

JHSSMUN

Backgrounder Guide



UNDP

PALESTINE, ISRAEL CONFLICT

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Director's Letter

Dear Delegates,

As the Director of UNDP, I would like to send an excited invitation to all prospective delegates wishing to participate in the enriching and academically driven experience that is Model UN. MUN is an excellent extracurricular avenue for inquisitive people like myself to learn about the cultures, policies and historical events that have shaped the 20th and 21st centuries. While there's much uncertainty regarding the world's socio-political climate as it has been for the entirety of contemporary history, it's important to foster an appreciation for the rich cultures and communities surrounding us. I encourage that all delegates can use MUN as an outlet for enhancing their research efficiency and becoming true global citizens with an expansive and conceptual global consciousness.

Ever since my first taste of the Model UN experience at a regional high school conference, I have realized the importance of having strong and comprehensive arguments which come from cumbersome but necessary research. I and the rest of the secretariat hope to contribute to a memorable and academically driven Model UN conference here at Johnston Heights where delegates can ignite their passion for diplomacy and public speaking.

Best Regards,

Gordon Li

Director of UNDP

For any inquiries, contact me at:

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Topic Overview

The Palestine-Israel conflict is a complex and highly contentious issue that has its roots in religious, cultural, and political differences between Israelis and Palestinians. The conflict can be traced back to the late 1800s, when Jewish immigrants began moving to Palestine, then part of the Ottoman Empire, and later under British control. After World War II and the Holocaust, the United Nations voted in 1947 to partition Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states. However, this plan was rejected by the Arab states and led to the first Arab-Israeli War in 1948.

The conflict has continued for decades, with both sides engaging in acts of violence and terrorism, as well as peace negotiations. Major events include the 1967 Six-Day War, in which Israel captured the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the First and Second Intifadas, and the construction of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories. Attempts at resolving the conflict have included the Oslo Accords in 1993, which established the Palestinian Authority and aimed at a two-state solution, and the Camp David Summit in 2000, which failed to produce a final peace agreement.

The conflict remains unresolved, with ongoing violence, settlement expansion, and political tensions in the region. The Palestine-Israel conflict continues to be a major source of conflict in the Middle East and is a key issue in the wider Arab-Israeli conflict. The conflict is complex and deeply rooted, with numerous and interrelated political, economic, and social factors contributing to the ongoing tensions.

Committee Overview

Created in 1969, the United Nations Development Program is the United Nations' lead agency on international development. The UNDP works in 170 countries and territories to reduce poverty and inequality in developing areas and countries.¹ They aim to help countries to develop; policies, leadership skills, partnering abilities, and institutional capabilities, and to build resilience to achieve their three target areas; Sustainable Development, Democratic Governance and Peace Building. The UN organizes its priorities into 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are meant to be completed by 2030.²

The UNDP is also a partner in mitigating worldwide conflict zones by utilizing SURGE Advisors. These are First Responders (FR) in the immediate aftermath of a crisis and are selected for their experience in their technical field and in crisis situations.³



¹ <https://www.undp.org/about-us>

² <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

³ <https://www.undp.org/crisis-response/deployment-mechanism>

Historical Analysis

Both Jews and Arab Muslims have laid claims to the “holy lands” in the eastern Mediterranean for centuries, but the modern-day socio-political conflict stems from events that occurred during the early 20th century.¹ Jews who were disenfranchised in Europe wanted to establish a nation-state in what was then Arab- and Muslim-majority territory in the Ottoman empire and later British mandate of Palestine.²

The Arabs resisted, seeing the land as rightfully theirs. Resolution 181 which planned to partition the land failed, and Israel and the neighbouring Arab nations fought several wars.³ Today’s borders largely reflect the outcomes of the 1948 and 1967 wars, as it left Israel in control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, two territories home to large diasporas of Palestinians: ⁴



- Gaza City is the largest city in the State of Palestine with a approximate population of 600,000⁵
- While Tel Aviv is often referred to as the "technological and economic capital" of Israel, Jerusalem is the official yet disputed capital after it was annexed during the 1967, Six-Days War⁶
- Ramallah is located in Central West Bank and is the administrative capital of the State of Palestine, though Jerusalem is considered the rightful capital by many ⁷
- The Golan Heights is a disputed region in Syria or Israel that only the US explicitly recognizes as a part of Israel⁸

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Palestine>

² <https://www.britannica.com/topic/two-state-solution#ref1261844>

³ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/United-Nations-Resolution-181>

⁴ <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/israeli-palestinian-conflict>

The West Bank

The West Bank is located between Israel and Jordan. It forms the larger half of the semi-autonomous Palestinian Territories, the other half being the Gaza Strip.⁹ The West Bank is controlled by the Palestinian Authority (the governing body of the Palestinian autonomous regions of the West Bank and Gaza Strip established in 1994 under the Oslo Accords).¹⁰ The West Bank has been under Israeli occupation since 1967 following the conclusion of the Six Days War. It is home to approximately 3 million Palestinians and would be the core of any potential Palestinian state.¹¹

Jewish settlements in the West Bank can be traced back to 1967 following the conclusion of the Six Days War.¹² This was when Israel's takeover of the West Bank from Jordan opened up the possibility for Jewish settlers to move into territory beyond the ratified 1948 borders of Israel.¹³ Some settlers were motivated by ideology, while others simply moved because cost of living in the West Bank was more affordable. Urban areas in Israel suffer from an increasing costs of living.¹⁴ Tel Aviv was ranked the most expensive city in the world by the 2021 Worldwide Cost of Living Index.¹⁵

⁵ <https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2364-1.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Tel-Aviv-Yafo>

⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ramallah>

⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Golan-Heights>

⁹ https://en.wikivoyage.org/wiki/West_Bank

¹⁰ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Palestinian-Authority>

¹¹ <https://peacenow.org.il/en/settlements-watch/settlements-data/population>

¹² <https://www.btselem.org/settlements/statistics>

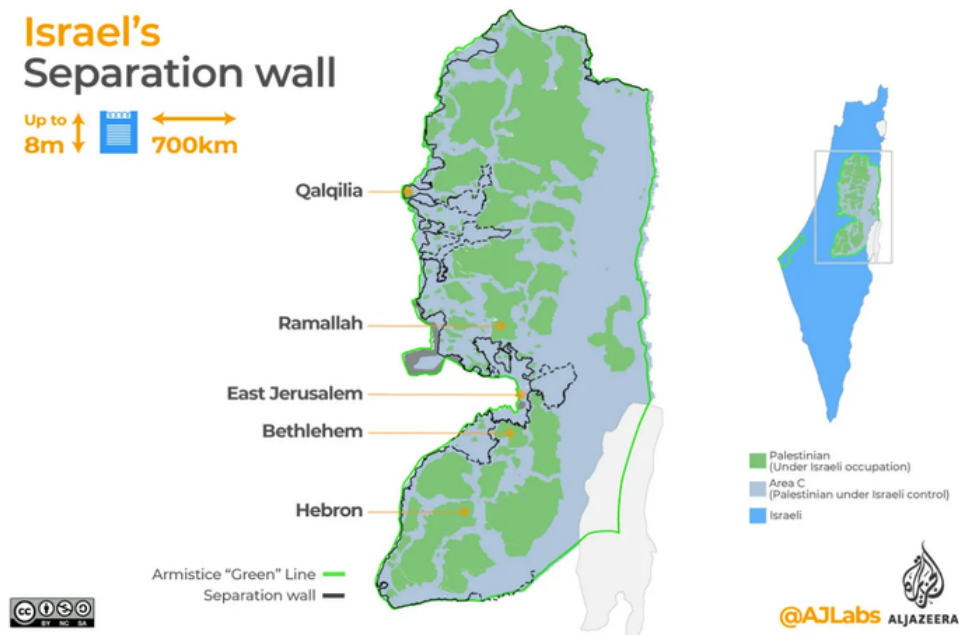
¹³ <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/arab-israeli-war>

¹⁴ <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2012/8/23/israeli-settlers-lured-by-subsidies>

¹⁵ <https://hir.harvard.edu/pragmatic-settlements-in-the-west-bank-and-implications-for-israel-and-palestine/>

Today approximately 500,000 Israelis live in the settlements around the West Bank.¹⁶ Roughly 75 percent of settlers live on or near the West Bank border with Israel.¹⁷ The mass exodus of Jews in effect blurs or constrains the boundaries of any potential future Palestinian state.¹⁸

The Israeli West Bank barrier, comprising the West Bank Wall and the West Bank fence, is a separation barrier built by Israel along the Green Line and inside parts of the West Bank. Israeli's describes the wall as a necessary security barrier against Palestinian terrorism, whereas Palestinians describe it as racial segregation.



¹⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Israeli-settlement>

¹⁷ <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/israels-settlement-crisis-its-not-too-late-for-a-two-state-solution/254955/>

¹⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hamas>

¹⁹ <https://unctad.org/news/palestinian-socioeconomic-crisis-now-breaking-point>

²⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/10/world/middleeast/forgotten-neighborhood-underscores-growing-poverty-of-gaza.html>

Gaza Strip

With a population of approximately 2.1 million, Gaza is the smaller and second half of the semi-autonomous Palestinian territories, though it is much more densely populated than the west bank. Gaza is controlled by Hamas, an Islamist fundamentalist organization, and is under Israeli blockade,²¹ which leaves the region impoverished.²²

Living conditions in Gaza are bleak: 95 percent of the population does not have access to clean water, according to UNRWA, and electricity shortages periodically bring life to a halt. The territory has one of the highest unemployment rates in the world, World Bank statistics show, and the United Nations estimates that roughly 80 percent of the population relies on international aid to survive and access basic services.²³



"Palestinians in a makeshift, rubble-strewn home in Gaza's Forgotten Neighborhood, an extreme example of Gaza's poverty." - New York Times²⁴

²¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hamas>

²² <https://www.britannica.com/place/Gaza-Strip>

²³ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/05/14/gaza-strip-history-geography/>

²⁴ <https://static01.nyt.com/images/2012/09/10/world/gaza1/gaza1-superJumbo.jpg?quality=75&auto=webp>

The Nakba

The 1948 war displaced 700,000 Palestinians, creating a refugee crisis that has had generational scars. Palestinians call this mass eviction the Nakba (Arabic for “catastrophe”).²⁵ Today there are more than 7 million Palestinian refugees worldwide defined as those displaced in 1948 and their descendants. 5.7 million of these refugees are registered with the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), a specialized UN agency established in 1949 to support refugees.²⁶



Palestinian civilians forced to flee from an unidentified village in Galilee some five months after the creation of the state of Israel - Aljazeera²⁷

A core Palestinian demand in peace negotiations is justice for these refugees, most commonly in the form of the “right of return” to their ancestors homelands. Israelis can’t accept the right of return without abandoning their Jewish or potentially democratic identity. Adding 7 million Arabs to Israel’s population would make Jews a minority (Israel’s total population is about 8 million, a number that already includes 1.5 million Arabs). Therefore, Israelis would likely reject such a demographical restructuring.²⁸ Ideas proposed so far to provide justice include financial compensation and limited resettlement in Israel, but no official solution has been ratified.

Zionism

Zionists believe Judaism is a nationality as well as a religion, and that Jews deserve their own state in their ancestral homeland, Israel, in the same way the French people deserve France, or the Chinese people should have China.²⁹

European Jews (the majority of the world's Jewish population at the time) arrived at Zionism partly because of anti-Semitic persecution and also because the Zionist movement fuelled secular nationalism.³⁰ During the late 19th century and the early-mid 20th century, hundreds of thousands of Jews settled to Palestine, including a large diaspora forced out of Europe during the Holocaust.³¹

Zionists have longed disagreed on to what extent socio-religious principles should dictate policy. The Zionist left are inclined to trade Israeli-controlled land for peace with Arab nations and prefers a secular government. The Zionist right, which currently enjoys commanding positions in the Israeli government and popular opinion, tends to be more skeptical of “land-for-peace” deals and more comfortable intertwining religion and politics.³²

²⁹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/5/23/the-nakba-did-not-start-or-end-in-1948>

²⁶ <https://imeu.org/article/the-nakba-and-palestine-refugees-imeu-questions-and-answers>

²⁷ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/5/15/nakba-day-for-palestinians-not-just-an-historical-event>

²⁸ <https://www.vox.com/2018/11/20/18080030/israel-palestine-nakba>

²⁹ <https://www.vox.com/2018/11/20/18080010/zionism-israel-palestine>

³⁰ <https://www.un.org/unispal/history/>

³¹ <https://www.history.com/topics/middle-east/zionism>

³² <https://www.vox.com/2018/11/20/18080010/zionism-israel-palestine>

Iron Dome

The Iron Dome defense system is a mobile air defense system developed by Rafael Advanced Defense Systems, an Israeli defense company. The system is designed to intercept and destroy short-range rockets, artillery shells, and mortars from militants in the Gaza Strip. The system has been highly successful in intercepting rockets and has been credited with saving many lives in Israel.³³

However, the Iron Dome system also has limitations. Large number of rockets can overwhelm the system. Additionally Hamas rockets are relatively cheap to produce, costing a few hundred dollars on average. In contrast, a single Iron Dome interceptor missile costs tens of thousands of American dollars. However, many analysts argue that the prevented casualties/infrastructure damage and strategic impact are worth the cost.³⁴

The Iron Dome is effective technically but strategically, Israelis cannot rely on it completely. Groups like Hamas, which are non-state actors are not guaranteed to be compelled by the logic of deterrence that the Iron Dome implies. While the Iron dome is an effective way to reassure the citizens and to avoid total disruption of daily life, at the end of the day, it wont bring an end to the conflict.³⁵

³³ <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-iron-dome>

³⁴ <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/article/iron->

³⁶ <https://www.vox.com/22435973/israel-iron-dome-explained>

Notable Terms

Camp David Summit: The Camp David Summit was a historic meeting between leaders of the USA, Egypt and Israel, held at the Camp David presidential retreat in Maryland, USA, in 1978. The summit aimed to resolve the long-standing conflict between Egypt and Israel and resulted in the signing of the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty in 1979, which remains one of the only enduring peace agreements between two Arab nations and Israel. The summit was a significant step towards peace in the Middle East and helped to ease tensions in the region.³⁶

Balfour Declaration: The Balfour Declaration was a letter written in 1917 by the British government that expressed support for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.³⁷

Oslo Accords: The Oslo Accords were a set of agreements signed between the government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1993. The accords marked a significant step towards resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as they established a framework for peace negotiations and provided for limited Palestinian self-governance in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Oslo Accords have been criticized by both Israelis and Palestinians for not achieving a comprehensive peace settlement, but remain a landmark event in the history of the conflict.³⁸

³⁶ <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/background-and-overview-of-2000-camp-david-summit>

³⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Balfour-Declaration>

Palestinian Authority: The Palestinian Authority (PA) is the organization established to govern parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip following the signing of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1993. The PA is responsible for providing various civilian services in the areas under its control, and its leadership is elected by the Palestinian people. The PA's ultimate goal is the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.³⁹

Resolution 181: UN General Assembly Resolution 181, also known as the "Partition Plan for Palestine," was a resolution adopted by the United Nations on November 29, 1947, which called for the partition of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states, with Jerusalem being placed under international control. The plan was accepted by the Jewish community but rejected by the Arab League and Palestinian Arabs. It ultimately resulted in the outbreak of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, and the establishment of Israel.⁴⁰

Six Days War: This was a military conflict fought by Israel and the neighbouring states of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria from June 5 to June 10, 1967. The war began with a surprise Israeli attack on Egyptian airfields and quickly escalated, with Israel also defeating Jordan and Syria and occupying the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. The war ended with a ceasefire and had major repercussions, including the displacement of Palestinian civilians and the establishment of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories.⁴¹

Green Line: The Green Line is the demarcation line established by the Armistice Agreement between Israel and neighbouring Arab states in 1949, following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. The line serves as the de facto border between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which are territories that were occupied by Jordan and Egypt respectively before the war and were captured by Israel during the 1967 Six-Day War. The Green Line is not a formal international border, as the status of these territories is still in dispute and subject to ongoing negotiations.⁴²

Intifada: The Intifada is a term used to describe two Palestinian uprisings against Israeli rule, the first occurred in the late 1980s and the second in the early 2000s. The word Intifada is Arabic for "struggle" and refers to the popular resistance and civil disobedience campaigns that included protests, strikes, and acts of violence against Israeli military and civilian targets. The first Intifada, began in 1987 and was characterized by widespread protests, rock-throwing, and boycotts of Israeli goods. The second Intifada, also known as the Al-Aqsa Intifada, began in 2000 and was marked by a sharp increase in Palestinian violence, including suicide bombings and attacks on Israeli civilians.⁴³

Hamas: Hamas (an acronym for "Islamic Resistance Movement") is a Palestinian Islamist political organization and militant group that operates in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. It was founded in 1987 during the First Palestinian Intifada and its charter calls for the destruction of the State of Israel and the establishment of an Islamic state in its place. Hamas is considered a terrorist organization by several countries and international organizations, including the United States, the European Union, and Israel. The group has carried out numerous attacks against Israeli civilians and military targets, including suicide bombings and rocket attacks. Hamas also provides social and humanitarian services to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, where it has held power since winning democratic elections in 2006.⁴⁴

³⁸ <https://www.history.com/topics/middle-east/ottoman-empire>

³⁹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Palestinian-Authority>

⁴⁰ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/United-Nations-Resolution-181>

⁴¹ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Six-Day-War>

⁴² <https://jstreet.org/the-green-line/#.Y9XeA-zMK3I>

⁴³ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/intifada>

⁴⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hamas>

Potential Solutions

The One-State Solution for the Palestine-Israel conflict refers to the idea of a single, unified state in which Israelis and Palestinians would have equal rights and citizenship. This state would encompass all of the territory currently controlled by Israel, including the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as Israel.

Supporters of the one-state solution argue that it would be the most just and equitable solution to the conflict, as it would ensure that all residents of the region have equal rights and would eliminate the need for a separate Palestinian state. However, it is also criticized as it would mean the end of a Jewish state due to the fact that the additional Palestinians will make Jews a minority and the fact that a large Palestinian majority would not be willing to live under Jewish minority rule.

The Two-State Solution for the Palestine-Israel conflict refers to the idea of creating two separate states, one for Israelis and one for Palestinians. Under this solution, Israel would retain control of its current territory, and an independent Palestinian state would be established in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The two states would exist side-by-side and would have open borders, allowing for free movement of people and goods.

The two-state solution has been the international community's preferred solution for decades and it was agreed upon in the Oslo Accords, however the lack of progress in the peace process and the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank have casted doubts on the feasibility of this solution.

Bloc Positions

The Arab League: The Arab League is a regional organization of Arab countries in and around North Africa and the Middle East. It is made up of 22 member states, the majority of which are located in Africa and the Middle East.⁴⁵ The Arab League has traditionally supported the Palestinian cause and called for an end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. They have also called for a two-state solution to the conflict and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.⁴⁶

The Non-Aligned Movement: The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) is a group of countries that are not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc. It is the largest grouping of countries outside the United Nations. NAM member states call for a peaceful resolution to the conflict and respect for the rights of both sides.⁴⁷

European Union: The European Union (EU) is a regional organization consisting of 27 member states primarily in Europe.⁴⁸ The EU has generally called for a two-state solution and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. They have also called for a peaceful resolution to the conflict, respect for international law and human rights, and an end to Israeli settlement building in the occupied territories.⁴⁹

Western Bloc: The states in the Northern Hemisphere consisting of the USA and its allies tend to have pro-Israeli sentiments. This is due to a variety of reasons, including historical ties, cultural similarities, and a shared concern for regional stability. Some argue that Western support for Israel is rooted in a commitment to preserving Israel's security and stability, while others view it as a reflection of a broader geopolitical strategy aimed at securing Western interests in the region.⁵¹

Guiding Questions

- What are the positions of the main actors involved in the conflict, including Israel, Palestine, and the broader Arab and Muslim world?
- How does the conflict affect the daily lives of ordinary Palestinians, refugees and Israelis and what are the humanitarian consequences of the ongoing violence?
- What are the regional and international implications of the conflict and how does it relate to broader issues such as the War on Terror and the rise of political Islam?
- How does the Israeli settlement in the occupied territories affect the conflict and the possibility of a two-state solution?

Supplementary Resources:

<https://israelipalestinian.procon.org/historical-timeline-1900-present/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9ilrmKY9k>

https://teachmideast.org/resource_guides/the-israeli-palestinian-conflict/

⁴⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Arab-League>

⁴⁶ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/2/arab-league-says-palestinian-cause-central-glosses-over-israel>

⁴⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Non-Aligned-Movement>

⁴⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/European-Union>

⁴⁹ [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/palestine/european-union-and-palestine_en?s=206#:~:text=The%20Office%20of%20the%20European,Bank%20and%20Gaza%20Strip%2C%20UNRWA.&text=The%20European%20Union%20\(EU\)%20has,Israel%20in%20peace%20and%20security.](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/palestine/european-union-and-palestine_en?s=206#:~:text=The%20Office%20of%20the%20European,Bank%20and%20Gaza%20Strip%2C%20UNRWA.&text=The%20European%20Union%20(EU)%20has,Israel%20in%20peace%20and%20security.)

⁵⁰ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/United-Nations>

⁵¹ <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/R44245.pdf>

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<https://www.airandspaceforces.com/article/iron-dome/>. Accessed 28 January 2023.

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