

# Book Review: The Search for Peace in the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Compendium of Documents and Analysis, edited by Terje Rod-Larsen et al.

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**The Search for Peace in the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Compendium of Documents and Analysis.** Edited by Terje Rod-Larsen, Nur Laidq & Fabrice Aidan. Oxford University Press. 2014.

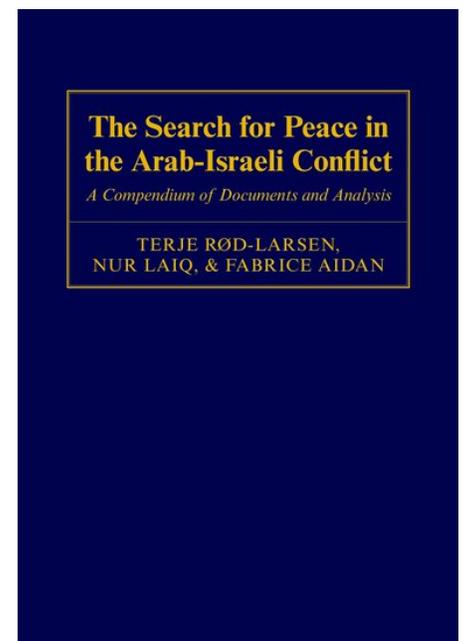
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The Arab-Israeli conflict has plagued the international community for the entire United Nations era, although its deeper historic origins go back centuries, if not millennia.

Over the last half century, Arab-Israeli relations have been characterised by alternating and overlapping periods marked by both violent conflict and initiatives to further the cause of peace between the state of Israel and its Arab neighbours. While Israel has found peace with a number of Arab states in the region, most prominently Egypt and Jordan, the major source of tension has been the inability of successive efforts to broker a lasting peace settlement capable of resolving the status of the Palestinian territories. Such efforts feature heavily in this volume.

The Arab-Israeli conflict is highly complicated and any meaningful understanding of its development over the past century is dependent upon a solid grasp of the key regional and international processes which have been utilised in the 'search for peace', and the instruments to have emerged from these. Piecing together this enormous myriad of documents is a mammoth task, however, and this new volume is therefore likely to be universally welcomed by Middle East scholars, historians, political scientists, and international lawyers alike, in aiding their attempts to make sense of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the various efforts undertaken to resolve it. This collection is the product of a major undertaking by renowned experts upon the subject matter, the principal editor being Terje Rod-Larsen, the renowned Norwegian diplomat and statesman who made a key contribution towards peace initiatives undertaken during the 1990s.

The documents contained within the collection are organised for convenience into five thematic parts. Part I is concerned with peace agreements and the Israeli disengagement from the Gaza strip from 1993 onwards. As Rod-Larsen notes in the introduction to the volume, this part "chronicles the rare moments when both Israeli and Palestinian negotiators put pen to paper in an effort to resolve a conflict that has seemed intractable." The Oslo Accords marked the greatest breakthrough in efforts to broker peace between Israel and the Palestinians, and documents related to this process take up much of this part of the book. A major outcome of this process was the creation of the Palestinian authority in order to bring a degree of self-government for the Palestinian population of the



West Bank and the Gaza strip. Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories was accelerated following Ariel's Sharon's decision to disengage from Gaza, documents concerning which also feature here.

Part II concerns the numerous peace proposals and ideas floated by various international actors dating back to 1977. Many of these proposals, from actors as diverse as the Arab League, individual Arab states, and the US, will not be familiar to most readers, but several of these served to influence opinion and mark small breakthroughs at particular moments in time. A major step came with in the form of the Madrid Peace Conference. Initiated in the aftermath of the Gulf conflict, it represented one of the early post-Cold War examples of newfound cooperation between the US and USSR. A glance through the various documents found in Part II will reveal the key role played by the US in efforts to further peace in the Middle East.

Part III contains the myriad of UN Documents related to the status of Palestine. These largely take the form of General Assembly resolutions which reveal considerable international support for the cause of Palestinian statehood, and to a lesser extent resolutions of the Security Council. The ability of the latter body to effectively address the subject has been tempered by US sympathy with pro-Israeli positions. Among the more prominent UN resolutions pertaining to the status of Palestine include General Assembly resolution 181, which called for the creation of two states at the time of the creation of the state of Israel, and Security Council resolution 242, calling for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories in the aftermath of 1967's six-day war. Also contained here is the ICJ decision on Israel's construction of a wall in the occupied Palestinian territories, determining this action to be contrary to international law.

Part IV contains various regional documents which include those preceding the creation of the state of Israel, for example the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement which determined spheres of influence within the region between the UK and France, and the famous Balfour declaration, under which the British government expressed support for a Jewish state in Palestine. Also included herein are several agreements between Israel and its Arab neighbours, perhaps the best known of which are the Camp David agreement between Israel and Egypt, signed by Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat in 1978, and the later Israel-Jordan peace treaty of 1994.

The final part of the book is comprised of domestic Israeli and Palestinian documents. These enable us to better understand the contexts within and perspectives from which both sides approach peace initiatives. The founding documents of the state of Israel, the PLO, and Hamas are included, as are numerous policy statements to have been adopted by both sides. Among the documents of critical importance here are the PLO's declaration of independence for the Palestinian territories and Israel's Law of Return, guaranteeing Jews everywhere a right to reside in the Jewish state.

The collection benefits from the inclusion of a detailed series of maps of the region from different points in time over the past century and which also indicate the impact of peace proposals on territorial allocations; a chronology of key events from the outbreak of World War I to the summer of 2014; and most importantly, accompanying commentary upon the documents contained in the volume. In sum, this major reference work is a much welcomed addition to any library upon Middle East affairs.

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