

Security Council

The Conflict between Israel and Palestine

Forum: Security Council

Issue: The conflict between Israel and Palestine

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Introduction

Regarded as one of the most persistent and intricate geopolitical conflicts of the contemporary era is the conflict between Israel and Palestine. This conflict, which has its roots in geographical, political, theological, and historical issues, is centred on conflicting claims to the area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. Both Israelis and Palestinians, who each claim the right to security, sovereignty, and self-determination, have ingrained the conflict in their own narratives and identities. This conflict has resulted in several wars, revolutions, peace initiatives, and continuous tensions over the years, resisting simple resolution and having a significant negative influence on people's lives in the area.

Gaining an understanding of the historical background, the goals of both parties, and the various variables involved is essential to appreciating the complexity and difficulties involved in trying to find a fair and long-lasting solution to this ongoing dispute.

Definition of Key Terms

Self-Determination

The right of people to decide their own political status and to pursue their own economic, social, and cultural development. Both Israelis and Palestinians assert their right to self-determination in the region.

Sovereignty

The authority of a state to govern itself or another state. In the context of the conflict, both parties claim sovereignty over the same territory.

Two-State Solution

A proposed solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict envisaging two states for two peoples, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. The feasibility and implementation of this solution have faced numerous challenges.

UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East)

An agency established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1949 to provide aid and protection to Palestinian refugees.

Six-Day War

A war fought in June 1967 between Israel and the neighbouring states of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. Israel's victory resulted in the capture of the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza Strip, West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Golan Heights, significantly altering the region's geopolitical landscape.

Intifada

Arabic for "uprising," referring to two Palestinian uprisings against Israeli occupation. The first intifada began in 1987 and ended in 1993 with the signing of the Oslo Accords. The second intifada started in 2000 and gradually declined by 2005.

Gaza Strip

A small, densely populated territory on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, bordered by Israel and Egypt. It is home to many Palestinian refugees and has been a focal point of the conflict, especially under the control of Hamas.

West Bank

A landlocked territory near the Mediterranean coast of Western Asia, forming the bulk of the Palestinian territories. It is bordered by Jordan to the east and Israel to the west, and its status remains a central issue in the conflict.

General Overview

In ancient Palestine, both Jews and Arabs fought for their right to self-determination following the fall of the Ottoman Empire. After the Ottoman Empire was defeated in World War I, the British Empire seized possession of the region that is today known as Palestine. The region was populated at the time primarily by Arabs, with a Jewish minority and other smaller ethnic groups.

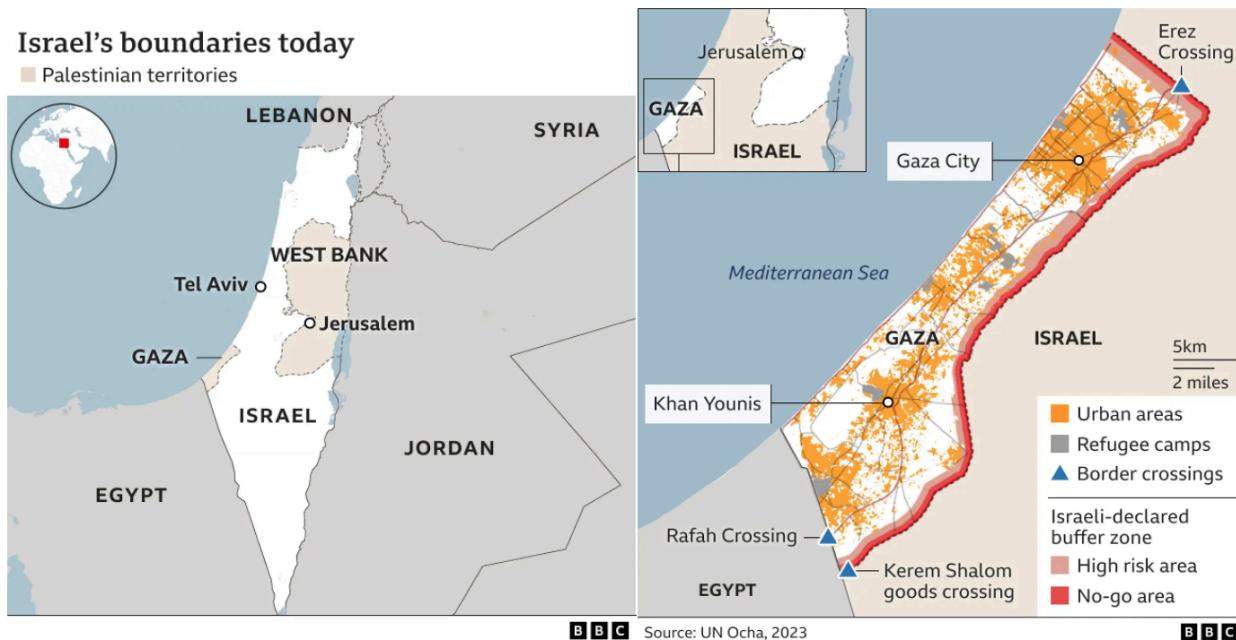
The Balfour Declaration of 1917 was the result of mounting tensions when the international community charged the United Kingdom with creating a "national home" for Jews in Palestine. The British mandate over the former area of Palestine was based on this document, which former Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour delivered to the Jewish community in Great Britain. It was also endorsed by the newly established League of Nations in 1922, which was a precursor to the United Nations.

A significant turning point occurred with the creation of the modern state of Israel in 1948, which resulted in the forced migration of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and a severe refugee crisis that continues to this day. The area was formerly part of historical Palestine, then divided among the states of Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. A close examination of the disagreement and the arguments put out by either side demonstrates the profoundly religious, ancestral, and geopolitical roots of this long-fought battle. For Israelis, the core of their national identity is the creation of a country following centuries of persecution and the remembrance of the Holocaust. Jews refer to the land of Israel as the "Promised Land" because of biblical stories in which God promises the land to Abraham, Isaac's, and Jacob's descendants.



Israeli armoured troop unit entering Gaza during the Six-Day War, June 6th, 1967

Conversely, Palestinians view the creation of Israel as the Nakba, or "catastrophe," which led to the dispossession of their land and the denial of their right to self-determination. The conflict emerged and evolved over decades, with significant milestones including the 1948 Arab Israeli War, the Six-Day War of 1967, the Yom Kippur War of 1973, and two intifadas (Palestinian uprisings) in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Efforts toward peace have been made through various negotiations, peace accords, and international interventions.



The Oslo Accords of the 1990s aimed to establish a framework for achieving lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians, yet the envisioned two-state solution has faced numerous challenges and setbacks, including territorial disputes, security concerns, settlements, access to resources, and the status of Jerusalem, a city of immense religious significance for Jews, Muslims, and Christians alike.

A persistent humanitarian crisis impacting civilians on both sides has been sustained by the cycle of violence that includes wars, uprisings, and conflicts. Under Hamas rule, the Gaza Strip has seen numerous wars with Israel that have left massive amounts of human misery and destroyed infrastructure in their wake. Diverse international viewpoints exist on the matter; some back Israel's right to self-defence and existence, while others push for the recognition of a Palestinian statehood and stress the importance of a fair settlement that considers the complaints of both sides.

For several decades, Israel and Hamas, the militant Palestinian party in control of the Gaza Strip since 2007, have been engaged in a protracted and complex confrontation. Founded as a resistance movement in the late 1980s, Hamas sought to overthrow Israeli domination and establish an Islamic state in historic Palestine. It gained popularity through its social services and armed resistance against Israel. However, its strategies—which include utilising civilian infrastructure in Gaza for military goals and rocket assaults aimed at Israeli civilians—have received criticism and escalated the conflict.

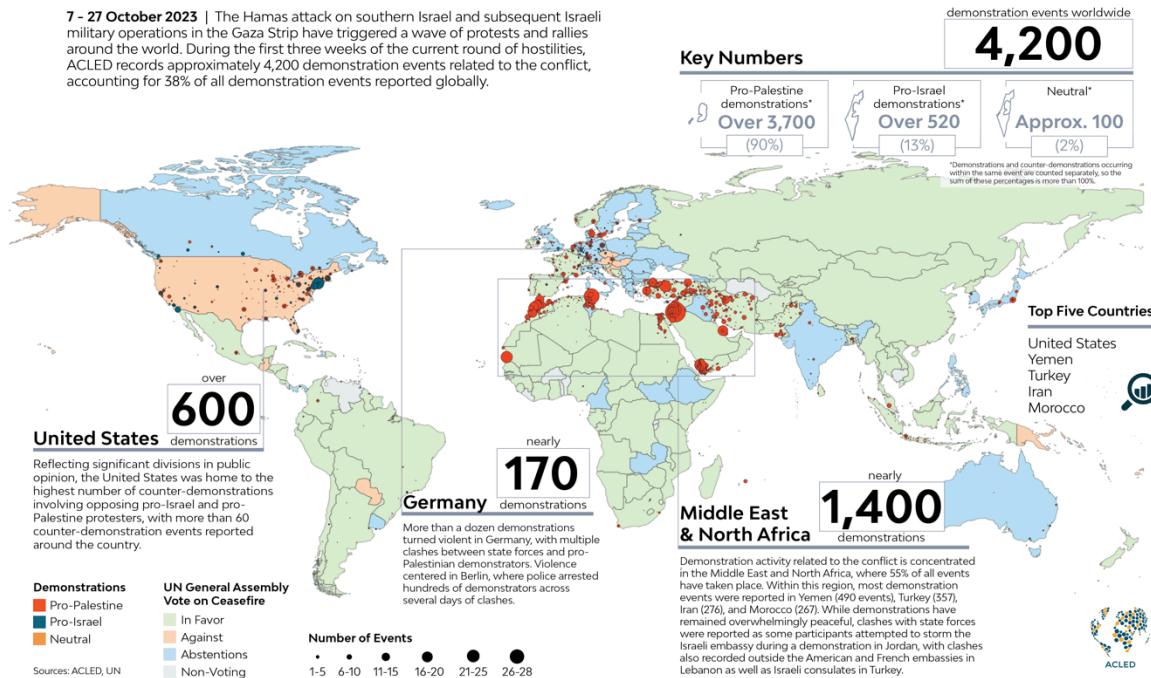
Because of its attacks on Israeli territory and civilians, Israel considers Hamas to be a terrorist organisation. Israel's position places a strong emphasis on self-defence against the dangers posed by the rocket fire of Hamas, the underground tunnels utilised by infiltrators, and the larger security issues arising from Gaza. Israel and Hamas have been engaged in a violent cycle that is characterised by brief intervals of relative peace interspersed with violent battles that are frequently brought on by particular episodes like rocket strikes, Israeli military actions, or disturbances in Jerusalem. Significant civilian losses on both sides, humanitarian crises in Gaza, and extensive destruction are frequently the outcomes of these conflicts.

On October 7th, 2023, a significant escalation in the Israel-Palestine conflict occurred when Hamas launched an unprecedented attack on Israel. In response, Israel launched extensive military operations targeting Hamas infrastructure in the Gaza Strip, leading to intense and prolonged confrontations.

The violence quickly escalated, with both sides experiencing significant casualties. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) conducted numerous airstrikes and ground operations aimed at dismantling Hamas' military capabilities, including rocket launch sites, tunnels, and command centres. The dense urban environment of Gaza led to substantial civilian casualties and destruction of infrastructure, exacerbating the severe ongoing humanitarian crisis in the region.

In response, the international community called for an instant ceasefire and stepped-up attempts to broker a settlement. But because of the intensity of the violence and the long-standing animosities, reaching a truce proved difficult. Delivering relief to the impacted communities in Gaza was extremely difficult for humanitarian organisations because of the conflict's harsh restrictions on access to basic amenities including food, clean water, and medical care.

Global Demonstrations in Response to the Israel-Palestine Conflict



Significant international political ramifications also follow from the escalation. It caused Israel's relations with its neighbours to deteriorate and provoked protests and demonstrations around the world. Many governments and international organisations denounced the conflict, demanding a stop to hostilities and a renewed emphasis on finding a fair and sustainable solution to the larger Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As the conflict continued into 2024, efforts to broker peace remained ongoing but fraught with difficulties. The cycle of violence highlighted the urgent need for addressing the underlying causes of the conflict, including the status of Jerusalem, the right of return for Palestinian refugees, security concerns, and the establishment of a viable and sovereign Palestinian state alongside Israel.

Major Parties Involved

Israel

Israel is a nation-state that was created in 1948 to provide a homeland for Jews who had experienced centuries of oppression and the Holocaust. The security and continued existence of the state are very important to the Israeli military and administration. A major portion of the conflict's territory, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, are occupied by Israel. Security concerns and the desire to hold onto territory that is deemed its historical and biblical homeland are the driving forces behind Israeli actions, including military operations and settlement development. There are a variety of viewpoints among the populace; some favour measures for peace, while others take more rigid positions.

Palestine

The Palestinian people, primarily residing in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, along with a substantial diaspora, seek the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. The Palestinian Authority (PA) governs parts of the West Bank and is recognized internationally but has limited autonomy and internal divisions. Palestinians aspire to sovereignty, self-determination, and the right of return for refugees displaced in 1948 and subsequent conflicts. Their struggle includes both political diplomacy and, at times, violent resistance against what they perceive as Israeli occupation and settlement expansion.

Hamas

Since 2007, the Gaza Strip has been ruled by the militant and political organisation Hamas, a branch of the Palestinian Islamist movement. Hamas began as a resistance movement against Israeli occupation when it was founded in 1987. Because of its attacks against Israeli military objectives and civilians, the United States, the European Union, and Israel are among those who consider it to be a terrorist organisation. Due to the group's rule of Gaza, there have been multiple battles with Israel that have resulted in a large number of casualties and humanitarian catastrophes. Palestinians, especially in Gaza, continue to support Hamas in large numbers despite its militant actions because they view it as a protector against Israeli aggression.

United Nations

The UN uses humanitarian aid, peacekeeping operations, and resolutions to address the Israel-Palestine conflict. The General Assembly and Security Council, among other UN entities, have adopted multiple resolutions advocating for security, peace, and the acknowledgement of Palestinian rights. For Palestinian refugees, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) offers vital assistance. The UN works to promote human rights, encourages discussions, and responds to humanitarian emergencies; yet, both Israelis and Palestinians frequently criticise its efforts.

United States of America

Traditionally viewed as Israel's close ally, the U.S. has played a crucial role in the conflict by giving Israel substantial military and economic backing. The US has tried to mediate peace efforts and support a two-state solution under several administrations. The United States is criticised for what is seen as bias towards Israel, especially in light of its backing of Israeli security measures. The United States' engagement in the Middle East is motivated by its geopolitical objectives and its endorsement of Israel's right to exist, which shapes the conflict's dynamics.

Egypt and Jordan

Egypt and Jordan, who signed peace treaties with Israel in 1979 and 1994, respectively, have a long history of involvement in the conflict. These nations have been vital in mediating attempts at peace and preserving regional stability. In ceasefire agreements between Israel and Hamas, Egypt has frequently served as a mediator. Despite having diplomatic ties with Israel, Jordan, which has a sizable Palestinian population, continues to support Palestinian aspirations for statehood.

Saudi Arabia and Gulf States

Political and financial support for the Palestinian cause has long been provided by nations like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Recent agreements on normalisation between Israel and a few Gulf nations, such as Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, however, indicate a change in the dynamics of the region. These agreements show a practical strategy that puts security and economic concerns ahead of enduring political ties. This change affects the larger conflict and muddies the conventional line between the Arabs and the Israelis.

Timeline of Key Events

November 2nd, 1917

The British government signed the Balfour Declaration.

May 14th, 1948

David Ben-Gurion, the head of the Jewish Agency, proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel and US President Truman recognises it the same day.

May 15th 1948 – March 10th 1949

The outbreak of the Arab-Israeli War where five Arab nations (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria) invaded territories in the former Palestinian mandate following the announcement of the independence of the state of Israel.

June 5th – June 10th 1967

Six-Day War, resulting in Israel's decisive victory and the capture of the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza Strip, West Bank, Old City of Jerusalem, and Golan Heights.

Dec. 9, 1987 – Sep. 13, 1993

The first intifada, a Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation, which ended with the signing of the First Oslo Accords, providing a framework for peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

July 11th – July 20th 2000

The 2000 Camp David Summit, an effort to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, ended without an agreement and is considered one of the main triggers of the Second Intifada.

September 28th 2000 – February 8th 2005

The Second Intifada, also known as the Al-Aqsa Intifada, resulting in significant casualties on both sides.

January 25th 2006

Hamas won Palestinian legislative elections and gained control of the Gaza Strip.

June 15th 2007

Hamas takes control of the Gaza strip after the 5-day Fatah-Hamas conflict.

July 8th – August 26th 2009.

An Israeli military operation in response to increased rocket fire from Gaza and the discovery of tunnels used by militants, lasting 50 days and resulting in heavy casualties and widespread destruction.

October 7th 2023

Hamas launched the deadliest attack on Israel, leading to one of the most devastating conflicts to date.

UN Involvement and Other Treaties

- United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181, November 29th, 1947 (A/RES/181)
- United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, November 22nd, 1967 (S/RES/242)
- Oslo Accords, September 13th, 1993 (n/a)
- United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334, December 23rd, 2016 (S/RES/2334)
- United Nations Security Council Resolution 2735, June 10th, 2024 (S/RES/2735)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

One of the most significant attempts in the peace process was reached with the signature of the Oslo Accords on September 13, 1993. The goal of these agreements was to set up a framework for direct negotiations between the Israeli government and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in order to resolve important issues such as the creation of an interim Palestinian self-government and the Israeli forces' withdrawal from areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Accords called for a phased approach towards a permanent settlement. Even though the Oslo process first inspired hope and resulted in the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, mutual mistrust and violence, together with the refusal to address fundamental issues like borders, refugees, and Jerusalem's status, prevented the realisation of a final peace agreement.



Shimon Peres, Israel's foreign minister, signing the Oslo Accords, September 13, 1993.

More recently, the Security Council Ceasefire Resolution 2735, adopted in June 2024, aimed to address the immediate violence between Israel and Hamas by calling for an immediate ceasefire and the protection of civilians. While the resolution succeeded in temporarily halting active hostilities and reducing immediate casualties, its long-term effectiveness has been limited. The ceasefire provided a brief respite and allowed for humanitarian aid to reach affected areas in Gaza, yet underlying issues such as territorial disputes, security concerns, and the blockade on Gaza remain unresolved. Consequently,

while the resolution managed to alleviate some immediate humanitarian concerns, it did not address the root causes of the conflict, leaving the potential for future escalations unmitigated.

Possible Solutions

A two-state solution, which calls for the creation of an independent State of Palestine in addition to the State of Israel, is one potential resolution to the Israel-Palestine issue. This proposal seeks to establish safe boundaries for both states based on pre-1967 lines with mutually agreed land swaps. It is based on the framework of the Oslo Accords and subsequent negotiations. As the shared capital, Jerusalem would represent the importance of the city to both Israelis and Palestinians. International players, such as the US, the EU, and the Arab states in the region, would have to provide security arrangements, financial backing, and diplomatic recognition for both countries in order to endorse this option. While this option offers a well-rounded approach to sovereignty and self-determination, it will only work if long-standing mistrust is broken, illegal settlements are demolished, and the right of return for Palestinian refugees is addressed.

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