

Palestine – Conflict & Allegations of Genocide

1. Overview

Palestine refers primarily to the **Gaza Strip** and the **West Bank**, territories located in the Middle East between Israel, Jordan, and Egypt. The region has been at the center of one of the most prolonged and complex conflicts in modern history: the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

The population of the Palestinian territories is approximately 5 million people. The majority are Sunni Muslims, with Christian and small Samaritan minorities. Governance is divided: the Palestinian Authority administers parts of the West Bank, while Hamas governs Gaza.

Since the mid-20th century, Palestinians have experienced displacement, military occupation, and recurring armed conflicts. In recent years, international legal experts and human rights organizations have debated whether actions in Gaza constitute genocide under international law, especially following large-scale military operations.

2. Timeline of Events

- 1917** – Balfour Declaration supports establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.
- 1947** – UN Partition Plan proposes separate Jewish and Arab states.
- 1948** – Establishment of Israel; approximately 700,000 Palestinians displaced (Nakba).
- 1967** – Six-Day War; Israel occupies West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem.
- 1987–1993** – First Intifada (Palestinian uprising).
- 1993–1995** – Oslo Accords establish limited Palestinian self-governance.
- 2000–2005** – Second Intifada.
- 2007** – Hamas takes control of Gaza; blockade imposed.
- 2008–Present** – Repeated military escalations in Gaza.
- 2023–2025** – Large-scale military operations in Gaza leading to extensive civilian casualties and destruction.

3. Root Causes

The roots of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict are deeply embedded in competing national movements that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Jewish Zionism sought the establishment of a Jewish homeland in historic Palestine, while Palestinian Arab nationalism developed in response to increasing Jewish immigration and fears of displacement. During the British Mandate period (1917–1948), British policies such as the Balfour Declaration intensified tensions by supporting a Jewish homeland without adequately addressing the political rights of the Arab majority.

The 1948 war, which followed the United Nations Partition Plan, resulted in the displacement of approximately 700,000 Palestinians, an event known as the Nakba (catastrophe). This mass displacement created a long-term refugee crisis that remains unresolved. Subsequent wars, particularly the 1967 Six-Day War, led to Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. The continued expansion of Israeli settlements in occupied territories, restrictions on Palestinian movement, and the blockade of Gaza have contributed to sustained political instability.

Religious significance, particularly surrounding Jerusalem, has further intensified the dispute. Additionally, regional geopolitics and international involvement have often complicated peace negotiations. The absence of a final political settlement and mutual recognition of sovereignty has allowed cycles of violence to continue over decades.

4. Consequences

The humanitarian consequences of the conflict have been severe and long-lasting. Tens of thousands of civilians have been killed over decades of violence, and repeated military escalations in Gaza have resulted in widespread destruction of homes, hospitals, schools, and infrastructure. The blockade imposed on Gaza has significantly restricted access to clean water, electricity, medical supplies, and economic opportunities, contributing to high unemployment and poverty rates.

Psychological trauma is widespread, particularly among children who have grown up amid conflict. Generational instability, displacement, and the fragmentation of families have weakened social structures. The unresolved refugee crisis has left millions of Palestinians living in camps across neighboring countries, often without full citizenship rights.

The conflict has also affected regional stability and international relations, contributing to polarization in global politics and repeated diplomatic deadlock within international institutions.

5. Global Response

The international response to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has been extensive but deeply divided. The United Nations has passed numerous resolutions addressing occupation, settlements, and the protection of civilians, including Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. However, enforcement mechanisms have often been limited due to political divisions within the Security Council, particularly the use of veto power by permanent members.

Humanitarian agencies, including UNRWA, have provided essential services such as education, healthcare, and food assistance to Palestinian refugees for decades. During major escalations in Gaza, international organizations have mobilized emergency relief operations. However, access restrictions and funding shortages have frequently limited the effectiveness of these efforts.

Diplomatic mediation has been led primarily by the United States, Egypt, and Qatar, with periodic ceasefire agreements negotiated during periods of intense violence. Despite these efforts, long-term political solutions have not been achieved. Recently, proceedings at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) have addressed allegations related to genocide and violations of international law, marking a significant development in legal accountability efforts.

Critics argue that while humanitarian aid has been consistent, political action has lacked unity and decisive enforcement, limiting the overall impact of global intervention.

6. Lessons Learned for Future Prevention

The prolonged Israeli–Palestinian conflict demonstrates the dangers of unresolved territorial disputes and the long-term consequences of political deadlock. One major lesson is the importance of early and sustained diplomatic intervention. Temporary ceasefires without structural political agreements tend to postpone violence rather than prevent it. Durable peace requires addressing root grievances, including sovereignty, security concerns, and the rights of displaced populations.

Another critical lesson is the necessity of protecting civilians during armed conflict. International humanitarian law exists to minimize harm to non-combatants, yet repeated escalations have shown weaknesses in enforcement mechanisms. Strengthening international accountability systems and ensuring impartial investigations into alleged war crimes are essential for prevention.

The conflict also highlights the importance of countering dehumanization narratives. When populations are portrayed as existential threats, violence becomes easier to justify. Long-term prevention must therefore include educational initiatives, dialogue programs, and cross-community engagement to reduce hostility and build mutual recognition.

Finally, sustainable prevention depends on economic stability and political inclusion. High unemployment, restricted mobility, and lack of statehood contribute to frustration and radicalization. Addressing socioeconomic inequalities can reduce the likelihood of recurring violence.