Introduction

There is an enormous gap, in my view, between what I would call the hypnosis of the present, or hypnosis towards the past, and a real understanding of the fundamental changes occurring today, in our lifetimes, which ultimately will find expression in the books written in academia or in history books, much more than in the day to day press. I think we all suffer from political or psychological jet-lag, where we don't harmonize what we see, the new images and pictures and rhetoric and actions over the last 40 years, with what exists and doesn't exist in the Middle East.

—Uri Savir[1]

Arabs and Israelis have battled one another in political and military arenas, seemingly continuously, for some fifty years. Yet recently, and within the span of only a few years, a broad group of Arab states sat down with Israel and began to cooperate on a wide range of regional issues in a multilateral setting. Why? How did enemies reluctant even to recognize one another choose to cooperate on substantive problems? What changed to enable such cooperation? How do such cooperative processes operate? And what forces stood, or stand, in the way of continuing cooperation? This book systematically addresses these fundamental questions, which cut to the heart of the evolving politics of the Middle East, the emergence and development of cooperative processes in regions of conflict, and the way international relations scholars examine the practice of regional cooperation at the turn of the century. I argue that multilateral cooperation in the Middle East must be understood as a process of interaction rather than solely a set of outcomes, and I demonstrate how interaction influences the way states view the region and the value of cooperation itself. The book's focus on multilateral cooperation in the Middle East thus contributes empirical knowledge about the development of Arab-Israeli relations after the Gulf War as well as theoretical comment on the prospects for regional multilateral cooperation among former adversaries; it provides a window into how Mid-

dle East politics are evolving and how IR theory can shed light on that evolution.

What Are the Multilaterals?

The day-to-day pattern of Palestinian-Israeli relations—crisis, negotiation, resolution, crisis—often overshadows regional efforts to establish cooperative relations among Arabs and Israelis. Yet, in the aftermath of the 1990–91 Persian Gulf War new regional alignments and opportunities for changing regional relations emerged. The Gulf War itself generated a shared sense of common threats facing Arabs and Israelis alike as they found themselves on the same side of the conflict. And with the Cold War over, the United States and the Soviet Union sought to cooperate rather than compete in order to establish new opportunities for Arab-Israeli peacemaking. One result, and the focus of this study, was the Arab-Israeli multilateral peace process, among the most important efforts in the history of Arab-Israeli peacemaking to overcome the regional "hypnosis towards the past."

The multilaterals might be seen as the quieter, less prominent of two siblings. The other sibling is, of course, the bilateral Arab-Israeli peace process. Both were born at the Madrid Middle East Peace Conference in October 1991, cosponsored by the United States and the Soviet Union principally to launch direct, bilateral negotiations between Israel and its immediate neighbors in an attempt to bring the Arab-Israeli conflict to a conclusion. As Secretary of State James A. Baker III observed after months of shuttle diplomacy to bring Israel and the Arab parties to Madrid, "Even in a period of dramatic and far-reaching change around the world, this conference stands apart. . . . For decades, agreement on whether to negotiate eluded the parties. This weekend, direct, bilateral negotiations aimed at a comprehensive, genuine peace will start."[2] In the end, Israel, Jordan, the Palestinians, Syria, and Lebanon attended the Madrid conference and agreed to participate in direct negotiations in efforts to reach a comprehensive peace.

The U.S. vision, however, was clearly broader than a series of bilateral peace treaties. President George Bush specified that the American quest was for a comprehensive regional peace:

> We come to Madrid on a mission of hope—to begin work on a just, lasting, and comprehensive settlement to the conflict in the Middle

> East. We come here to seek peace for a part of the world that in the long memory of man has known far too much hatred, anguish, and war. . . . Our objective must be clear. . . . It is not simply to end the state of war in the Middle East and replace it with a state of nonbelligerency. This is not enough; this would not last. Rather, we seek peace, real peace. And by real peace I mean treaties. Security. Diplomatic relations. Economic relations. Trade. Investment. Cultural exchange. Even tourism. . . . What we seek is a Middle East where vast resources are no longer devoted to armaments. . . . A Middle East where normal men and women lead normal lives.[3]

The American vision was, in some ways, broad and radical for the Middle East, but certainly not the stuff of daily news items. As expected, Madrid's bilateral tracks and the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations that followed the 1993 Oslo Accord captured the daily headlines.

Meanwhile, a less heralded and relatively unknown track of the Madrid process evolved simultaneously between Israel and a large segment of the Arab world.[4] The letter of invitation to the Madrid conference invited regional parties to join also a multilateral peacemaking track that would "focus on region-wide issues such as arms control and regional security, water, refugee issues, environment, economic development, and other subjects of mutual interest."[5] The Arab-Israeli multilateral peace talks (the "multilaterals") offered a novel and unprecedented approach to Middle East peacemaking.[6]

Unlike the bilateral tracks, the multilateral talks established a *regional* framework for Arab-Israeli peacemaking which included Arab states beyond Israel's borders. The United States and Russia sponsored a conference in Moscow in January 1992 to launch the multilateral track formally, a conference attended by thirty-six parties, including eleven Arab states and Israel.[7] After forty-four years of official nonrecognition by all Arab states except Egypt, Israel was joined not only by three of its immediate neighbors (Egypt, Jordan, and the Palestinians) but also by Arab states from the Gulf (including key states like Saudi Arabia) and North Africa to address a broad range of regional issues.[8] While the bilaterals were designed to "resolve the core bilateral issues at the heart of the Arab-Israeli dispute: namely, land, peace, and security," the multilaterals were intended to "address functional issues on a region-wide basis . . . to foster broader human contact between Israelis

and Arabs."[9] The bilaterals would resolve the conflicts of the past while the multilaterals would address the regional problems of the present and future.

As the first regional forum where such a wide array of Arab states sat with Israel to discuss common regional problems, the multilaterals marked a turning point in regional relations, the first tangible sign of a possible change in the way regional actors saw themselves and the region. Less than a year before, in the midst of the Gulf crisis, such a meeting would have been unthinkable. In his concluding remarks at the 1992 Moscow organizational meeting, Secretary Baker noted both the challenge and the promise of a new multilateral forum:

> No one should expect immediate breakthroughs toward multilateral cooperation in the Middle East, but neither should we neglect the possibilities for cooperation which exist at this unique moment in the history of the region. . . . Look around you. . . . Who would have imagined 50 years ago that the nations of Europe, many of whom were for centuries the fiercest of enemies, would find lasting common purpose in a vibrant European Community? And, who would have imagined even 5 years ago that the United States would launch a new partnership with a democratizing Russia? Who really knows what kinds of cooperation, however improbable it might seem today, might be possible in the Middle East.[10]

The Moscow meeting initiated five working groups focused on regional problems, each chaired by an extraregional party (a "gavelholder"): Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS), chaired by the United States and Russia; Regional Economic Development (REDWG), chaired by the European Union; the Environment (EWG), chaired by Japan; Water Resources (WWG), chaired by the United States; and Refugees (RWG), chaired by Canada. A steering group co-chaired by the United States and Russia was also established to oversee the operations of the overall process and its respective working groups.

After Moscow, beginning in the spring of 1992, the multilateral working groups began to meet separately and developed distinct agendas and goals, with varying degrees of success. Israel and its Arab partners, with the encouragement and funding of their extraregional sponsors, developed regional projects, numerous confidence-building measures, and even new regional institutions [see figure 1]. The working groups began with occasional plenary

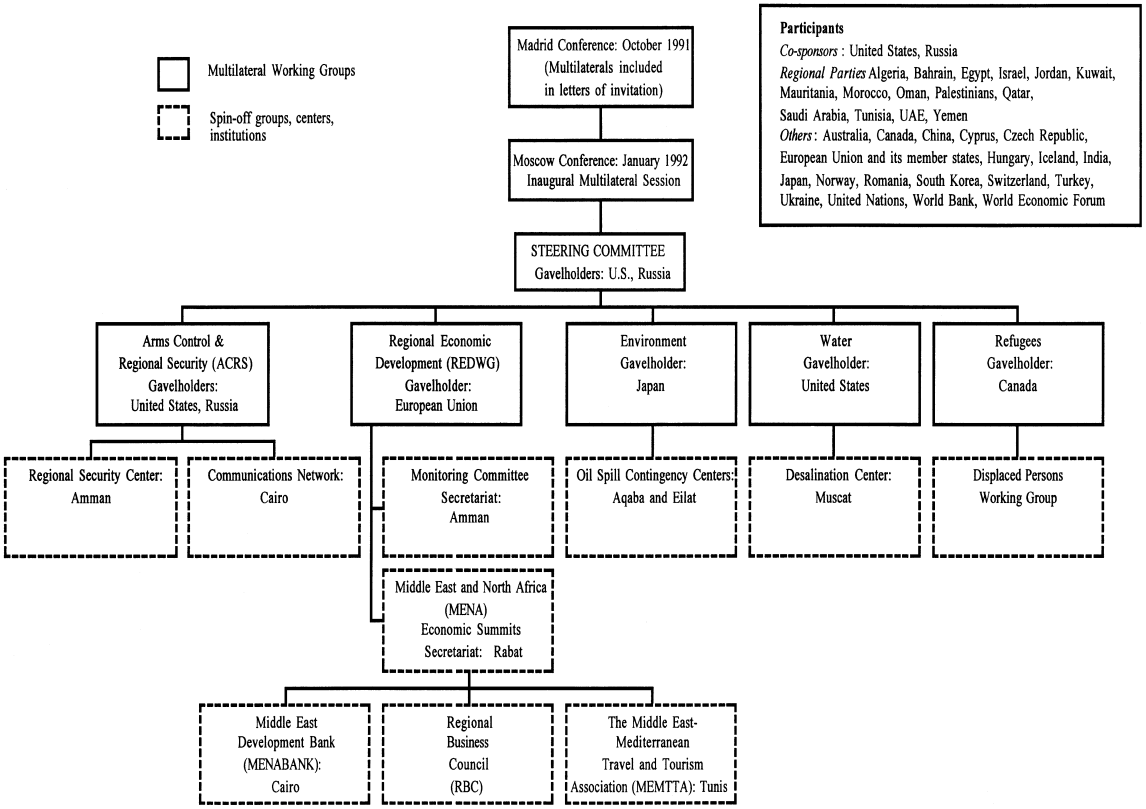

FIGURE 1 The Arab-Israeli Multilateral Peace Process

sessions where the entire range of issues within a particular group might be discussed at a fairly general level. Over time the working groups increased their interaction by meeting in smaller, more focused intersessionals between the larger plenaries, sometimes on a monthly basis. Many concepts discussed in the multilaterals found their way into Israel's bilateral peace agreements with Jordan and the Palestinian Authority (PA). A network of hundreds of regional and extraregional experts have participated in and organized the activities of the multilateral working groups, creating a nascent multilateral subculture. New working relations were formed among Israeli and Arab political elites and technical experts. Despite political limitations and numerous conflicts, the multilateral peace process has proven a unique and largely positive experiment in Arab-Israeli relations.

Why the Multilaterals Matter

The multilaterals have significance for both theoretical and empirical reasons. First, the multilaterals demonstrate the need for IR scholars to reevaluate conventional understandings of cooperation and the functions that interactive forums and institutions serve. Specifically, the study suggests that the conventional understanding of cooperation as policy adjustment (focused on policy outcomes), while important, neglects the crucial *process* of cooperation. Reconceptualizing cooperation as a process of *working together in an effort to achieve common understandings* enhances our appreciation for new regional forums like the multilaterals. Such a reconceptualization of cooperation should also contribute to studies of other regions and institutions by highlighting dynamics overlooked by the traditional definition of cooperation. Most critically, viewing cooperation as a process allows us to determine how interaction within the process helps shape actor views and positions. It narrows the gap between what participants involved in international negotiations view as cooperation and how IR scholars study the phenomenon. Moreover, the criteria for success and failure change because cooperation is about working toward common understandings, not just producing specific policy outcomes. The multilaterals demonstrate that placing Arabs and Israelis in a novel multilateral process can change views and attitudes not only toward the specific issue areas but also toward regional relations more generally.

Second, the emergence and enlargement of regional forums and institutions since the late 1980s[11] argue for rich understandings and analyses of new forums for cooperation emerging in regions like the Middle East. As might be expected, the European dimension of this trend, certainly the most mature example of regional cooperation and integration, receives the most attention. Equally interesting are the new efforts at "regionalization" in other areas, such as Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, where former rivalries may be giving way to growing regional cooperation, or what some call "cooperative security."[12] While the durability of these new forums is uncertain, they hold the potential to create patterned expectations (or norms of acceptable behavior) among regional parties. These types of cooperative forums can never guarantee the absence of conflict, but they can contribute to limiting its prospects and controlling conflicts once they have begun.

Finally, multilateral interaction is essential for handling certain regional problems—such as arms proliferation, economic development, water scarcity, environmental degradation, and refugee crises—that have been largely neglected because of the politically divisive nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict and its tendency to dominate the regional agenda throughout the Cold War. However, these and similar types of problems must be addressed because bilateral Arab-Israeli peace treaties are not sufficient to bring about an enduring regional peace. Without multilateral forums, critical regional problems will continue to be neglected, leaving sources for regional conflict in place.

New multilateral interaction addressing common issue areas can also contribute to normalizing Arab-Israeli relations, moving from the unnatural state of nonrecognition and exclusion to regular dialogue, cooperation, and even disagreements that fall short of armed conflict. While many obstacles remain to the full normalization of the region and regular multilateral relationships that include Israel, the shift toward multilateral cooperation has been definite. Of course, the pace and substantive outcomes of Arab-Israeli multilateralization are not foregone conclusions, with a variety of factors pushing the process in different directions. In this study I will explore and explain the foundations of this process and the factors facilitating and impeding Arab-Israeli multilateral cooperation, with the intention of contributing to both our general understanding of how cooperation works and our awareness of the specific dynamics of Arab-Israeli peacemaking.

The Relationship Between the Bilateral and Multilateral Tracks

Many observers may assume that the fate of the multilaterals and related regional cooperation efforts is contingent on progress in the bilaterals, especially the Palestinian track. According to this logic, the multilaterals were created solely to support the bilateral tracks, and their development hinges on bilateral progress. If the bilaterals falter, so do the multilaterals. To some extent, this assumption has held, as exemplified by the suspension of many regional activities following the freeze in Israeli-Palestinian relations during the administration of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu beginning in mid-1996. However, gaps between bilateral and multilateral progress are also apparent, suggesting that the bilaterals—while certainly a critical force—leave much unexplained about the multilaterals and the requisites for further Arab-Israeli multilateral cooperation.

The major problem with such an assessment is empirical: the multilaterals have not, in fact, moved in tandem with the bilateral negotiating tracks at all times. To be sure, the 1993 Oslo breakthrough in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations[13] significantly improved the regional environment and created new possibilities for Arab-Israeli multilateral cooperation, just as certain Israeli policies under Prime Minister Netanyahu contributed to a slowdown in these efforts. Yet even before Oslo the multilateral working groups were making steady progress, particularly in formulating consensus on working agendas. Given that the bilateral negotiations occurring in Washington during the two years between Madrid and Oslo were deadlocked, the multilateral track was a surprising success. In fact, the multilaterals played an important role in keeping the Madrid process afloat in this pre-Oslo period, emerging as a distinct force in the larger peace process. They did so in two central ways: 1) by providing a forum for continuous Arab-Israeli interaction when the bilateral tracks were stalled; and 2) by providing conceptual blueprints, and even language, for future bilateral accords between Israel, the Palestinians, and Jordan.

For example, while the Israeli-Palestinian track was stalled in the aftermath of the Israeli expulsion of several hundred Hamas activists from the West Bank and Gaza Strip in December 1992, the ACRS working group conducted a successful meeting the following May in Washington, where the group agreed to move to a more active work agenda, including the launching of focused intersessional activities (technical expert meetings).

Other working groups also expanded their work agendas and activities before Oslo, particularly the less contentious environment talks. The group's gavelholder, Japan, conducted a seminar on maritime disaster prevention, and the U.S. sponsored a workshop in the summer of 1993 on wastewater treatment facilities for small communities. Even after Oslo, the multilaterals continued to function during crisis periods in the bilateral tracks. For example, just two months after the massacre in Hebron of twenty-nine Arabs by an Israeli on February 25, 1994, which interrupted the bilateral negotiations, the water group held a "business as usual" plenary session in Oman, the first multilateral meeting to take place in the Gulf. The stability of the multilateral track throughout various crises gave the overall peace process continuity and momentum and demonstrated that the link between bilateral and multilateral progress was not always direct.

The bilateral negotiations did limit the scope of the multilateral talks (e.g., the multilaterals avoided issues concerning borders and sovereignty), but the multilaterals also influenced the bilateral peace agreements. For example, provisions relating to water and environment issues in the Oslo Accord, such as a Palestinian Water and Environmental Authority, were first discussed in the multilaterals. In the economic realm, the REDWG-commissioned World Bank study of the development needs of the West Bank and Gaza formed the basis for assistance to the Palestinians after Oslo. Similarly, the confidence-building measures (CBMs) included in ACRS's agenda contributed positively to the Israel-Jordan peace treaty, with the communication, notification, and maritime arrangements first studied in ACRS included in the final agreement. Indeed, the treaty refers to ACRS specifically, stressing the need for a multilateral dimension to regional security [see appendix B].

Thus, the causal arrow did not always flow from bilateral developments; at times, the reverse was true. That said, progress in the bilaterals, particularly the Oslo Accord, did favorably impact the multilateral working groups. Bilateral progress, then, may be a necessary condition for successful outcomes in multilateral cooperation, but it is not determinative. It alone cannot predict the pace of the multilaterals, particularly the variation across its working groups. For instance, why did different groups achieve varying degrees of success at the same juncture in the bilateral process? At the time of the Amman Economic Summit in October 1995, for example, the bilateral peace process had reached its peak, with the meeting convening on the heels of the signing of the second Oslo Accord (Oslo II) which began the process of Israeli troop redeployments in the West Bank. Yet while the economic

working group and related activities were flourishing at that time, ACRS was beginning to face serious challenges, setting the stage for the Israeli-Egyptian rift over the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) extension the following spring and the breakdown of the group's activities. Moreover, ACRS's work was suspended *before* the election of a Likud government in Israel in May 1996, which created a series of crises in bilateral peace negotiations, suggesting that factors other than the political climate in the bilateral talks influence both the success and failure of multilateral cooperation.

In sum, the multilateral working groups did not always evolve in tandem with the highs and lows of the Israeli-Palestinian track. Despite the important role played by the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in fostering a positive overall regional environment and enhancing the prospects for cooperation, other forces were also driving the process. To understand the multilaterals, it is necessary to examine these forces. Indeed, the multilaterals offer an excellent opportunity to draw on broader theoretical explanations of why states might engage in regional cooperation, and the forces that both facilitate and impede such cooperation. Such an analysis will allow us to move beyond daily speculations toward long-term thinking about what factors will be most critical in shaping regional relations in the coming decades.

The Organization and Design of the Book

The book is organized as follows: Chapter 1 establishes the theoretical framework needed to explain regional multilateral cooperation. To illustrate the leverage gained by a process conception of cooperation, I consider several other explanations derived from the general IR literature, broadly characterized as power, interests, domestic politics, and ideas. The power hypothesis focuses on extraregional influence and participation, particularly the role of the United States. The interest explanation focuses on regional players' cost-benefit calculations and institutional efficiency. Domestic politics is limited to the role public opinion and the domestic economic environment plays in the political leadership's calculations of how to stay in power. The ideational hypothesis focuses on shared ideas held by small groups of policy elites.

After evaluating these alternative explanations for multilateral cooperation, the chapter emphasizes the advantages of linking cooperative processes to constructivist notions about how interests come to be defined through

interaction. However, this study is about the interactions, not the interests. That is to say, I do not claim that participants' interests, traditionally understood, changed in the process. Rather, I explore how participants' interactions shaped thair perceptions of, and commitment to, the process. The chapter also explains how the origins of cooperative processes are often dependent on leadership and the ideas of leaders representing powerful states. Finally, I offer an explanatory framework for multilateral cooperation which considers the mechanisms that may facilitate or impede such cooperation.

Chapter 2 pauses from the narrative to consider the historical context of the multilaterals, reviewing pre-Madrid efforts to establish Arab-Israeli cooperation in the arms control, economic, water, and environment issue areas. This chapter underscores the dramatic differences between the pre- and post-Madrid Middle East but also foreshadows a number of continuities and difficulties for those engaging in regional cooperation efforts today.

Chapter 3 addresses the origins of the multilaterals, including the negotiations leading to their emergence at the first Moscow organizational session in January 1992, and the creation of the working groups. The chapter addresses both the motivations of various regional actors in attending this forum as well as the desire of the United States to add this track to the Arab-Israeli peace process. To explain the origins of the process, the chapter illustrates how the United States projected its structural power to create such a process, but emphasizes that such power could also have led to alternative outcomes. To comprehend fully why the multilaterals emerged, we must turn to the ideas held by the small group of American elites who projected American power based on a shared set of beliefs about Arab-Israeli peacemaking.

Chapters 4–6 examine the empirical cases that are divided according to issue areas. To assess the value of a theoretical framework centered on process, I apply the framework from chapter 1 across four multilateral working groups (arms control, economic development, water, and the environment).[14] Because these issue areas range from "hard" (arms control) to "easy" (environment) cases according to the conventional wisdom about cooperation in international relations,[15] they not only provide variation on the dependent variable[16]—multilateral cooperation—but also offer an opportunity to assess the extent to which the nature of the issue area affects the prospects for cooperation as compared to other explanatory forces. Each empirical chapter first reviews the development of the working groups and then proceeds to analyze these developments through theoretical perspectives outlined in chapter 1. All chapters illustrate how the process of multilateral

interaction shaped the participants' view of the process and perceptions of policy options, with some groups proving more successful than others at reaching common understandings in their respective issue areas.

Chapter 7 concludes by reviewing the central arguments of the study, suggesting implications for how IR theory should address questions of regional multilateral cooperation, and offering policy prescriptions for the future of Arab-Israeli multilateral cooperation.

In the study, I have made particular use of open-ended personal interviews with American, Israeli, and Arab officials involved in the multilateral process and its respective working groups. Because written material is scarce given the sensitivity and contemporary nature of this topic, author interviews were essential to the study and were conducted both in the region and in Washington, D.C. In order to elicit candid responses to my questions, nearly all the interviews (with the exception of those with former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and former U.S. Secretary of State Baker) were conducted on a confidential, anonymous-source basis. Such exchanges were critical for discerning accurately elite beliefs about the costs, benefits, and purposes of multilateral cooperation, as opposed to rationales that may appear on the public record. Given the centrality of cognitive variables to this study, such interviews were a critical methodological component to the research, in addition to traditional document analysis. In many cases, I reinterviewed officials to determine how the process evolved and the extent to which perceptions shifted over time as a result of new interactions and also in response to environmental changes. The book largely covers developments in the multilateral process from the Madrid Peace Conference in October 1991 to late 1996, the formative years of the multilaterals.[17] As one scholar and practitioner of Arab-Israeli diplomacy, Itamar Rabinovich, has observed, this basic period, "shrouded as it is by both nostalgia and controversy, looms ever more distinctly as a notably significant chapter in the evolution of Arab-Israeli relations."[18]