PNC) proposed

the reconstitution of Palestine as a democratic non-sectarian republic for Palestinian Arabs and Jews, in which all communities share a common homeland with equal rights and obligations. (Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine 1992, i)

This framework was defined as a long-term strategy for Palestinian self-determination over the whole of Palestine. Article 2 of the 1968 PLO Covenant states that ‘Palestine with the boundaries it had during the British mandate is an indivisible territorial unit’ (Khalidi W 1992, 144).

Drawing on the Algerian experience in the war of independence against France, the Fatah movement (the largest movement in the PLO) defined its struggle against Israel under the ideological slogan ‘an armed struggle and the people’s long term war as the single way for liberation’ (Abd Al-Ruhman 1982; Saif 1985, 14). In the early years of its

emergence, the PLO had to confront several Arab regimes who challenged the organization over its right to represent the Palestinian people. Transjordan continued to demand the role of representing the Palestinians in any future settlement (Al Azhari 1988). It was only during the 1974 Rabat Summit (meeting of the heads of Arab states) that the PLO was named 'the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people' (Said 1992, xii). The UN General Assembly Resolution 3236 of the same year determined that the Palestinian right of return was an 'inalienable right' (Salam 1994, 21). The raising of the Palestinian issue demonstrates Taylor's (1993a) argument that issues which have been placed on the international agenda and which provide an alternative discourse to previous agendas can no longer be avoided or pushed aside.

The June 1967 war and the subsequent UN Resolution 242 calling for Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories resulted in changes on the part of the Arab countries in their search for a solution to the wider Arab-Israeli conflict. On the one hand, Israel's direct power increased at the expense of the Palestinians while, at the same time, the Palestinians underwent initial empowerment within the international arena. The occupation of the remaining part of mandate Palestine in this war as well as additional territories from Egypt and Syria (Sinai and the Golan Heights) exposed the military weakness of the Arab countries. Most Arab countries now sought a solution in which to confine Israel to its pre-5 June 1967 borders (Fig. 1c). Implicit in their acceptance of UN Resolution 242 was Arab recognition of the existence of the state of Israel on the remaining territory. However, the PLO continued to reject this proposal on the grounds that Resolution 242

considered the Palestine Problem as a 'question of refugees' and ignored the 'inalienable national rights' of the Palestinian people. (Khalidi R I 1992, 137)

According to Hurani (1983), the mood of most Arab states following the Khartoum Summit was to reach a settlement with Israel. These countries were largely preoccupied with their internal affairs and in seeking a rapprochement with the United States. It was only the PLO and some non-confrontation countries who continued to reject any territorial solution which did not comprise the whole of Palestine.

1974–88: Palestinian state on any part of Palestine

During the twelfth session of the PNC, held in Cairo in June 1974, the Council adopted a 'Provisional Political Program', known as the ten-points programme, for establishing 'an independent fighting national authority of the people on any piece of Palestinian land which is liberated' (Kazziha 1979, 32; Harmalani 1990, 51). This was in effect the first time that an authoritative Palestinian body was prepared to consider anything but the exclusive claim to the entirety of Palestine, thereby laying the basis for a compromise settlement (Khalidi R I 1992). Such changes in the PLO tactical struggle for self-determination were important in yielding significant results in the international arena and in helping to mobilize worldwide recognition of the Palestinian claims. Most significantly, the Palestinians achieved observer status at the UN in 1976. Subsequently, in 1980, the European Economic Community (EEC) declared Palestinian self-determination to be one of the main planks of its middle eastern policy (Said 1992). This was followed by the adoption of a European resolution at Strasbourg in the same year, calling for a change in the wording of the UN Resolution 242 to favour the Palestinian position, requesting complete Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories and the recognition of a Palestinian right to self-determination (Badir 1980).

Palestinian empowerment within the international arena thus derived from its implicit acceptance of part, rather than all, of the territory. It was further enhanced as a result of the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt. Egypt refused to negotiate a peace agreement without direct reference to the Palestinian issue. At the same time, it was the Egyptians who negotiated on behalf of the Palestinians, thus ensuring that, while the Palestinian issue was articulated, there was no real change in the grass-roots power relations of the Palestinians themselves (Jiryis 1980). This, together with contradictory Israeli interpretations of the meaning of autonomy, accounts for the failure of the ensuing negotiations on autonomy.

Shaheen (1984) examined four proposals for conflict resolution emanating from this period: the 1982 American proposal (endorsed by the Reagan administration); the 1982 joint French-Egyptian proposal; the 1982 Arab states proposal (endorsed by the Fez Summit); and the 1984 Soviet Union

proposal. Each of these was initiated against the backdrop of the completion of the Israeli–Egyptian peace agreement and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. These two events moved the focus of the conflict from the Israeli–Egyptian military context to the Israeli–Palestinian dimension of self-determination. The common denominator in all four proposals is the recognition of the Palestinian problem as the core of the conflict and that conflict resolution should be undertaken through peaceful means. All but the American proposal are explicit in seeking Palestinian self-determination in the territory of the West Bank and Gaza Strip with full representative participation of the PLO. The American proposal did not advocate the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip but, at the same time, it opposed Israeli claims to sovereignty over the region. Under the American proposal, therefore, the territory remained a separate ‘default’ entity around which a final territorial arrangement had to be reached. All of the proposals explicitly recognized the territorial dimension of the Palestinian question rather than defining it as simply a refugee problem. For its part, there is also conditional recognition on the part of the Arab world for the existence of the state of Israel in its pre-1967 boundaries. This was enunciated in the 1982 Arab Fez Summit (*ibid.*):

there was absolutely no precedent for the Fez Summit in collective Arab diplomacy. Its orientation was unmistakably conciliatory toward a peaceful, non-transitional and guaranteed settlement on the basis of coexistence with Israel within the 1967 frontiers. (Khalidi W 1992, 135)

Thus, during the 1974–88 period, the international status of the Palestinians was articulated but this was not necessarily accompanied by increased power orientations on the part of the Palestinians themselves. Arab states took on the role of proposing initiatives aimed at conflict resolution. Because of their standing as sovereign states, they were able to place the Palestinian issue on the international agenda and thus require that decisions be made rather than avoided. From the perspective of the international community, the implicit recognition of the state of Israel and the acceptance of part, rather than all, of the territory for a future Palestinian state transformed the issue of Palestinian statehood into a bona fide part of the international discourse.

1988–96: Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

The latest change in Palestinian power relations has emerged since 1988, especially following the increase in internal empowerment which has resulted from two seemingly contradictory events. On the one hand, grass-roots empowerment has resulted from the Intifada in which the Palestinians have found themselves able to withstand the military power of Israel (McColl and Newman 1992). At the same time, the acceptance of a two-state solution within Palestine became more tangible amongst both the PLO leadership and the Palestinian masses. The PNC gradually dropped some of the ambiguity, and with it much of the militant language, which characterized its earlier resolutions. The resolutions adopted by the PNC in Algiers in November 1988 mark the most explicit statement of PLO goals to date (Barzilai and Peleg 1994; Khalidi R I 1992; Peretz 1993). Whereas in the previous sessions, the PLO statement of accepting the idea of constructing a state in any part of Palestine did not imply automatic recognition of Israeli control of the rest of Palestine, the nineteenth session of the PNC was different in that it defined the territorial extent of the future Palestinian state, based on recognition of the UN Resolutions 242 and 338, concerned with the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It was during this session that the Declaration of Independence of the state of Palestine was issued and was recognized subsequently by over a hundred states (Abd Al-Ruhman 1990).

Additional events which served to further empower the Palestinians in their quest for statehood were the declaration by Jordan that it no longer saw itself as being responsible for, or having a legal claim over, the West Bank (Robins 1989) and the short-lived PLO–US ambassadorial dialogue in Tunis. Walid Khalidi (1992, 148–9) notes that

the goal, as defined by the Declaration of Independence and the Political Statement, is peaceful coexistence and guaranteed permanent peace on the basis of partition along the 1967 frontier. The means of achieving this are negotiation at an effective international conference . . . such a goal and such means are again in diametric and total variance with the goals and the means spelled out in the 1968 PLO Covenant . . . in the combined 15 000 words of the Declaration of Independence and the Political Statement, the two-word phrase ‘armed struggle’ occurs not once.

While acquiring international legitimacy, PLO acceptance of the UN Resolution that remains the

basis of consensus within the international community as the framework for a settlement of the Palestinian problem brings the organization full circle. The Resolution defines the 'default' territory, namely the West Bank and Gaza Strip, on which the Palestinian problem is to be resolved. The default territory is, in turn, implicitly recognized by Israel in both the Madrid (1990) and Oslo (1993) Accords, in which the West Bank and Gaza Strip constitute the territorial definitions of the areas to be discussed and from which representatives are to be drawn for negotiations. In terms of the evolution of a territorial concept, the Palestinian position had moved, by the early 1990s, from a situation of demanding exclusive rights to the whole of Palestine, to one which accepted political realities of a two-state solution on part of that territory.

Palestinian empowerment has thus resulted from a dynamic interaction of internal and external factors, which together have served to articulate the quest for statehood. Placing the Palestinian issue on the international agenda as part of the decision-making process resulted from the acceptance by Arab states of a solution which took in only part, rather than all, of the Palestine territory. While not initially acceptable to the Palestinians, a more realistic assessment since the late 1980s has changed views of what is possible given the existing realities. International pressure has also played its part, forcing Palestinians to adopt a more conciliatory role by accepting only part of the territory as a basis for direct negotiations with Israel. At the same time, acceptance of this stance has served to increase the relative power of the Palestinians and thus transform them into a direct partner in the process destined to bring about conflict resolution.

Evolution of Israeli concepts of autonomy

The debate around 'whole' or 'part' of the territory ceased to be part of the Israeli/Zionist discourse following the acceptance of the UN Partition Plan and the subsequent establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. When the idea of partitioning Palestine had first been proposed during the 1930s, there had been a heated debate within the Zionist movement about whether to accept the notion of founding a state on less than the whole territory (Galnoor 1991; Haim 1978). After 1948, this debate was no longer considered relevant; issues of territorial configuration had, in the eyes of most Israeli policy-makers, been finally worked out. Only in 1967, following the occupation of the West

Bank and Gaza Strip, did territorial, rather than refugee, issues once again become part of the Israeli discourse. Eban (1992, 461) argues that

The partition principle had always been the foundation of Israel's international legitimacy . . . This [post-1967] map did not conform with any historic conception of the country's boundaries . . . [By] elevating the results of the 1967 war into a kind of sacred text [the proponents of a Greater Israel] turned their back on the Israeli state at it was conceived in 1948.

The post-1967 history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is replete with attempts to implement some form of autonomy for the Palestinian residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Table I). Israeli and Palestinian definitions of any particular autonomy proposal have differed, both in terms of the spatial extent of the autonomous territory and the degree to which self-government is decentralized from the state (Israel) to the autonomous authority (the Palestinians). Just as Palestinian concepts of statehood and its territorial configuration have changed over time, so too have Israeli concepts of autonomy. While Palestinian changes have come about as a result of increased power orientations, Israeli changes have resulted from a relative weakening of its political power within the international community. Power relations remain asymmetrical in Israel's favour, particularly with regard to military power, but not to the point where endogenous and exogenous factors are unable to influence change.

The changing nature of power relations with respect to the autonomy discourse relates to political, rather than military, power. Although Israel's military and strategic superiority has undergone some change, particularly as a result of its vulnerability to ballistic missiles, it has retained its overall hegemony in terms of territorial control. But, politically, Israel's position within the international community has weakened as Palestinian rights have become part of the international agenda. Paradoxically, Israel's military superiority has been a major factor influencing its international standing. The continued control of a stateless nation on the grounds that this was important for the physical security of the state was a stance which, in an era of postcolonialism, was unacceptable to the international community.

Autonomy by default: the Allon Plan (1967-77)

Prior to 1967, conflict resolution was perceived only as resulting from negotiations between

Table I The substance of autonomy models in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict

	<i>Allon Plan</i>	<i>Camp David</i>	<i>Declaration of Principles</i>
Context/objectives	Immediate post-1967. Israeli hegemony	Israel–Egypt peace accords	Recognition of legitimate Palestinian leadership
Negotiating participants	Israel unilateral No partner. Imposed autonomy	Israel–Egypt No Palestinian participation	Israel–PLO Direct negotiations
Territory	Upland region of West Bank. Territorial corridor to Jordan	Undefined. Autonomy for people not territory	Jericho and Gaza Strip. To be extended to remainder of West Bank
Degree of self-government	Subject to Jordan	Civilian and municipal local government	Limited self-government. Gradual extension of authorities
Leadership	Local leadership, subordinate to Jordan	Elected municipal leadership, subject to Israel	Elected leadership, popular franchise
Security issues	Israeli control of boundaries. Demilitarized autonomy zone	Israel	Palestinian police force. Israeli–Palestinian joint control of boundaries

sovereign states over the final demarcation of boundaries. Following the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, conflict resolution had also to take account of the future status of a non-sovereign territory. While Israel desired to retain overall military and security control, it did not desire to take on the responsibilities of long-term administration of the Palestinian inhabitants of this region. Immediately following the war, some Israeli policy-makers rejected any notion of Palestinian autonomy, even where issues such as defence, finance, foreign affairs, land and water were left in the hands of the Israeli authority (Eban 1992). Eventually, the Israeli government adopted a policy known as the Allon Plan.³ This plan envisaged Israeli retention of direct territorial control over the border regions of the West Bank, including the Jordan Rift Valley separating the West Bank from the state of Jordan. The remainder of the region – containing the bulk of the indigenous Palestinian population – was to be controlled by Jordan, either through annexation by the latter or as an ‘autonomous’ region subject to Jordanian authority. Under such an arrangement, the

Palestinians of the West Bank would not exercise any form of sovereignty but would be part of a Jordanian/Palestinian state under Hashemite leadership (Lustick 1993) or part of a federal or confederal arrangement with Jordan (Elazar 1979, 1983, 1991). It was envisaged that the Palestinian population would be administered by local governmental authorities, conducting their municipal, legal and educational affairs according to Jordanian guidelines. The autonomous zone would be linked to Jordan by means of a territorial corridor (Fig. 2a).

The territory to which autonomy could apply in the Allon Plan falls far short of the whole of the West Bank. In addition, the degree of self-government accorded to this authority would be largely dependent on the goodwill of Jordan which would be entitled to define the nature and structure of Palestinian local government. It would appear that the use of the term ‘autonomy’ in this context satisfied the Israeli aspiration to be rid of the territory containing the bulk of the Palestinian inhabitants but, at the same time, without recognizing any alternative form of sovereignty. While

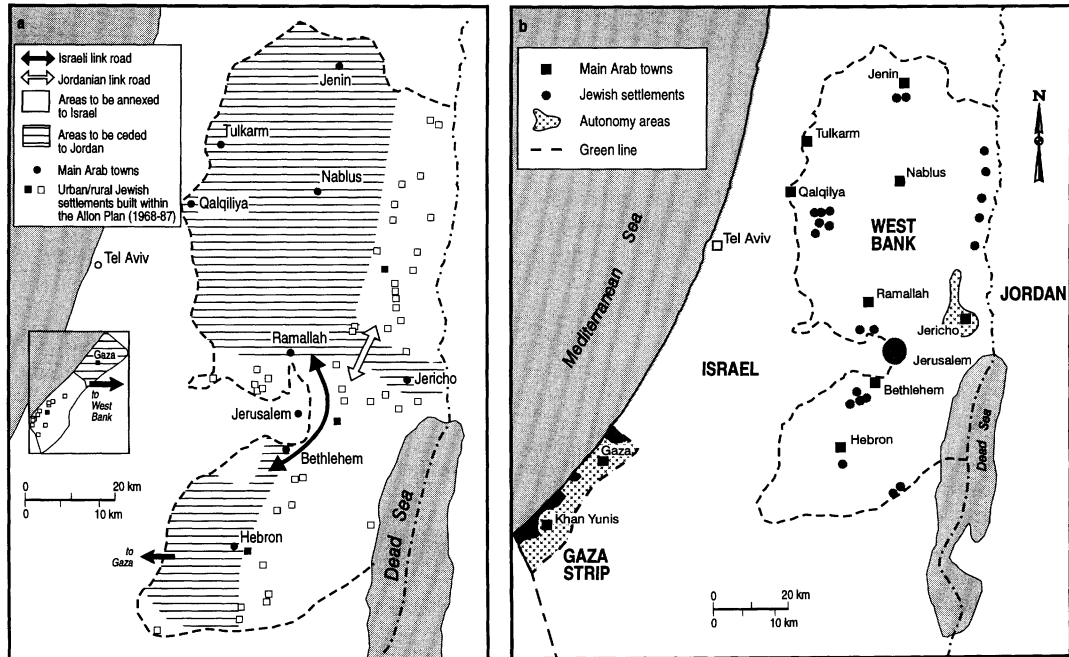


Figure 2 Changing territorial configurations of autonomy proposals (a) Allon Plan 1967-77; (b) Declaration of Principles 1993

Israel would recognize the right of the Jordanian government to intervene in the affairs of the autonomous zone, this did not extend to recognizing any Jordanian policy of annexation aimed at fully integrating parts of the West Bank into the Jordanian sovereign entity.

There was little in the Allon Plan which resembled any recognized model of autonomy elsewhere in the world. It did not grant any degree of meaningful self-rule within the autonomous territory, nor did it recognize the legitimacy of self-government based on a local leadership with real decision-making powers. Instead, it perceived the 'autonomous' region as a territorial parcel which could simply be wrapped up and handed over to an alternative administration within constraints set by the dominant power. Autonomy was required for the region in order to differentiate it from the Jordanian state rather than as a means of promoting meaningful autonomous self-government.

Moreover, autonomy was a 'fall out' of the major objectives of the plan, namely to ensure Israel's security claim and strategic concerns along the new eastern boundary. The Allon Plan also included proposals for the establishment of Jewish

settlements along the Jordan valley as well as the eventual annexation of some of the western fringes of the region to Israel itself. As such, the notion of an autonomous zone came about by 'default' rather than by a process in which the role and status of the Palestinians had to be decided. Denial of the Palestinians as a separate people meant that they were not part of the decision-making process at that time. Had the autonomy proposals ever been implemented, they would have resulted in an even smaller Palestinian territory than that of the West Bank, a territory which would have become transformed into a virtual exclave surrounded by Israeli-controlled security belts.

The Allon Plan indicates the asymmetry in power relations which emerged in the immediate aftermath of the June 1967 war. This plan was a unilateral attempt to impose a solution taking into account the concerns of the victorious power. This was further enhanced by Israeli policy which saw Jordan, rather than the Palestinians themselves, as the negotiating partner over the future of the West Bank. The 'Jordanian option' ceased to be a realistic alternative for Israeli policy-makers only after the formal withdrawal of Jordan's King Hussein from

West Bank affairs in 1988. The peace agreement between Jordan and Israel, signed in 1994, makes no reference whatsoever to the West Bank and the Palestinians (Document 1994b). Moreover, it served to strengthen the notion of the West Bank as a default territory for Palestinian statehood by virtue of the fact that boundaries were demarcated only along those stretches between Jordan and Israel to the north and south of the West Bank. Jordan perceived the remaining section of the boundary to be determined between itself and a future Palestinian entity.

Planned autonomy: Camp David (1979–85) The Camp David peace agreement between Israel and Egypt was accompanied by proposals for the implementation of Palestinian autonomy. The plan was first proposed by the Israeli Prime Minister, Begin, in December 1977, under the title 'Home Rule: Administrative Autonomy for Palestine Arab residents of Judea, Samaria and Gaza' (Hattis Rolef 1987; Quandt 1986). The original plan suggested the dismantling of the military government and the establishment of an elected Administrative Council while leaving internal and external security in Israel's hands. This plan was later incorporated into the Camp David Accords. Under this agreement, the West Bank and Gaza would undergo a transitional period of five years, following which full autonomy would be granted to the Palestinian inhabitants of these areas (Lapidot 1982; Shalev 1979). As with the case of the Allon Plan, the autonomy proposals were prepared by 'outsiders', not by the Palestinians themselves. However, while in the Allon Plan the proposal was unilateral on the part of Israel, in the case of Camp David there was a full Arab state partner in Egypt. As such, the nature of Palestinian self-government became an issue for negotiation between two sides rather than the imposition of a formula drawn up by the dominant military power. Moreover, while the Allon Plan was accepted as representing government policy, it was never officially endorsed or approved by the Israeli cabinet. It remained an informal statement of intentions on the part of Israel. For its part, the Camp David Accords were ratified by both the Israeli and Egyptian governments, and they obliged both sides to the agreement to work towards the implementation of the autonomy clauses.

The autonomy proposals of the Camp David agreement evolved over a period of time.

Sicherman (1993) documents this process, including both the initial autonomy models proposed both by Israel and Egypt in 1980, the United States mediation in drawing these vastly different proposals together and a second, more developed, Israeli proposal in the following year. In the ensuing negotiations, carried on during the early 1980s, little progress was made in the implementation of the Camp David autonomy. Each side interpreted the agreement according to their own readings of the original agreement, much of which had been couched in vague and indeterminate language (Gabay 1981; Rabinovitch 1981).

The Israeli autonomy model was limited in both its territorial and power characteristics. The proposal related only to some form of limited self-government for the Palestinian residents of the West Bank and Gaza without any acknowledgement that this would be part of national self-determination. In a technical document, Israel even proposed the exact structure, number and hierarchy of a Palestinian administrative council and the areas of activity in which they would be allowed to operate (Sicherman 1993). No mention was made of territorial issues other than that the self-administration would take place within the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These ideas were translated into notions of personal autonomy alone, within which Palestinians could opt for either Israeli or Jordanian citizenship but would not be accorded their own sovereignty.

The counter Egyptian proposal was much more detailed and far-reaching in its coverage of autonomy (*ibid.*). Their proposal assumed the initial withdrawal of the Israeli military government and its associated civil administration, and the full transfer of authority to the autonomy administration. The Egyptian proposal states categorically that autonomy applies to both people and land (not just people, as later Israeli diplomats would argue), and that autonomy was only a temporary arrangement which would continue for a period of five years and which was aimed at achieving a final settlement to the Palestinian problem. The autonomy council would be elected in free elections and would have its headquarters in East Jerusalem (a term not mentioned within the Israeli proposal).

Following American mediation, Israel produced a 'final autonomy proposal' (*ibid.*, 153–7) in which some of the vague points in their initial document were elaborated. While agreeing to extend the

scope of powers of an elected self-administration authority, this proposal still failed to accept the notion that autonomy would be part of a Palestinian state-building process and the eventual re-partition of the area into two separate states. There was still no mention of autonomy over land, only people. Moreover, in the preamble to the document, it was restated that the substance of autonomy would be decided upon by the co-signatories to the Camp David agreement (Israel and Egypt) with the possible participation of Jordan as an 'invited' partner. No mention was made of the Palestinians taking part in this negotiation process.

The nature of power relations remained asymmetrical in Israel's favour but were nevertheless subject to the influences of exogenous factors. Both the United States and Egypt rejected the Israeli definition of autonomy as being too limited in nature. This resulted in the formulation of a document which, unlike the Allon Plan, was not a unilateral statement of intentions. However, Israel's power to determine the course and length of negotiations meant that the discussions aimed at bringing some form of autonomy model to fruition dragged on for a number of years before finally being pushed aside in the wake of changing regional and geopolitical events.

Autonomy in practice: the Declaration of Principles (DOP) (1993–1996) Prior to the signing of the Oslo Accord, Israeli and Palestinian delegations first came into direct contact with each other at the Madrid conference in 1990 (Shlaim 1994). This was brought about largely by the new American position following the Gulf War and its commitment to the Arab world to readdress the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The threat to withhold economic loan guarantees from an intransigent Israeli government signalled potential changes in American policy towards Israel. The Palestinians began with the assumption that they were a people with national rights and that the interim arrangements under discussion were no more than a transitional stage on the road to independence. The Israeli government accepted neither the notion of Palestinian national rights nor independent statehood. The outcome of the ensuing talks was two incompatible proposals aimed at implementing 'interim self-government' which contained irreconcilable differences of nature and scope. The Israeli proposals were rooted in the Camp David Accords,

in which self-government or autonomy applied only to people but not to territory (*ibid.*). This was unacceptable to the Palestinians who argued for the clear delineation of the territory within which autonomy would apply.

The Oslo Accords resulted from a different set of geopolitical codes. The new Israeli government had a more constructive position on territorial compromise. They also understood the importance of being included within processes of economic globalization rather than following policies of isolationism. At the same time, the fact that the negotiations leading up to the Oslo Accords were undertaken secretly without any direct United States participation reflects the processes of global geopolitical restructuring which were taking place at the time. While the Madrid talks were the epitome of the 'old' global geopolitics, conducted by the superpowers with much publicity, they did not result in substantial progress. The secret talks leading up to the Oslo Accords were brokered by a more peripheral power, Norway, and resulted in substantial and tangible gains for both sides.

Although the initial autonomy areas were limited to the Gaza Strip and the Jericho area, there were a number of important differences between this agreement and any previous autonomy proposals. First, following Israeli recognition of the PLO, the Palestinians were an equal partner in the negotiation process with Israel. This had not been the case in any of the previous proposals, nor had it been apparent in the initial peace process which had commenced in Madrid in the autumn of 1991. As such, while it could be argued that the limited extent of autonomy was 'forced' upon the Palestinians by a dominant Israel, it was nevertheless not an agreement simply imposed by outside powers which had assumed for themselves the role of negotiating in the name of the Palestinians. This equality was probably the single most important change in the nature of power relations between the two sides.

The substance of the implemented autonomy was limited both in its original territorial extent and the degree of self-government (Document 1993, 1994a). Indeed, Peretz (1993) argues that Israel's negotiating stance was not greatly different from that proposed at Camp David and that rejection of the former had been a lost opportunity. Israel continued to reserve for itself the right to control border crossings into the autonomy areas from third countries (Jordan into Jericho and Egypt

into the Gaza Strip). However, the Palestinians were allowed to create an armed police force, much of which was composed of returnee Palestinian members of the PLO. The fact that this autonomy was negotiated between the relevant partners to the conflict, coupled with the implementation of autonomy for the first time, meant that this functional model has served as the basis for real transition to a next stage of state evolution. The diffusion of self-rule powers to other areas within the West Bank, the withdrawal of Israeli military from the initial autonomy zones and the direct discussions between Israeli and Palestinian leaders as a means of solving problems on the ground as well as preparing for the next round of negotiations all point towards the transitional nature of this autonomy agreement. At the same time, the concept of autonomy remained part of Israeli, rather than Palestinian, discourse. Dajani (1994, 8) notes that

The PLO, in recognising the State of Israel, recognised a territorial state and a sovereign state . . . but with no fixed borders. Israel in return recognised the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people, . . . merely an organisation that can serve as a suitable negotiating partner.

The Oslo II Accord, signed and implemented in the latter part of 1995, went a stage further in the recognition of Palestinian self-government. Power was transferred to virtually all of the 2 million Palestinian residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, although Israel retained direct control over 60 per cent of the area, particularly those areas within which there was little Palestinian population or where Israeli settlements were located. The Oslo II map produced a geographically discontinuous territory, in which the Palestinian self-government areas did not form part of a compact political unit (Newman 1995a, 1996). The region was divided into areas 'A', 'B' and 'C', with Palestinian autonomy encompassing areas 'A' and 'B' while Israel retained control of area 'C' (least population, most territory). This Accord was, again, perceived as being no more than a transitional stage on the path to full statehood which would take place within a compact territory to be defined in further stages of negotiations.

Beyond the context and objectives of any autonomy agreement, it is the facts on the ground that dictate the nature of the transition process to the next stage. Official Israeli negotiating policy still fell short of accepting the ultimate establishment of an independent sovereign Palestinian state. Paradoxically, however, we would argue that

Israeli policy with respect to the autonomy areas strengthened, rather than weakened, notions of territorial separateness leading to independent statehood. This is indicated by the fact that the transfer of authority to the Palestinian leadership has been accompanied by an almost total withdrawal on the part of Israel from any form of fiscal and administrative intervention/assistance. For the West Bank and Gaza Strip to function as stable political units, it is necessary to improve the basic economic conditions of these areas. Israeli policy, however, has been to withdraw its own direct subsidies which were transferred through the military government. Instead, responsibility for the functioning of the autonomous area has been completely transferred as though both Gaza and Jericho were completely separate political entities (Fig. 2b). The lack of a certain level of 'federal' or 'state' intervention within the autonomous regions or provinces makes this model of autonomy exceptional. Moreover, the Israeli policy of closing the boundaries of the West Bank and Gaza Strip following incidents of violence strengthens the notion of separate, rather than integrated autonomous, regions (Newman 1995a, 1996). Autonomous regions are not normally subject to the closure of boundaries which are, for the most part, of an administrative nature only.

As in the case of the Palestinians, alternative proposals reflect the nature of the intra-society political discourse and debate. Both the Allon Plan and the present DOP were put forward by the Labour government while the Camp David proposals were a product of the right wing Likud government. The former are generally perceived as taking more moderate stances with regard to territorial issues and are prepared to undertake territorial concessions in return for a peace agreement. Different versions of the Allon Plan strategy have been formulated throughout the interim period (Cohen 1986) and have even resurfaced in the current debate over final territorial negotiations (Alpher 1994). The major difference in recent discourse concerns the nature of political power and self-determination accorded to the Palestinians rather than a change in the territorial configuration of the proposed autonomy territory.

Concluding discussion

Our discussion of the nature of autonomy within the Israeli-Palestinian context has focused on the

diverse notions and interpretations of this concept at different stages in the process. Two conclusions are apparent. First, autonomy, whichever model is adopted, cannot be imposed by one side on the other as part of dominant power hegemony. In both the Allon Plan and Camp David proposals, the Palestinians were not even part of the negotiation process concerning their autonomy. This is, in effect, similar to a Soviet or Yugoslav model of autonomy, in which autonomy was imposed upon the constituent republics by a centralized Soviet regime. The implementation of autonomy has taken effect only as a result of the stage of conflict resolution within which the Palestinians have been equal representatives in the negotiation process. Secondly, once autonomy is actually implemented on the ground, its transitional nature becomes all the more apparent, especially when it is perceived as being part of a 'bottom-up' model of autonomy which is a means to an end (independent statehood) rather than an end in itself. As with federalism, autonomy is only one form of implementation of the right to self-determination (Kimminich 1993). The granting of 'internal' self-determination may only be a transitional stage in the long process leading to 'external' self-determination and the formation of a state (*ibid.*; Rosas 1993).

For Israel, autonomy is a means by which to decentralize certain civilian powers to the Palestinians while maintaining overall control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and, as such, part of a 'top-down' solution to the conflict. It has been a means by which the international character of the Palestinian case can be resolved within the framework of a domestic intra-state solution but without having to give up overall territorial and strategic control. For the Palestinians, the very essence of the conflict is the struggle for self-determination and the establishment of a sovereign state (Falah 1995; Falah and Newman 1996). Autonomy is not part of the Palestinian discourse on self-determination but one to which a response must be made when put on the agenda by the 'other' side. The conflict has to be resolved through direct negotiations and international mediation, itself stemming from international recognition for Palestinian rights, rather than imposed by a single hegemonic power.

Notwithstanding, both cases of conflict resolution – the Camp David and the Oslo Accords – have resulted from circumstances in which a single superpower has had direct influence on both protagonists. The agreements between Israel and

Egypt resulted from a shift in Egyptian allegiances from the Soviet Union to the United States, thus removing this particular part of the Arab–Israeli conflict from the cold war stage. Similarly, the direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians took place in the period of global restructuring in which the United States became the single hegemonic power in the middle east. Despite the fact that the secret negotiations, which took place in a 'peripheral' location (Norway), were the key factor in bringing about the agreement, they could not have occurred under the circumstances of a cold war in which each side continued to be a pawn in superpower strategic confrontation.

Both Israel and the Palestinians have adapted their geopolitical codes as they attempt to make sense of the new world order and to 'create events to their state's advantage' (Taylor 1993b, 36). The demise of Soviet power resulted, paradoxically, in both a weakening and a strengthening of the Palestinian position. Practical geopolitical reasoning would lead us to assume that, having lost the support of their major political patron, the Palestinian position would be weakened. However, the strengthening of American hegemony within the middle east, not least as a result of the Gulf War, meant that the United States could bring pressure for conflict resolution rather than view the region as just one more cold war battlefield. The middle east is one region within which a power vacuum has not occurred in the immediate aftermath of the cold war. Israel's relative position was weakened as its traditional support from the United States became dependent on conflict resolution instead of maintaining a bulwark against Soviet expansion in the region.

Prior to the period of conflict resolution, Israeli geopolitical codes focused on their global (USA) and regional (Europe) interests. Local codes began to be important only after the peace accords with Egypt. For their part, the Palestinians derived their major power base from strong local and regional codes while their international position was relatively weak. The period of conflict resolution has paralleled an increase in global power on the part of the Palestinians and an increasing recognition by Israeli political élites that long-term survival is dependent on becoming more fully integrated within the local and medium geopolitical hierarchy. This derives from an understanding of the relationship between political and economic processes at both the regional and international scales.

In this paper, we have traced the evolving territorial and conflict resolution narratives of both the Palestinians and the Israelis. In essence, the two discourses talk at, rather than to, each other. The Palestinians discuss statehood and political self-determination but this has not been part of the Israeli agenda. For its part, Israel discusses power devolution and autonomy (while retaining partial control of the territory) which, in turn, has not been part of the Palestinian agenda, not least because they themselves have not been party to this discourse. Under these conditions, the discourse which is articulated by the party with the greater power stands a better chance of being heard and placed upon the agenda. But our discussion of these conflicting discourses has also shown that both have undergone change and have moved closer to each other over time. The most significant change in the relative power relations has taken place as a result of Israelis and Palestinians talking to, rather than at, each other. The discourse, however hotly contested, now becomes a mutual one in which both sides are represented, enabling direct negotiations. The 'other' has been recognized, as has its respective claims to at least part of the contested territory (Peretz 1993).

But the 'narrowing' of the gap does not mean that the gap has been 'closed'. Alternative narratives concerning the final territorial resolution of the conflict have yet to be bridged. Despite the logic behind a single binational democratic entity in the whole of Palestine, political realities and mutual animosities would indicate a clear preference, and movement towards, a two-state solution of the conflict (Falah and Newman 1995; Newman and Falah 1995). This requires the clear demarcation of boundaries which would serve the dual purpose of both a physical-political and ethnic line of separation. From an Israeli perspective, it allows the state to continue to exist as a sovereign entity within a defined territory while, for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, it provides a core territory for the ultimate realization of political self-determination and sovereignty.

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Notes

- 1 See Buchheit (1978); Cobban (1969); Knight (1984, 1985, 1994); and Murswiek (1994).
- 2 See Bachrach and Baratz (1962); Giddens (1987); Schattschneider (1960); and Taylor (1993a).
- 3 See Allon (1976); Harris (1978); Newman (1991); and Rowley (1989).

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