Commonwealth-Parkville School

**The Question of The Two-State Solution:**

**A Story of a Stolen Land**

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Most people make the mistake of using certain words like “conflict” and “complex” when speaking of the situation in occupied Palestine. Words like these only succeed in furthering a problem, one in which there is no real discussion of what is actually taking place and impedes the necessary meaningful conversations. Many like to assume this is a war between Jews and Muslims (and they use this as an excuse to shy away from the issue), when in fact it is one between a tyrannical government (Israel) and the people who impede the development of this Zionist state (Palestine). The only correct label for what is currently taking place in occupied Palestine is “the ethnic cleansing and displacement of an entire people”. The use of words like “conflict” makes it seem like both sides are on equal footing- they are not. One makes the rules, and the other is subjected to the whims of those rules. Nor is it “complex”, or some moral conundrum- in fact, I would go so far as to say it is very black and white. The history of Palestine, from its ancient beginnings up until modern times, has been shaped and formed by colonial powers that have passed possession of it around like a horribly mistreated toy, a factor that has come to impressively shape international attitude toward Palestinians. Later, the introduction of Zionism in the early 19th century would come to have catastrophic effects on the existence of Palestine and the subsequent “Jewish state” would virtually bring an end to the common conception of peace in the middle east. In “The Conundrum of the Palestinian Two-State, One-State Solution.” Talhami states “…Israel’s rebranding itself as a Jewish state hammered the last nail in the coffin of the two-state solution.” (page 1). This “Jewish Identity” Israel has used to brand itself with, the ever-present population of Palestinians (both Muslim and other), and the resulting issue Israel has as they attempt to achieve their true “Jewish State” is what created this so-called “conflict.” Certainly, the train for the two-state solution has long departed the station- and all parties involved have missed their chance to get on it.

Zionism is a movement that calls for an establishment of a Jewish homeland, in a land that used to be only Palestine. The father of Zionism is famously known to be Theodor Herzl, who wrote *The Jewish State*, a pamphlet which called for (spoiler alert) recognition of a Jewish state in Palestine. This would be the beginnings of what is now known as Israel. Although Herzl would die in 1904, Zionism spread throughout Europe quickly, and with antisemitism sentiment making many places in Europe hostile to Jews, there was a mass migration of Jewish people to Palestine. By the end of 1914, 75,000 Jews had migrated to Palestine and by 1945, following WWII, 500,000 Jews were living in Palestine. What is modern-day Israel was founded completely on the ideals of Zionism, as Israel makes itself out to be the “Jewish Homeland” in which all Jews born anywhere are welcome to become Israeli citizens (as per the 1950 Law of Return). International opinion on Zionism and its application is divided, many Jews believe a national homeland is not necessary for the survival of their religion. Most neighboring Arab countries, as well as the Palestinians living in the West Bank and the Gaza strip, also widely oppose Zionism due to the resulting Israeli occupation on Palestinian land. Most opposers cannot ignore the reality of Zionism, the discriminations and segregation against non-Jews, in this case, the Palestinian people. On the other hand, Zionism is viewed as a positive ideology for Jews, who have been infamously abused and mistreated by the European community. Under this view, the movement is more of a natural solution to the antisemitism that was so prevalent in the earlier century. For many Zionist the cost of the movement is dismissible. (Zionism, History.com)

Palestine can be reasonably considered to be one of the most contested lands in the world. Palestine is special to all the three Abrahamic religions, of which Islam and Christianity are two of the most universalizing religions in the world, with billions of followers all across the globe (5 Religions With The Most Followers, huffpost.com). The religious importance Palestine has for these different groups has been a source of conflict for centuries, as it is known as a “Holy Land” for many. “Palestine” originates from the word “Philistia,” which refers to a part of the region’s 12th century BC occupants, the Philistines. Some of the groups that would come to rule Palestine are Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Fatimids, Seljuk Turks, Crusaders, Egyptians, and Mamelukes (Palestine, History.com). Eventually, from 1517 to 1917, Palestine would be under Ottoman Rule, the Ottomans Empire being a major power that dominated most of the Middle East during that time. In 1923, following WWI- in which the Ottoman’s allied with Germany and subsequently lost the war- the League of Nations gave the Palestinian lands to Britain when drawing up peace treaties. This put Palestine under British mandate and colonial rule (Palestine, History.com). Only a couple decades later, with the withdrawal of Britain and the creation of Israel, it would be clear that Palestine’s misfortune would not come to an end any time soon.

Like the story of any tragedy, we can trace the beginnings back to those in power. The true crime in this situation is the lack of control Palestine had, and continues to have, in the matters of its own statehood and existence. The history of Palestine is one of whose content is constantly being written by the whims of countries with enough power and status to consider Palestine to be irrelevant and dispensable. The first serious consideration of a Jewish homeland, in 1917, came in the form of the *Balfour Declaration*, a statement by the British government in which they issued their full support for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. This was a victory for the Zionist movement, because they now had the backing of one of the greatest colonial superpowers in the world. A few short decades later, following WWII, the British Mandate in Palestine would come to an end and it seemed obvious who the successor of this abused land would be. From the beginning of the 20th century up until the official establishment of Israel in 1948, many Jews were immigrating to Palestine, causing heightened tensions between the newcomers and the Arabs of Palestine and neighboring countries. The hostilities of Egypt and Jordan made the situation even more precarious, since now the UN and the superpowers of the world (USA and Britain) had to take into account the anger of these countries if Israel would be allowed to form. In the end, the US’s support was the only greenlight needed, and Israel was officially formed in 1948, following the withdrawal of Britain (Indeed Friends, Norman Finkelstein).

All of a sudden, the countries of the middle east had to come to terms with the arrival of a foreign neighbor. Naturally, their feelings toward the new country were of anger and resentment. To them, Israel was a symbol of the increasingly obvious influence western and European powers had over the middle east. As a response to the creation of Israel, the neighboring Arab countries of the region refused to recognize the new country, which would be the start of the Arab-Israel War of 1948 and would in turn cement the relationship Israel and these Middle eastern countries would have in the future. With Egypt bordering on the south, Jordan on the east, Syria and Lebanon in the North, Arab armies surrounded the new country. Israel had to turn to the US for dearly needed money and weapons to aid in the fight. By 1949, Israel became a member of the UN and armistice agreements were signed in order to end the conflict, although violence continued to play out. Both Egypt and Jordan had taken advantage of this brief period of official fighting, with the former now controlling the Gaza Strip while the later occupied the West Bank and Jerusalem (Indeed Friends, Norman Finkelstein).

The 1949 armistice agreement did not bring peace. Attacks along the borders continued and the tensions only heightened. The Arab countries were adamant in their refusal to find peace, as Gamal Abdel Nasser (a former colonel who had overthrown the King of Egypt in 1952 and assumed power as the president) once said, “Israel’s existence in itself is an aggression.” Other than violent occurrences, there was also the blocking of Israeli shipping through the Gulf of Aqaba by Egypt and prohibiting Jews from visiting Jerusalem by Jordan. The climax of these hostilities came in the form of an agreement struck between Israel, Britain, and France. Britain and France, hoping to take advantage of the situation, wished to destabilize Nasser’s regime. Israel mobilized their troops in October of 1956 and launched an invasion of Egyptian-held Sinai and Gaza. They defeated the Egyptian troops stationed there and seized the islands Egypt was using to close off the Gulf of Aqaba, reaching as far as the banks of the Suez Canal. As per the prearranged plan, Britain and France issued an ultimatum in which they would intervene if both Israeli and Egyptian troops did not withdraw. They also demanded to be allowed to occupy the Suez Canal. Israel, obviously agreeing to the prearranged terms, withdrew. Egypt did not. Britain and France proceeded to invade the canal, to the fury of Eisenhower, who had wished for the US and its allies to not involve themselves in the situation. Eventually- following fears of all-out war and the involvement of the Soviet Union on the side of the Arab countries- a motion was passed in the UN, the invasion ended, British and French forced withdrew, and UN forces took their place to ensure free passage in the Suez Canal. Israel withdrew from the territories they had seized (Sharm al-Sheikh in Sinai and Gaza) on the condition that their right to shipping in the Gulf of Aqaba continued. The result of this conflict had Israel proving to its Arab neighbors that the Western powers were on their side and it would not be an easy task to commercially isolate the new country. Israel found new security with the establishment of UN troops along its borders with Egypt (Indeed Friends, Norman Finkelstein).

The situation was far from calmed in the Middle East. A clash in the Syrian border set off a chain reaction of dangerous actions that would culminate in the Six-Day War of 1967, which would dramatically alter the balance of power in the Middle east. Throughout the course of the war, Israel would come to destroy the Egyptian forces and recapture the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza. By the time a UN ceasefire was called following the sixth and final day of conflict, Israel had succeeded in defeating all five Arab armies and captured both the West Bank and Jerusalem, the beginning of what is considered an illegal occupation. A chief difference between the outcome of the 1956 situation and the Six-Day War was that Israel got to keep the lands. Palestine would be further erased. The US showed its support for Israel and asked why he was so supportive of Israel, President Johnson responded: “Because it is right.” The US benefited greatly from this support as they were allowed free access to the Soviet military equipment Israel found itself in possession of. This would help set a precedent of US involvement in favor of Israel (Indeed Friends, Norman Finkelstein).

I hope what has been presented thus far is enough to prove how little say the Arab, non-Jewish population in Palestine (those whose lives, as they know it, would all but end) had on the events that would transpire. All of what would come to directly affect them would be decided by outside powers vying for their own personal gain, against the outright protest of those most severely affected. Most Palestinian were against the initial UN partition plan, Palestinian’s were ready to live in peace with Jewish immigrants. The voice of the original inhabitants of the land were never heard or considered, and eventually they would all be expelled off their lands, forced into militarized labor camps, refugee camps in other countries, to find a place somewhere in the world that would take them in (From Palestine to Israel: A Photographic Record of Destruction and State Formation, 1947-1950). Once again, this is not a “conflict” or a “necessary evil”. This is the active erasure of an entire group of people, the systematic oppression that comes as a product of a stolen land, the stomping on of one group to lift up another.

Palestinian call it the Nakba, the catastrophe, “the shattering of the Palestinian community” (Surviving Opportunities, p.42). In numbers: 78% of Palestine became “Israel” (now, virtually 100%), 700,000 Palestinians either fled or were forced from their homes, the geographical erasure of over 400 Palestinian villages depopulated and destroyed, the land later being used for Israeli settlements. 2,780 historical locations have been Hebraized (given Hebrew names): 340 villages and towns, 1,000 ruins, 560 rivers, 380 springs, 198 mountains and hills, 50 caves, 28 castles and palaces, and 14 pools and lakes (Hebraization of Arabic Place Names, p. 106). Palestinian’s are united in what they have lost, they share the pain of exile and being a stateless people. In the end, the only unconditional support they will find is with each other.

The Two-State solution is fated for failure. To set the stage, let us introduce the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), the representation of Palestinians, created in 1964. Up until then, Palestine had no political activity, its leadership consisted of a scattering of resistance movements, dispersed across different Arabic countries. The PLO was created in order to unify them. Following the Six-Day War, the PLO put its focus on guerilla warfare against Israel, headed by Yasser Arafat, who would, in a few decades, become president of the newly proclaimed (by the PLO) state of Palestine in 1988. At this point, the PLO had adopted a more flexible attitude toward Israel, going so far as acknowledging Israel’s right to existence, a stark contrast to their previous attitude of Israel’s destruction and the creation of a secular state in its place. At that point in Israel’s existence, the PLO could no longer afford to continue with their previous attitude of complete Israeli destruction. It was under Arafat that the Oslo Accords were signed in 1993, an agreement in which both Israel and the Palestinian representatives recognized each other. Gaza and the West Bank would be handed over to the now newly formed Palestinian Authority (PA). The Oslo Accords was the first sign of a possible Two-State solution and it was also a failure- Israel would continue to build illegal settlements in the West Bank and Palestine was not any closer to independence than before. Nevertheless, tensions continued in the region and it would be marked by the two Intifadas, or revolutions. (Palestinian Liberation Organization, Britannica.com)

The first Intifada happened in 1987, in response to Israel’s continuous settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, Israeli invasion of Lebanon, increased repression by Israel’s political right-wing group, and Palestinian dissatisfaction with the PLO leadership, which, by most of the world, was yet to be recognized as the official representation of Palestinians. In December of 1987, an Israeli vehicle rammed into two Palestinian vans, killing four workers. This would be the spark that would ignite the fire of revolution. Rioting took place throughout the first year, with rocks and Molotov cocktails. Rifles, grenades, and explosives were introduced when the violence from the Israel police and military increased. The ratio of Palestinian to Israeli death was 3 to 1. The first Intifada would culminate with the Oslo Accords, the revolution causing enough political and economic damage for the Israeli’s that they would begin to search for means to peace and the end of fighting. (Intifada, Britannica.com)

The second Intifada, also known as the al-Aqsa Intifada, came in 2000, as a result of the effects of the first Intifada and the failure of the Oslo Accords. Much more violent than the first Intifada, it was caused by the visit of the Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to al-Aqsa mosque, which was very provocative for Palestinians as tensions and hostilities were already very high. The Aqsa mosque is the third holiest site for Muslims, and the visit of such an important Israeli government official was a show of disrespect and outright power over the Palestinians. In response to the reignited violence and fighting and in hopes of suppression, Israel began to reoccupy Gaza and the West Bank, building a barrier to separate the West Bank and Israel, as well as more than 200 government directed assassinations of certain Palestinian political and military figures. The main effects of this second intifada, which can still be seen in the region today, was a worsened standing for Palestinians. Although there was no official end to the second Intifada, the violence and revolution died down around 2005. By then, the illegal occupation in the West Bank by Israel was stronger than ever before and tighter controls on Palestinian movement, both goods and people, killed any chance of economic growth for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. (Intifada, Britannica.com)

From all sides, those in power have failed the Palestinians. Following the Intifada’s and the failure of the Oslo Accords, the PLO and PA (officially, not the same thing, but basically, they are) lost all their esteem in the eyes of the people. With the introduction of Hamas during the first Intifada, their political position strengthened following the second Intifada, specifically in 2006, when they won the majority of the seats in the legislative body over the PA. Hamas, a militant Islamic group centered in Gaza and the West Bank, saw a return to the original policy the Palestinian government had against Israel: the liberation of Palestine and the end of Israel. Their take on it consists of an Islamic state, not a secular one, therefore they oppose the PLO and their approach. Hamas is considered a terrorist group by Israel and many different government’s around the world, with the militaristic hold they have over Gaza and the many missiles they have shot at Israel. I believe it is not the craziest thing to understand, when you look at it from a Palestinian perspective. To a Palestinian, Hamas is the only group that is willing to take decisive action in the struggle for their freedom. Hamas represents ideals that, among Palestinians, are popular: their thirst for a free state, their anger and hate for Israel, their wish to do to them what has been done unto them. (Hamas, Britannica.com)

I believe the Two-State solution is a pathetic fantasy many people use as an excuse to brush away the problem and not take any real action. A Two-State solution has been in the works for decades and the moment the Oslo Accords fell apart, the idea of separate states for the Palestinians and Israelis was basically confirmed to be impossible. The Israel government have already shown their unwillingness to even consider the prospect of giving up the occupied lands, and even if they were to do that, the Middle East would suddenly find itself with two states that only moments ago were enemies to each other. For the Palestinians, the Israelis are their oppressors, the reason they have no land, the reason they are refugee’s, the reason they are a stateless people. For the Israelis, Palestinians are the final obstacle in their perfect Jewish State, the pushback that makes their dreams of total occupation unattainable.

The reality of the issue is this: Israel will never give up the land they have, they have no reason to, not with the significant international support they have garnered with the superpowers of the world, the ones that basically control which direction the world rotates and have the power to alter the lives of an entire group of people. Although what is going on in the West Bank and Gaza has been denounced as illegal and a violation of human rights, by the UN and international communities, Israel has no reason to worry- the US backs them up and with that, no real action would ever be taken against them. The victims of all this are the Palestinian people, society, community, life, etc. The ones with no say on the course of their own lives, and who have experienced inhumanities most of the world, sadly, does not acknowledge. In the end, this is just another story of oppression and hardship, at the hands of selfish powers on a bloodthirsty mission to acquire even more power.