

The question of stabilising the relationship between Israel and Palestine

The conflict surrounding Israel and Palestine has been a controversial topic since the mid-twentieth century and the member states of the UN have yet to come to an agreement to settle the fighting between the Israelis and the Arabs. Many people have lost their lives on both sides. The key issues at stake include the Barrier, settlements, the control of Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees and getting humanitarian aid to the people living in the war zones.

Definitions of key terms

Zionism - a movement for the reestablishment, development and protection of a Jewish nation that is currently Israel.

Gaza strip - Territory bordering Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea, occupied by Palestinians but under the influence of Israel

Settlements - residential areas built by Israelis in the occupied territories, illegal under international law

West Bank - Territory bordered by Jordan to the east and by the Green Line separating it and Israel on the south, west and north.

Green line/1949 Armistice Line - the marking of the boundary between Israel and the West Bank

Administrative detention - imprisonment without charge or trial, commonly associated with the imprisonment of Palestinians by Israel

Intifada - Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza

Nakba - a mass eviction of Palestinians from the 1940s that created a refugee crisis

Contextual information

After World War II and the Holocaust, many Jewish people wanted their own country and so were given part of Palestine. They considered it to be their traditional home but this caused many Arabs to be displaced from their homes and lose land so they did not accept the new country.

A war began between the Israelis and Palestinians in 1948 and at the end, Gaza was controlled by Egypt and the West Bank was controlled by Jordan, where many Palestinians who fled Israel were now living. Another war broke out in 1967 and Israel occupied these areas for many years after. Israelis had hoped to exchange this land for the recognition of Israel's right to exist by Arab countries and an end to the fighting.

After Israel left Gaza in 2005, a group called Hamas won elections there and took control. Hamas does not recognise Israel as a country and wishes for Palestinians to be able to return to their old homes. Many countries around the world consider Hamas to be a terrorist group because of their willingness to use violence to achieve these aims. Israel has been holding Gaza under a blockade since then and so controls the borders.

1.5 million Palestinians live in the Gaza Strip but access into Gaza is very restricted by Israel so not many goods can get in and out. This has made life very difficult for the people living there as there is limited food, there are often power cuts and many people are unemployed and without money as businesses find it difficult to get their products outside of Gaza to sell.

During the wars, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians left or were forced out of their homes, moving to neighbouring countries to become refugees. Many of the 4.6

million Palestinian refugees live in camps in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon and are currently receiving help from the United Nations.

Palestinians regularly fire rockets into Israel, causing Israelis living in border towns to have to take shelter and adapt their lives around this. There have been several Israeli offences in Gaza since they withdrew in 2005 which they say was aimed at stopping rocket fire.

Major countries and organisations involved

Israel

Lebanon

USA - key player in the peace process and supplies Israel with military aid.

PLO - Palestinian Liberation Organisation

Hamas

Timeline of events

1917- Britain seizes Palestine from Ottomans. Supports Jewish settlements in Palestine.

1947 - United Nations recommends partition of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states, with international control over Jerusalem.

1948 - Israel declares independence as British rule ends. Admitted to United Nations.

1948-1949 - First Arab-Israeli war. Armistice agreements leave Israel with more territory under the Partition Plan, including western Jerusalem. Gaza strip controlled by Egypt, West Bank controlled by Jordan. Both containing Palestinians who had fled.

1966 - France halts arms supplies to Israel, the United States increases sales.

1975 - UN General Assembly adopts a resolution describing Zionism as a form of racism.

June 1982 - Israel invades Lebanon in order to expel PLO leadership after assassination attempt on Israeli ambassador.

September 1982 - Massacre of Palestinians in camps in Beirut by Israel's allies.

June 1985 - Israel withdraws from most of Lebanon but continues to occupy narrow "security zone" along border.

December 1987 - Uprising begins in Occupied Territories. Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza forms Hamas movement, which turns to violence against Israel.

1993 - Prime Minister Rabin and PLO leader Yasser Arafat sign Oslo Declaration to plot Palestinian self-government and formally end First Intifada. Violence by Palestinian groups that reject Oslo Declaration continues.

October 1994 - Jordan and Israel sign peace treaty.

September 1995 - Rabin and Arafat sign Interim Agreement for transfer of further power and territory to Palestinian National Authority.

May 2000 - Israel withdraws from southern Lebanon.

June 2002 - Israel begins building barrier in and around West Bank. Israel says barrier aimed at stopping Palestinian attacks; Palestinians see it as a tool to grab land.

2003 - United States, European Union, Russia and United Nations propose independent Palestinian state. Israel and Palestinian National Authority both accept plan.

2005 - Israel withdraws all Jewish settlers and military personnel from Gaza, while retaining control over airspace, coastal waters and border crossings.

December 2008 - Israel launches month-long full-scale invasion of Gaza after Hamas elected. An estimated 1,300 people, many of them civilians, were killed in Gaza before a ceasefire was declared; 13 Israeli soldiers also died.

September 2010 - Direct talks resume between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, disagreeing over the question of settlements.

2012 - At least 167 Palestinians and six Israelis were killed during an Israeli operation. After eight days a ceasefire was declared with both sides promising to stop attacks.

July 2014 - 50 days of violence in which authorities said over 2,200 people were killed - most of them Palestinians - and many more injured. A ceasefire was agreed between Israel and Hamas on 26 August.

2016 - US agrees military aid package worth \$38bn (£28bn) over next 10 years for Israel, largest military deal in US history.

December 2016 - Israel suspends working ties with 12 countries that voted for a Security Council resolution condemning settlement building, after the US for the first time abstained from the vote rather than using its veto.

2017 - US President Donald Trump recognizes Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, upsetting the Arab world and some Western allies.

2018 - UN and Egypt attempt to bring about a long-term ceasefire between Israel and Hamas amid an upsurge in violence on the Gaza border from March.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

Partition plan 1947 - For the formation of two separate states at the end of British mandate, with the area around Jerusalem to be an international area.

1991 Madrid peace process - The first time that Israeli leaders engaged in negotiations face to face with representatives from Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and Palestinians

Many other resolutions have been made and passed over the years, and are on the website listed below.

Possible solutions

A solution that takes into account the demands of both sides and forms a compromise that has the potential to end the conflict is needed in this complicated situation.

Many people want the West Bank and Gaza to be turned into a new country, Palestine, but Israel won't agree to this unless Hamas accepts its right to exist and it feels safe as a country. Other issues created by this solution is the question of what will happen to Israelis who've settled in the West Bank, who will run Jerusalem and what will happen to the Palestinian refugees.

One solution would create an independent Israel and Palestine so the two states can govern themselves as a Jewish state and a Palestinian state, respectively. This is the only solution that satisfies everyone as it separates Palestinians and Israelis.

However, the problems still arise of people already settled in an area which would be in a different state to theirs and all diplomatic efforts to realise the two state solution have failed as the boundary is still subject to dispute and negotiation.

Another solution would merge Israel, the West Bank and Gaza into one big country which could come in two versions. One of these would create a single democratic country and since Arab Muslims would outnumber Jews, this would end Israel as a Jewish state. The other version would involve Israel annexing the West Bank and either forcing out Palestinians or denying them the right to vote. This is considered by most of the world to be an unacceptable human rights violation.

Since Israelis and Palestinians have been unable to come to two-state terms, there is a fear that if the sides cannot negotiate a two-state solution, a de facto one-state outcome will be inevitable.

Bibliography

Timeline - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-29123668>

Key issues - <https://www.un.org/unispal/permanent-status-issues/>

Resolutions on the topic -

<https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/israelpalestine/>

Solutions - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two-state_solution

<https://www.vox.com/2018/11/20/18080094/what-are-the-two-state-solution-and-the-one-state-solution>