

Introduction

Malcolm Kerr, the late scholar of the modern Arab world, wrote in 1980 that the conventional wisdom about the Arab-Israeli conflict had become so entrenched in the United States that diplomats were severely inhibited in their ability to formulate policy. Kerr maintained that a body of assumptions and misconceptions, rarely challenged or debated, had grown up around the origins of the conflict, and serious discourse had ceased among the public and except in rare instances among policymakers as well. Policymakers tend in general, he observed, to try to avoid controversy, and, with regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict, it had thus become the natural inclination of the very people inside government whose job it was to study the issues to fall back instead on the analysis prevailing in Congress, in the press, and among the general public.¹

Kerr's observations remain widely applicable today, despite progress toward resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. Two of the elements that he identified as constituting the conventional wisdom relate specifically to the Palestinian-Israeli issue: the notion that Palestinian national claims are "artificially and mischievously inspired" and thus may be ignored and the notion that the only real issue in the Arab-Israeli conflict is an unreasonable Arab refusal to accept Israel's existence—not, as Arabs contend, a real grievance against Israel arising from the Palestinians' displacement.² The perception that the Palestinians have no rational basis for their hostility to Israel and no legitimate national claim to the land of Palestine is fundamental to the misconceptions surrounding this conflict. It has essentially been a given for most of the twentieth century that Palestinians are contesting the Jews' inherent right to exist in Palestine—not that Palestinians, as a native population with centuries of residence and title deeds to the land, have their own claim to patrimony in Palestine.

For the half century before the 1993 Palestinian-Israeli peace agreement, and in large measure still, the assumption that the Arab and Palestinian position was “mischievously inspired” has constituted a nearly unchallengeable vantage point for observing the Arab-Israeli conflict. This vantage point has constituted what might be called a frame of reference within which the conflict has been contained in public and diplomatic discourse. The frame of reference defines and sets boundaries around thinking on Palestinian-Israeli issues. It is for the most part Israel-centered, approaching the conflict generally from an Israeli perspective and seldom recognizing the existence or the legitimacy of a Palestinian perspective.

The dispossession and dispersal of the Palestinians in 1948 has always been and to a great extent remains “an unrecognizable episode,” as Kerr put it, even for most informed Americans³—unrecognizable in the sense not only that the dispossession has been forgotten but also that it is seldom recognized to be the ultimate cause of the conflict. A well-known Israeli historian has remarked that history is in a real sense “the propaganda of the victors,” and because Israel won the contest for Palestine, Israel’s version of that contest, of the rights and claims that underlay it, and of the justice of the outcome has prevailed in most international discourse.⁴

For the vast majority of Americans, including the reasonably well informed, Palestinians have never had a history; they were never there until, apparently out of the blue, they began preying on Israel. A U.S. journalist working in Saudi Arabia in the early 1980s recalls a U.S. senator asking a Saudi official where on earth the Palestinians had come from “to begin with.”⁵ The senator’s ignorance is not unusual by any means. The conventional wisdom generally holds that the conflict originated not because Palestinians lost land and homes and a national locus in their native territory and have been attempting to recover a lost heritage but because Arabs have an innate hatred for Jews. The notion that the conflict involves not unreasoned hatreds but competing nationalisms finds little accommodation within the frame of reference, even today.

In its Israel-centeredness, the frame of reference assumes a unique bond between Israel and the United States arising from a common biblical heritage, from a shared belief that because of the Holocaust and earlier centuries of suffering Jews must have a homeland, and from U.S. identification with what some have called Israel’s “national style,” particularly its pioneering beginnings and its commitment to Western democracy.⁶ For some, particularly those U.S. Jews in whom Israel arouses an intense emotional identification, the relationship is symbiotic. “Americans and Israelis are bonded together like no two other sovereign peoples,” notes Peter Grose in

his 1983 book, *Israel in the Mind of America*. "As the Judaic heritage flowed through the minds of America's early settlers and helped to shape the new American republic, so Israel restored adopted the vision and the values of the American dream. Each, the United States and Israel, grafted the heritage of the other onto itself."⁷ Grose accurately reflects the depth and quality that supporters of Israel have tried to achieve in the relationship. Another historian has observed that the emotional and cultural identification of the United States with Israel is so close that Israel takes part "in the 'being' of American society."⁸

In a frame of reference that so enthusiastically envelops Israel and so automatically approaches the conflict from the Israeli point of view, there has been little room for the Palestinian perspective. This is clearly the case in the public consciousness, and, for the same reasons, policymakers have paid little heed to the Palestinian viewpoint. The emotional bond with Israel, the perception that has prevailed to one degree or another throughout every administration since Harry Truman's that Israel is strategically important to the United States, a strong and ingrained reluctance among policymakers to spark controversy or generate change by giving any advantage to Arabs perceived to be "difficult" or ready to upset the status quo, and the militant and uncompromising nature of the Arab and Palestinian reaction to Israel's creation and the Palestinians' dispossession—all these factors have combined to give Israel overwhelming predominance in U.S. policy considerations and to push concern for the legitimacy of Palestinian claims to the background.

The idea that an event as significant as the displacement of over seven hundred thousand people from homes and native land could have become an "unrecognizable episode," forgotten by policymakers as the source and motivation for that people's anger and hostility, would seem preposterous. But a mind-set is by its nature an outlook that is fixed, accepting of the status quo, and often closed to new or unconventional perspectives. As will be seen, so many factors combined so quickly in the wake of the Palestinians' displacement in 1948 to put the Israeli case prominently before the U.S. public, to make the assurance of Israeli security the central concern of U.S. interest, and, perhaps most significant, to push the Palestinian case to the background that the development of a mind-set and an all but immutable frame of reference was virtually immediate.

In his classic study of Western perceptions of the Orient, *Orientalism*, Palestinian American intellectual Edward Said describes the life cycle of a mind-set in a graphic way. "Fictions," he observes, "have their own logic and their own dialectic of growth or decline." Learned texts, media repre-

sentations, any supposedly authoritative body of knowledge have a self-reinforcing tendency. Having gained a certain perspective from something they have heard or read, audiences come to have particular expectations that in turn influence what is said or written henceforth. Said notes:

[If] one reads a book claiming that lions are fierce and then encounters a fierce lion, . . . the chances are that one will be encouraged to read more books by that same author, and believe them. . . . A book on how to handle a fierce lion might then cause a series of books to be produced on such subjects as the fierceness of lions, the origins of fierceness, and so forth. . . . A text purporting to contain knowledge about something actual . . . is not easily dismissed. Expertise is attributed to it. The authority of academics, institutions, and governments can accrue to it, surrounding it with still greater prestige than its practical successes warrant. Most important, such texts can *create* not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe.⁹

Like the notional literature on lions and their fierceness, the conventional wisdom on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has grown exponentially as it has been iterated, reiterated, embellished, and expanded on. Each scholarly text, each novel and movie and media representation, each piece of data added to the framework has helped create reality. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, in a 1996 op-ed article criticizing Hollywood director Oliver Stone for distorting history in the movie *Nixon*, notes that, once put forth in a big-budget movie, “a caricature of history” is virtually impossible to counter in the public mind. Actual history is usually too complex for a simplified dramatic presentation.¹⁰ And so a new body of knowledge is created.

A prime example of a significant misrepresentation in the Palestinian-Israeli situation that has had the effect of creating false knowledge, through a spiraling process of constant repetition and supposedly authoritative reinforcement, is the widely believed but untrue story that Palestinian civilians left their homes in 1948 because the Palestinian leadership broadcast instructions over the radio that they leave in order to give Arab military forces a clear field to drive the Jews out of Palestine. This misconception began to be circulated in the midst of the 1948 war and quickly became an enduring staple of Israeli lore and U.S. perceptions.

In fact, no broadcast orders from any Arab authority were ever issued to the Palestinian populace, and, except in a few local instances, no Arab military commanders gave orders to clear areas of Palestine of civilians. A U.S. author, Dan Kurzman, whose 1970 book, *Genesis 1948: The First Arab-Israeli War*, recounted the events of 1948 as seen by both Arabs and

Israelis, searched Israeli military archives and the British Broadcasting Corporation's radio monitoring files and found no record of either Arab military communications ordering a civilian evacuation or any broadcast radio instructions.¹¹ Virtually no heed was paid to Kurzman's findings, which constituted the first refutation of the "broadcasts myth" to appear in a popular medium in the United States.¹² Almost two decades later—forty years after the Palestinian flight—Israeli historian Benny Morris concluded in *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, an exhaustive study using declassified Israeli archival material, that no Arab authority issued "blanket instructions, by radio or otherwise, to Palestine's Arabs to flee," that Palestinian flight was induced to a great extent by a "general sense of collapse" that permeated Arab Palestine, and that a "small but significant proportion" of the flight resulted from explicit expulsion orders issued by Jewish forces.¹³

The broadcasts myth became a central element in Israeli and U.S. images of the 1948 conflict. It was used to demonstrate that the Palestinians' attachment to their land and homes was weak, that by clearing the way for Arab military forces to "drive the Jews into the sea" the Palestinians showed that they were bent on Israel's destruction, and that in the end Israel bore no responsibility for the Palestinians' displacement and homelessness. Although it has been discredited in most scholarly circles, the myth remains widely believed outside academia.

Historians have often noted the difference between events and the memory of them, the dichotomy between how a historical event actually unfolded and how it is remembered. Nowhere has this been more true than in the Arab-Israeli conflict, where both sides have built an elaborate structure of myths and warped memories. And with no other country has the United States more completely absorbed the entire catalog of myths than it has with Israel. Israeli commentator Meron Benvenisti has noted that national myths, made up of a mixture of real and legendary events, are "the building-blocks from which a society constructs its collective self-image" and, once absorbed, "become truer than reality itself."¹⁴ In a real sense, Israel's self-image has become a part of the U.S. self-image, as Israel is a part of the "being" of the United States.

The Israel-centeredness of the framework of thinking on Palestinian-Israeli issues, even today, is clearly illustrated in the way the media treated the Palestinians' May 1998 commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of their dispersal. Palestinians call this dispossession the *nakba*, the catastrophe, in recognition of the national and societal disaster caused by their expulsion and flight from Palestine in 1948. The Israeli press, however, indi-

cating a wholly self-absorbed point of view, reported that the word *nakba* referred to Israel's creation—"the Arab designation for the founding of the State of Israel"—rather than to the Palestinians' dispossession. Reflecting a similarly Israel-focused perspective, even the *New York Times* reported that Israel's creation was "an event [the Palestinians] call the 'catastrophe.'" ¹⁵ A neutral press would have described the *nakba* from the perspective of those who coined the term, not from Israel's viewpoint.

The prevalence of the Israeli perspective is further illustrated by an encyclopedia of the Arab-Israeli conflict published in 1996. Edited by the well-known scholar Bernard Reich, *An Historical Encyclopedia of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* approaches most issues from an Israeli perspective despite what Reich describes as a deliberate attempt to be nonpartisan and to select scholars with a wide range of perspectives. Bias is notable not only in terminology but also in the selection of data and in interpretation. The 1948 war, for instance, is called the War of Independence, the 1967 war is the Six-Day War, and the 1973 war is the Yom Kippur War—all Israeli terms for these conflicts that Arabs consider offensive. In articles on Palestinians involved in terrorism, each incident is detailed and words such as *slaughter* and *murder* are used repeatedly. Yet none of these terms is used in the articles on Menachem Begin and the Irgun, the pre-state terrorist organization that Begin headed, and Begin's involvement in political violence, including the 1946 bombing of the King David Hotel and the massacre of Palestinian civilians at the village of Deir Yassin during the 1948 war, is not mentioned at all. Irgun involvement at Deir Yassin is briefly mentioned, but the incident is described as an attack "which resulted in 240 Arab civilian casualties."¹⁶

Two articles cover Jerusalem: one, three pages in length, devotes one paragraph each to the city's Muslim and Christian connections, leaving the entire remainder of the article to Jewish matters; the second, also three pages long, is devoted solely to the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City. The treatment given Hebron, a West Bank town of great religious significance to both Jews and Muslims, where fewer than 500 Israelis live among 120,000 Palestinians, is similarly skewed toward the town's Jewish aspects. Reich and his authors also use virtually none of the revisionist history of 1948 published since the mid-1980s by such Israeli historians as Benny Morris, Avi Shlaim, and Ilan Pappé. As a result, the encyclopedia contains nothing about the pre-1948 cooperation between the Zionist leadership and Transjordan's King Abdullah to prevent the formation of a Palestinian Arab state and nothing about the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948.¹⁷

Terminology such as that used in Reich's encyclopedia has always played

a major role in shaping perceptions of Palestinian-Israeli issues. Terminology is the basic material for constructing the framework through which we view any situation—the shaper, in the words of Israeli sociologist Baruch Kimmerling, of our cognition and patterns of thinking.¹⁸ In the Middle East, terminology shapes reality; it becomes a way of seeing reality, and, finally, it is reality. Terminology often determines, for instance, who is thought of as a terrorist and who is not. British journalist Robert Fisk relates that the Marine colonel who commanded the U.S. contingent of the multinational force in Lebanon in 1982 referred in a press briefing to a group of Palestinians who attacked Israeli armor near Beirut as terrorists. When Fisk asked why he had used that particular word, the colonel responded sarcastically that he could also have called them outlaws. But Fisk thought the colonel had missed the point of the question. Either word implied that the Israelis, although a foreign army, had a right to expect immunity from attack in Lebanon and that anyone who shot at them was automatically a terrorist.¹⁹ The Americans, by using either “terrorist” or “outlaw,” had bought into the concept that Israel’s presence in Lebanon was more legitimate than that of its enemies, some of whom were also foreign, some indigenous. The use of these terms automatically defined the U.S. frame of reference for dealing with anyone who shot at Israelis.

Terminology can also determine who owns a piece of land—or who the speaker believes owns it. In the case of the West Bank, the land can be called by the name Arabs and most of the international community use or by the names Judea and Samaria, used by Israelis who believe it is irrevocably Israeli land. Imposing place names is part of imposing control and passes judgment on ownership, according to Palestinian American scholar Rashid Khalidi. “This process of naming,” Khalidi says, “is an attempt to privilege one dimension of a complex reality at the expense of others, with the ultimate aim of blotting the others out, or decisively subordinating them to Israeli domination.”²⁰

Kimmerling observes that through their use of certain words and concepts Israeli historiographers often predetermine their conclusions—and, it might be added, help to predetermine the perceptions that Americans also hold about Israel and the Palestinians. Many Israeli historians, for instance, indiscriminately use the term *Eretz Israel*—the Land of Israel—to apply to all historical periods, no matter what power ruled it at the time. The practice effectively grants Jews an “eternal title” over the land, obscuring and in some fashion delegitimizing other populations and other governments, Kimmerling notes. During the British Mandate, Israeli historiographers handled the Palestine issue “as an almost exclusive ‘Jewish bubble.’” Brit-

ain and the Arab population of Palestine either were not included or, if dealt with, were “treated as external forces and residual categories.”²¹ In many respects, this exclusion, particularly of the Palestinian Arabs, spilled over into U.S. perceptions of the Palestine situation, and many Americans, in and out of government, came to see the Palestine issue primarily in “Judeo-centric” terms, despite Palestine’s Arab majority and British government.

The frame of reference that defines the limits of discourse on the Palestinian-Israeli issue is not a matter solely of terminology and of false knowledge but also of knowledge withheld. The Palestinians have always to a great degree been politically invisible. This has been true since the days of Woodrow Wilson, when the United States endorsed Britain’s Balfour Declaration; this first policy statement by a Western government on the Palestine situation supported the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine and largely ignored Palestine’s Arab inhabitants, referring to them merely as “non-Jews.” From more recent times, a few examples suffice to demonstrate how the frame of reference functions to withhold knowledge.

- In the mid-1980s, the executive producer of the ABC television program *Nightline* acknowledged to an interviewer that the Arab point of view was underrepresented in comparison with the Israeli viewpoint because, he said, there was a dearth of “credible Arab guests” who were as interesting from a programming standpoint as Israel’s spokespeople. Other television programs and networks similarly ignored Arab spokespeople thought to be radical, uninteresting, or not credible for one reason or another, particularly before 1990.²² As a result, in its search for program material that is entertaining rather than necessarily balanced, television only rarely gave audiences an opportunity to hear the Arab and Palestinian points of view at all until the 1990s.
- In June 1988, at the height of the Palestinian uprising, the *intifada*, in the West Bank and Gaza, a close adviser to Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman Yasir Arafat passed out to the press corps covering an Arab summit meeting in Algiers a statement affirming Palestinian agreement with Israel’s desire for direct peace talks. Expressing Palestinian understanding for “the Jewish people’s centuries of suffering,” the statement affirmed a belief that “all peoples—the Jews and the Palestinians included—have the right to run their own affairs, expecting from their neighbors not only non-belligerence but the kind of political and economic cooperation without which no state can be truly

secure." The statement, one of the most conciliatory by a Palestinian official to that point, was reportedly rejected when submitted to the *Washington Post* as an op-ed article and when distributed to journalists at Algiers was reported on only by the *Wall Street Journal*, which placed the story on page nineteen. It was another two weeks before other major newspapers mentioned the statement and then only in articles whose principal focus was anti-Arafat fringe groups that rejected its moderation. *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis praised the statement's moderation two weeks after its issuance.²³ The U.S. State Department did not respond to it.

- Many Americans have been equally reluctant to hear news and opinions about Israel that do not fit what has come to be the conventional wisdom. On a visit to the United States in 1983 Israeli journalist Danny Rubinstein met with representatives of the major U.S. Jewish organizations and was rebuffed when he argued that the principal danger Israel faced was not Arab military threats but the potential for internal "moral destruction" because of its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. A leader of one organization told Rubinstein he was not interested in hearing the journalist's argument because he could not use it with his audiences. Rubinstein concluded that only the notion of Israel facing external threats would sell in the United States. Moderate positions, he wrote in an article for the Israeli press, went unheard and did not bring in contributions.²⁴
- The reluctance to publish or to hear the viewpoint of Israel's opponents has extended beyond the Palestinians and to areas beyond politics. A Columbia University professor of comparative literature recalls being asked in 1980 by a New York publisher to suggest a list of Third World novels to be translated and included in a planned new series. The professor gave the publisher a long list that included two or three books by Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature eight years later but was then hardly known in the United States. Asked after a few weeks which novels he intended to have translated, the publisher said that none by Mahfouz had been selected because "Arabic is a controversial language."²⁵

Studies of the foreign-affairs decision-making process have shown that, not unlike the general public, policymakers usually operate on the basis of

a set of assumptions, often inherited from predecessors, and do not scrutinize or challenge those assumptions. Analysis of failed policies shows that policymakers make errors because they have not asked the right questions or examined preconceived notions. Underlying assumptions are often so widely shared that anyone who questions them is regarded as troublesome, so there are few incentives for debating an issue on which everyone seems generally agreed. This has been the case with the Palestinian issue for virtually all of its history. When an issue has a long history, in fact, as with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, policymakers are particularly reluctant to seek out opposing views, feeling that everyone's position is known and everyone is in tune with the prevailing policy line.²⁶

The mind-set with which most policymakers approach the Middle East tends in fact to be self-reinforcing in the sense that officials usually seek only those opinions that fit with the views they already hold. According to one former government official who is still a close observer of the Washington scene, most administrations go through the motions of consulting outside academic experts during their election campaign or early in their tenure but soon limit this contact because most academics do not tell them what they want to know or do not give them information in a context they can use. Those more policy-oriented academics whom policymakers do listen to tend to be co-opted by the administration and become insiders.²⁷

Harold Saunders, a senior State Department official who was involved in Arab-Israeli peace negotiations under Presidents Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter, states that it is normal to reexamine assumptions and policy directions at the beginning of an administration but equally normal to ride along with the initial judgments unless a major development causes rethinking or a particularly difficult situation requires repeated mid-course corrections. Saunders notes that sometimes in his experience, once an initial review had been completed, basic choices with regard to the direction of policy were made instinctively rather than through a further formal decision-making process and that often no one took the time to examine the consequences of a position taken. Saunders also indicates that a president's or senior policymaker's approach to Middle East questions has almost always been influenced by the particular lens through which he or she views the world. Kissinger, for instance, saw the world in a traditional, power-centered way; as a result, he was receptive to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin because they could talk in terms of the international balance of power. Carter and his secretary of state, Cyrus Vance, by contrast, viewed the world more in the context of human rights, making them better able to

see the Palestinian perspective. When Ronald Reagan took office, he and his policymakers put the strategic lens back on, diminishing the importance of regional issues like the Palestinian question.²⁸

Studies of the decision-making process show that statesmen who have formed a certain image of another country are able to maintain that image even in the face of large amounts of information that should alter it. The very human inclination among policymakers and their subordinates is to ignore information that does not fit basic assumptions.²⁹ For example, before the October 1973 war, both Israeli and U.S. intelligence analysts saw evidence of military preparations by Egyptian and Syrian forces but assumed the military moves were exercises because it was so universally believed that the Arabs would not launch a full-scale war. In the aftermath of Israel's stunning victory in the 1967 war, Israeli analysts had constructed a doctrine, which came to be called *ha-Konseptzia*, "the Concept," that maintained that the Arabs were inherently inferior and would never launch a war because they knew they could not win.³⁰

Policymakers do consult with outside experts when doing so reinforces their viewpoint. A few prominent academics have become part of the policymaking milieu; they often obtain a hearing with policymakers because they have gained a reputation as scholars with the right political bent and an ability to talk in terms that are relevant to policy. One of these is the well-known historian of the Arab world Bernard Lewis. "This was a guy," according to a former government official, "who had all the appropriate credentials: knowing the Arab world, speaking Arabic better than most Arabs—and being pro-Israeli. It's an amazing combination." Another is Arab scholar Fouad Ajami, whom the former official describes as also combining a knowledge of the Arab world with a pro-Israeli tilt. "That combination has somehow worked," the official notes, "whereas somebody who is 'an Arabist' and sympathizes with the Arabs tends to be dismissed as pleading for a client."³¹ Scholars like Lewis and Ajami reinforce a policymaker's mind-set. It is an exaggeration to say they are bluntly pro-Israeli or anti-Arab, but policymakers are often comfortable with them because they reinforce the tendency to view the Middle East through an Israeli-oriented prism, and they are generally either outspokenly critical of or patronizing toward the Arabs.

As the people in government who are supposed either to be or to rely on the Middle East experts, policymakers above all would perhaps not be expected to base serious Arab-Israeli policy on an incorrect or insufficient reading of history or on ephemera such as an impression or a public per-

ception. Ultimately, however, policymakers are members of the general public who grow up with and base their fundamental attitudes on the same impressions and perceptions that inform the public. As one student of the policymaking process has noted, because people tend to absorb the values and beliefs that dominate society at the time they first begin to think about politics and because the concerns and events that are most important in any period pervade society, all those who come of age at that time are similarly affected. The orientation or framework originally formed is not easily replaced but instead “structures the interpretation of later events.”³²

Thus it has been a rare policymaker in the late twentieth century who has not taken office thinking as the general public does on Palestinian-Israeli issues: basically ignorant of the Palestinian situation and feeling, at least subconsciously, that Palestinians are backward, warlike, perhaps pitiable, and, especially, different from Americans, while Israelis are enterprising, progressive, under siege by Arabs, and “like us.” In a substantive sense, until the 1990s it was also a rare policymaker who did not automatically exclude Palestinians from policy considerations simply because the Israelis constituted a sovereign nation and the Palestinians did not.

Any body of perceptions that has evolved into conventional wisdom is tenacious and extremely difficult to alter, and so these impressions have tended to remain popular throughout most administrations. Policymakers are not as a rule historians or students of any geographical area of the world. They come to their jobs with a general impression and at best a casual knowledge of a given issue and usually do not have the time while on the job to delve into the historical background or into those aspects that do not appear immediately relevant to policy. In fact, many of the bureaucrats and policymakers concerned with, and usually totally absorbed in, fast-breaking current developments tend to exhibit a clear disdain for history. History is often regarded as a leisure pursuit, a luxury that a busy policymaker or bureaucrat has little or no time for.³³

There is often academic expertise, including scholarship in languages and the humanities, at the working level of the bureaucracy, but the impact of these low-level experts is minimal. Evidence that presidents and key policymakers often, perhaps usually, ignore this expertise is voluminous, and it has historically been the case that those working-level bureaucrats whose analysis occasionally does reach the president or his aides are as likely as not to have no academic expertise in or historical knowledge of the conflict. Richard Parker, a long-time Foreign Service officer and former ambassador to several Middle East countries, studied policymaker behavior through Middle East crises spanning sixteen years and involving three U.S.

administrations; he concluded that in each instance in which the United States miscalculated there was a tendency to ignore expertise. Decisions were made by a few people at the top, Parker found. Policymakers listened selectively, ignoring what they did not want to hear, and they consulted little and debated little. Decisions tended to be personal rather than collegial and to be based more often on intuition than on hard evidence.³⁴ Other studies have found that the greater the urgency of the situation, the fewer the participants in the decision-making process. "Although it may be liberating to get away from predictable and self-interested departmental views," one expert notes, "small high-level groups also get away from expertise."³⁵

Policymakers also generally lack any continuity on the Arab-Israeli conflict that might compensate for a lack of historical background. Presidents and bureaucrats come and go, and neither is likely to pass on knowledge to a successor. Occasionally, a key policymaker from one administration remains in the next administration; for example, in the 1970s, Saunders made the transition from the Nixon-Ford administrations to the Carter administration, and, again in the 1990s, Dennis Ross served in a central policymaking role first in the George Bush and then in the Bill Clinton administrations. But this kind of continuity is rare. As a result, the policymaker who may once have known the background of a conflict has long since been replaced by a policymaker who cares little how the conflict originated and whose focus on the present situation makes him or her reluctant to look beneath the surface. The result of all these influences and pressures on policymakers, as has been noted, is to make them fall back on the easy analysis, the facile explanation, the common, superficial impression prevalent among the general public, in Congress, and in the media.

This book will describe in some detail the impact that the so-called frame of reference has had on policymaking on the Palestinian issue in each U.S. administration since Woodrow Wilson's—which coincided with the issuance in 1917 of Britain's Balfour Declaration promising support for the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. The book will analyze (1) the state of knowledge of the president and key policymakers in each administration and the preconceptions with which these policymakers entered office, as gleaned through their writings, if any exist, or through the writings of those individuals who most influenced their thinking, or as deduced from a knowledge of what might be called their style—their religious inclinations, for instance, or their susceptibility to pressure from special-interest groups or their general policy outlook; (2) the state of pub-

lic knowledge of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the United States and the prevailing set of public perceptions in each period, as determined by images and impressions conveyed in the media, in popular literature and movies, and by public, particularly congressional, figures; and, finally, (3) the ways in which policies in each administration have been influenced by the conventional wisdom on this question. There has been an extremely slow but evident evolution in U.S. policy toward the Palestinians since 1917, as there has been a definite evolution in the prevailing frame of reference; both phenomena will be discussed as they relate to each other.

The Palestinians' own actions have inevitably had some impact on how popular and policymaker perceptions have been formed and on how the policymaker frame of reference has changed over the years, and these actions will be examined for their impact on each administration. But the book will concentrate not only on how perceptions of the Palestinians have evolved over the years but also on popular perceptions of Israel and the roots of the U.S.-Israeli alliance, for the Palestinian image has to a great extent been a function of the Israeli image. Because the framework within which policy is made is determined as much or more by how Israel is perceived as by how Palestinians are perceived, it is important to look beyond the Palestinian image.

The intent of this book is to demonstrate how a body of perceptions can evolve into a seldom-challenged set piece and a tightly bound framework for thinking, to the point that public discourse and U.S. policymaking are profoundly affected. In his criticism of the movie *Nixon*, Kissinger asks, "But what if public discourse becomes warped by powerful engines of myth, big budgets and outright falsehoods?"³⁶ This book will not delve deeply into the "what ifs" of U.S. policy on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, for they are endless: What if the United States had not acquiesced in Jordan's seizure of the parts of Palestine that were to have constituted a Palestinian state under the 1947 United Nations partition resolution? What if the United States had in some way forced Israel to permit the repatriation of Palestinians who fled their homes in 1948? What if the United States had treated the Palestinian problem as a political issue rather than as an issue simply of refugee relief from the beginning, after the 1948 displacement? What if the United States had encouraged rather than ignored the signs of Palestinian flexibility that began to emerge in the mid-1970s and grew apace throughout the 1980s? What if the United States had not waited almost three decades to recognize that the Palestinian issue was the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict, as it finally reluctantly did in 1975? And so on.

Finding definitive answers to these questions is impossible, but, in suggesting the questions, the book will raise the possibility—indeed, the likelihood—that in a different, more open, and more all-encompassing frame of reference, many wars might have been avoided and peace in some form might have been possible much earlier. If public discourse had not been warped, policy might have been quite different.