

Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is an ongoing dispute between the State of Israel and the Palestinians and is part of the wider Arab–Israeli conflict. At present, major polls show the vast majority of Israelis and Palestinians agree a two-state solution is the best way to end the conflict. Most Palestinians view the West Bank and Gaza Strip as their future state, and most Israelis agree.



The negotiating parties have been the Israeli government and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The official negotiations are mediated by an international contingent known as the Quartet on the Middle East (the Quartet) represented by a special envoy that consists of the United States, Russia, the European Union, and the United Nations. The Arab League, another important actor, has proposed an alternative peace plan. Egypt, a founding member of the Arab League, has historically been a key participant. The United States has been an ardent supporter of Israel often taking positions against UN Resolutions condemning the actions of Israel.

Since 2006, the Palestinian side has been fractured by conflict between the two major factions: Fatah, the largest party, and Hamas. As a result, the territory controlled by the Palestinian National Authority (the Palestinian interim government) is split between Fatah in the West Bank and Hamas in the Gaza strip. Hamas is considered a terrorist organization by Israel and the United States although it won the Palestinian elections of 2006; therefore, it has not been allowed to participate in official negotiations. The Palestinians are an occupied people living in refugee camps often without sufficient food, potable water, electricity, adequate medical care, or work. Peace negotiations began at Annapolis, Maryland, United States, in November 2007. No final solution occurred. The parties agree there are six 'final status' issues which need to be resolved: Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security, borders and water.

Causes of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

The Palestinian--Israeli conflict stems from competing Jewish and Arab claims to the land in Palestine (the Zionist occupation of Palestinian land), conflicting promises by the British in the forms of the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence and the Balfour Declaration of 1917, and several outbreaks of violence between Jewish and Arab residents of the region of Palestine.

The roots of the conflict can be traced to the late 19th century, which saw a rise in national movements, including Zionism and Arab nationalism. Zionism, the Jewish national movement, was established as a political movement in 1897, largely as a response to Russian and European anti-Semitism. It sought the establishment of a Jewish Nation-State in Palestine so that they might find sanctuary and self-determination there. The World Zionist Organization and the Jewish National Fund encouraged immigration and funded purchase of land under Ottoman rule and under British rule in the region of Palestine.

In the 1870s, a wave of anti-Semitism spurred a new migration from central Europe, and in 1898, Theodore Hertzl organized a Zionist international movement to establish in Palestine a home for the Jewish People secured by public law. Thousands of Palestinians were already living in Palestine as their descendants had done so for centuries.

In 1917, Arthur James Balfour, as Foreign Secretary, authored the Balfour Declaration, which supported the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The Balfour Declaration pledged England's support of Zionist goals in order to win support of international, especially American, Jews to the Allies during World War I. In 1916, one year prior to the Balfour Declaration, a secret agreement was made between the British War Cabinet and Zionist leaders promising the latter a "national home" in Palestine in consideration of their efforts to bring the United States into World War I on the side of Great Britain.

Following World War I and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, Palestine came under the control of the United Kingdom through the Sykes-Picot Agreement and a League of Nations mandate. During the mandatory period, the British made conflicting promises to both populations in the forms of the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence and the Balfour Declaration of 1917. The Paris Peace Conference and subsequent conferences made Palestine a British mandate. The League of Nations approved, and more Jews entered Palestine. Palestine Arabs resented this "immigration" into their homeland. Tensions between Arab and Jewish groups in the region erupted into physical violence--the 1920 Palestine riots, the 1921 Palestine riots, the 1929 Hebron massacre and the 1936-1939 Arab revolt in Palestine.

The British tried to maintain a precarious peace, but Hitler's anti-Semitic policy increased the influx of Jews into Palestine and caused further Arab resentment. The Jewish population rose to nearly half a million in 1935. The Arab rebellion started in 1936 and continued to expand until a major British Military effort suppressed it two years later.

The British proposed a failed partition plan, while the White Paper of 1939 established a quota for Jewish immigration set by the British in the short-term and by the Arab population in the long-term. Both Arab and Jewish groups directed violence against the British in order to expel the mandatory government, which was held in contempt by both sides. In 1942, Zionist leaders met in New York's Biltmore Hotel to devise the Biltmore Program which called for unlimited immigration of Jews to Palestine which, after the war, would become a Jewish commonwealth state.

In May 1945, after the German surrender, the Jewish Agency wrote Prime Minister Churchill demanding the full and immediate implementation of the Biltmore resolution, the cancellation of the White Paper, the establishment of Palestine as a Jewish state, Jewish immigration to be an Agency responsibility, and

reparation to be made by Germany in kind beginning with all German property in Palestine. The Palestinians seemed to have no say in any of this.

The British stalled, and the Haganah (the Jewish voluntary militia organized in local units primarily for local defense) engaged in extensive smuggling. In October 1945, Haganah's clandestine radio station, Kol Israel, declared the beginning of "The Jewish Resistance Movement". On October 31, 1945 the Jews in Palestine engaged in an extensive "terrorist" campaign and attacked three small naval craft, wrecked railway lines, and attacked a railway station and an oil refinery. In June 1946, Jewish terrorists committed more sabotage in Palestine. They destroyed twenty-two RAF planes at one airfield. The Haganah agreed to an Irgun (terrorist group offshoot of Haganah) attack on British headquarters in the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. The bombings killed ninety-one British, Arab, and Jewish people and wounded forty-five. The British retaliated by raiding the Irgun headquarters in Tel Aviv. By the end of 1946 the Irgun-Sternist groups had killed 373 persons. The Haganah and the terrorists continued to operate with at least tacit support of a large part of the citizenry.

This violence and the heavy cost of World War II led Britain to turn the issue of Palestine over to the United Nations. In 1947, the U.N. approved the partition of the British Mandate of Palestine into two states: one Jewish and one Arab. The Jewish leadership accepted the plan, but Palestinian Arab leaders, supported by the Arab League, rejected the plan, and a civil war broke out. Israel quickly gained the upper hand in this inter-communal fighting, and on May 14, 1948 declared its independence. Five Arab League countries (Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Transjordan and Iraq), then invaded Palestine, starting the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. The war resulted in an Israeli victory, with Israel capturing additional territory beyond the partition borders, but leaving Jerusalem as a divided city. The territory Israel did not capture was taken over by Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Transjordan (now Jordan). The war also resulted in the 1948 Palestinian exodus, known to Palestinians as Al-Naqba.

For decades after 1948, Arab governments had refused to recognize Israel and in 1964 the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was founded with the central tenet that Palestine, with its original Mandate borders, is the indivisible homeland of the Arab Palestinian people. In turn, Israel refused to recognize the PLO as a negotiating partner.

In the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel captured the West Bank from Jordan, the Gaza Strip from Egypt, and East Jerusalem including the Old City and its holy sites, which Israel annexed and reunited with the Western neighborhoods of Jerusalem. The status of the city as Israel's capital and the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip created more conflict between the parties.

In 1970, the PLO was expelled from Jordan, in what was known as the Black September. Large numbers of Palestinians moved into Lebanon after the Black September, joining the thousands already there. In 1973 a coalition of Arab states led by Egypt and Syria launched the Yom Kippur War against Israel. The Egyptians and Syrians advanced during the first 24–48 hours, after which momentum began to swing in Israel's favor. Eventually a cease-fire took effect that ended the war. This war paved the way for the Camp David Accords in 1978, which set a precedent for future peace negotiations.

Status of the occupied territories

Occupied Palestinian Territories is the term used by the UN to refer to the West Bank and Gaza Strip—territories which Israel conquered from Egypt and Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War—in the conflict. The Israeli government uses the term "Disputed Territories", to indicate its position that some territories cannot be called occupied as no nation had clear rights to them and there was no operative diplomatic arrangement when Israel acquired them in June 1967.

Israeli settlements

The Israeli settlements in the West Bank and, until 2005, the Gaza Strip, have been an obstacle to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The international media, the international political community (including the US, the UK, and the EU), the International Court of Justice, and international and Israeli human rights organizations who have also called the settlements illegal under international law. In the years following the Six-Day War, and especially in the 1990s during the peace process, Israel re-established communities destroyed in 1929 and 1948 and established numerous new settlements on the West Bank. Most of these settlements of about 350,000 people are in the western parts of the West Bank, while others are deep into Palestinian territory, overlooking Palestinian cities. These settlements have been the site of much inter-communal conflict.

Jerusalem

The three largest Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—claim Jerusalem in their religious and historical narratives. Israel asserts that the city should not be divided, and should remain unified within Israel's political control. Palestinians claim at least the parts of the city which were not part of Israel prior to June 1967. As of 2005, there are 465,000 Jews mostly living in West Jerusalem, and there are 232,000 Muslims mostly living in East Jerusalem.

Palestinian refugees

There are about four million Palestinians and their descendants who were expelled or fled from Israel following its creation. Palestinian refugees were chased out or expelled by the actions of Zionist terrorist organizations--the Haganah, Lehi, and Irgun.

Palestinian negotiators have so far insisted that refugees, and all their descendants, from the 1948 and 1967 wars have a right to return to the places where they lived before 1948 and 1967, including those within the 1949 Armistice lines, citing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and UN General Assembly Resolution 194, adopted in 1948, which says:

"the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible." UN Resolution 3236 "reaffirms also the inalienable right of the Palestinians to return to their homes and property from which they have been displaced and uprooted, and calls for their return". Resolution 242 from the UN affirms the necessity for "achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem".

Osama bin Laden told Peter Arnett a reason why his Al Qaeda may have had a motive to attack the US was the illegal occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people by Israel also strongly supported by the US.