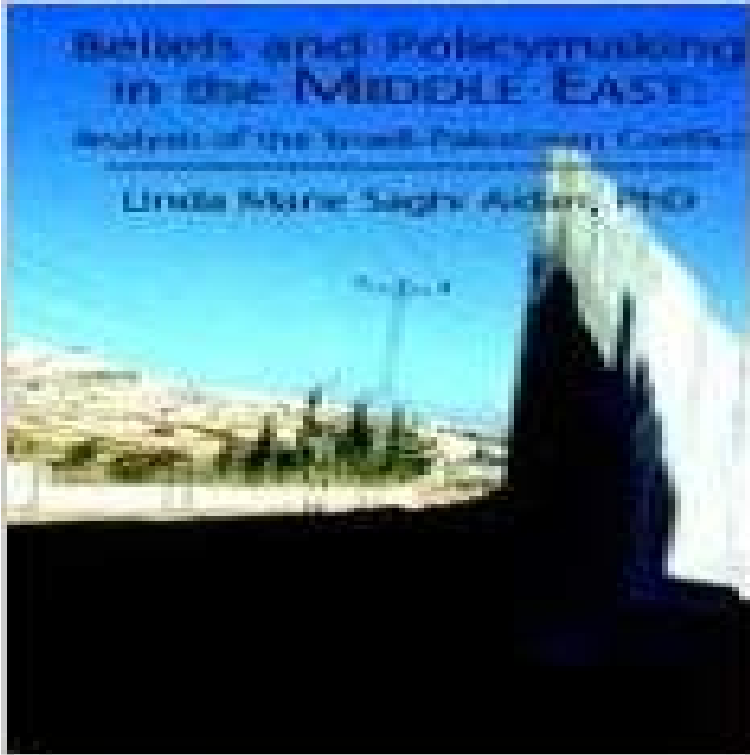# Beliefs and Policymaking in the Middle East: Analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

I have long tried to understand why the Arab-Israeli Conflict has not been resolved. Despite many attempts at regional and international negotiations since the time of the Mandate, the Conflict has persisted and the Palestinians still do not have a state. The continuation of the Palestinian question within the more general context of this issue places it at the heart of the Conflict and this is the reason why I centered my analysis on the Israelis and just the Palestinians (instead of all the Arab states in the region). Lack of a solution to the Arab-Israeli Conflict may thus be associated with absence of a state for the Palestinians. My case study begins with a brief introduction to trends in negotiations after which I come to my central research question: Why, despite all these attempts at negotiation had the Arab-Israeli Conflict not been resolved? I had a feeling the problem might have to do with beliefs. That is, both sides to the Conflict held (and some still hold) maximalist beliefs about having the whole of what was mandated Palestine for themselves. Both sides have made advances toward peace but the Conflict continues and the Palestinians still do not have a state. I assumed that unless both sides changed their beliefs regarding territory there would be no resolution to the Conflict. In my view, change was not a matter of eliminating a belief but changing the priority of one belief over another, i.e. to believe in peace instead of believing in having all the land of Palestine. Before developing some ideas about beliefs in the next section, I reviewed some of the literature in international relations that dealt with conflict analysis. Two of the more popular ones are the realist approach and organizational theory. Realist theorists Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz examine conflict in terms of maximizing interests, in particular power. (See Introduction.) Their approaches can explain situations where interests are clear-cut but

power cannot always impose itself as is seen by international attempts at negotiation or even Israels efforts to impose a solution on the Palestinians. Organizational theory does not necessarily explain situations where state or government bureaucracies dont exist, e.g. with the Palestinians during the time of the Mandate. I then decided to go ahead and see what beliefs had to offer to conflict analysis. In the section following the realist and organization discussion, I looked at beliefs from the standpoint of belief system theorists in international relations and from the psychological approaches that influenced them. In order to better examine beliefs and be able to use them to explain this Conflict (and perhaps others later), I formulated four questions and then looked at what belief system theorists and psychologists had to say about them: How were beliefs formed, were they consistent with behavior, could they change and if so, how. Two of the major theories in psychology were looked at: Attribution and learning. (See Introduction for more on these approaches.) From these two approaches we can learn much about how beliefs are formed and, in so doing, how they can change. For example, in interpreting incoming information individuals tend to attribute causes to explaining event. This causation process implies some reasoning ability and facilitates learning. One problem with attribution theory is that it indicates what an individual should do but the person is not always so careful in causal analysis. Still, the approach is valuable to understanding beliefs. These theories also highlight the importance of experience, as the past is so often the source of recurrent behavior. For any successful negotiation, communication is imperative and rests on an understanding of the other party. In understanding whether beliefs and behavior were consistent, I looked at Leon Festingers dissonance theory (see Introduction). As I will illustrate, some psychologists argue that beliefs can a

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