

Brief History of Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

The ancient land of Palestine has come under many rules over the centuries. Considered by some to be the "homeland of the Jews," Christian, Muslim, and other armies have marched into Palestine claiming the Holy City of Jerusalem as their own. Prior to World War I, the Ottoman Empire had controlled Palestine for more than four centuries. Though there were significant numbers of Jews and Christians within the Palestinian population, the majority were Muslims. Historically, the Palestinian people of this region have also been referred to as the Canaanites; the Jebusites; the Philistias; and several other Biblical and historical references.

Late 1800's

Jews, mostly from Eastern Europe and regions of the Middle East, began buying land from the Ottomans in the Palestinian regions. Neither the Christians nor the Muslims living in Palestine at the time had any official claims to the land.

1917-1947

Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire during World War I, the region of Transjordan (currently the lands of Jordan, the West Bank, Israel, and Gaza) was handed to the British as a mandate.

The "Balfour Declaration" was declared in 1917 by British Foreign Minister Lord Arthur Balfour, announcing his government's support for the establishment of "a Jewish national homeland in Palestine." Jews, Christians, and Muslims continued to live together throughout this period.

1948

The United Nations announced a Partition Plan which proposed the creation of Arab and Jewish states within the Palestine area. The Jews accepted the Plan; the Arabs did not. Arab militias began fighting to prevent Jews from settling in previous Arab areas. This became known as "The 1948 Arab-Israeli War" ... or as the "Israeli War of Independence." Arabs, however, refer to this war as "al-Nakba" ... or "The Catastrophe."

Ultimately, more than 700,000 Palestinians were forced to leave their homes in what became the new country of "Israel," mostly without taking anything with them. They began to settle in other areas of the region, mainly in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq.

1956-57

When it was thought that Egyptian President Gamal Nasser was about to nationalize the Suez Canal, Israel invaded the Sinai Peninsula, driving back Egyptian forces. British and French troops ended this fight but promised Israel continued use of the canal. United Nation troops were deployed in the Canal Zone.

In January, 1957, Israel withdrew from all Egyptian territory except the Aqaba area and the Gaza Strip.

1964

Palestinian refugees, mainly from Jordan, established the Palestinian National Charter, which later became the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), to protect Palestinians from any movements on the part of Israel to control more lands.

1967

The Six-Day War of 1967 began with a first strike by Israel, though controversy surrounds the motivating reasons. Some sources say that Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser wanted to reclaim Gaza; others say he had made public that he wanted to destroy Israel. The surprise preemptive attack by Israel destroyed the entire Egyptian Air Force while it was still on the ground.

Also, Syria had reportedly built up troops along the Syrian border. Jordan had also planned to join in the attack. As a result of victories from this war, Israel claimed the new territories of Gaza from Egypt; the Golan Heights from Syria; and the West Bank from Jordan. Israeli deaths were said to number about 700, while Arab deaths were more than 10,000.

Thousands more Palestinian refugees were forced to flee the regions of Gaza, the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights, as Israeli claims more than doubled its previously allotted land territories.

The international community does not recognize the legitimacy of Israel's claims to East Jerusalem, Gaza, the West Bank, or the Golan Heights as a bounty of the war.

1968-70

There were repeated unsuccessful attempts by Egypt to reclaim the Sinai Peninsula.

1973

The 1973 Yom Kippur War began when Egypt and Syria launched a surprise joint attack against Israel in an attempt to regain Sinai and the Golan Heights. This occurred on the Jewish holy day of fasting, creating new concerns among Israelis about their security.

1978

The Camp David Accords were brokered by President Jimmy Carter and held in the United States. There was an agreement to return the Sinai to Egypt, but other issues remained unresolved. Also, negotiations framed an accord for self-rule to more than 1,000,000 Palestinians then living on the Israeli-occupied areas of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

1982-85

The War of 1982 was conducted when Israel attacked Lebanon, which Israel said was justified to remove PLO Fatah militants led by Yasser Arafat in Southern Lebanon. As a result of this attack by Israel, the Hezbollah ("Party of God") group was formed, consisting of mostly of Shi'a Muslims in Lebanon, in order to drive the Israelis out of Lebanon. (This group has become a powerful political organization with support from both Syria and Iran).

Following this war, the Israeli-backed Christian militia conducted the Sabra and Shatila refugee camp massacres which led to the deaths of more than 1,000 Palestinians ... mostly women and children. Beirut was held by Israel for 79 days. More than 40,000 Palestinians and Lebanese were killed during this Israeli invasion; 5,000 more were taken prisoners. Israel did not fully withdraw from Lebanon until 2000.

By 1985, Israel had retreated from all but a narrow stretch of Lebanese territory designated by Israel as the "Israeli Security Zone." United Nations Security Council Resolution 425 called on Israel to completely withdraw from Lebanon.

On September 2, President Ronald Reagan endorsed full autonomy for the Palestinians which would include some form of Jordanian supervision. Israel rejected the plan.

1987

An uprising of Palestinian youth against Israel's occupation of Gaza and the West Bank occurred and became known as the first "intifada." Palestinian rock throwing was met with Israeli heavy tanks and artillery, with a 10-1 ratio of Palestinian to Israeli casualties.

Hamas (an Arabic acronym for "Islamic Resistance Movement") was founded by the Muslim Brotherhood in December, 1987 as a social and military unit to check Israeli expansion. (Initially calling for the destruction of Israel, they currently claim they are seeking to work with the Fatah government).

1990-1992

Saddam Hussein of Iraq attempted to get Israel involved in the Gulf War of 1990-91 by launching 39 Scud missiles on Israeli territories. Fortunately, and under great pressure, Israel held back from firing return missile strikes.

On December 18, 1992, Israel expelled 400 Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank. Bound and blindfolded, they were put on buses and driven to Lebanon.

1993

On September 13, The "Oslo Peace Accords" called for an end to the Israeli- Palestinian conflict based on a two-state solution. PLO leader Yasser Arafat agreed to sign the Accords. However, a new Israeli election was in process, and the agreement was never enacted.

Hamas opposed the agreement and stepped up suicide attacks against Israel.

1996

In February, Israel's Prime Minister, Shimon Peres vowed to wage a methodical and incessant war against Hamas following two suicide attacks against Israelis which killed 27 people.

2000

In July, President Bill Clinton conducted two weeks of marathon negotiations with Israeli and Palestinian leaders; he announced that they were unable to reach an agreement.

On September 28, Israel's Ariel Sharon and a large contingent of more than 1,000 armed body guards made an unannounced "visit" to the Muslim honored Temple Mount (also known as the Dome of the Rock.) Sharon declared the area to be "eternal Israeli territory." This led to a rock throwing reaction by Palestinian youth toward Jews praying at the Western Wall. A second "intifada" began, and support for Hamas began to grow.

All this quickly led to an escalation of violence in Jerusalem and other Israeli cities, as well as the West Bank and Gaza. The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem was captured by Palestinians. More than 1,000 Israelis and 3,500 Palestinians died during this time, resulting in heavy economic losses.

2001

A suicide bombing at a Tel Aviv disco resulted in 17 Israeli deaths; scores were injured.

2002

The Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 was drafted by Saudi Arabia. This called for:

- 1) a resolution of land issues and refugee resettlement;*
- 2) East Jerusalem to be the capital for the Palestinian state; and,*
- 3) all of Israeli nuclear installations to come under international supervision.*

In return for these things, all Arab nations would agree to recognize the State of Israel and assure that no further attacks by any Arab State or organization would occur. Israel said, "No."

2004

On March 22, Israel fired shrapnel-packed missiles into Gaza, killing Hamas' spiritual leader, Sheik Ahmed Yassin as he was being pushed home in his wheelchair. Palestinians vowed revenge for the killing. Yassin was succeeded by Abdel Aziz Rantisi, also killed by an Israeli rocket strike on April 17.

On November 11, PLO leader Yasser Arafat died in a Paris hospital, with Palestinians still in a limbo of semi-statehood. Final peace with Israel had not been achieved and there was a lingering "intifada." Yasser Arafat was succeeded by the current Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

2005

Following a 38-year presence in Gaza, Israeli leader Ariel Sharon directed unilateral evacuation of all Israeli settlements from Gaza as well as four settlements from the West Bank. Many Israelis evacuees, however, relocated to new settlement areas of the West Bank.

2006

On Jan. 26, Hamas won an overwhelming victory in the Palestinian Parliamentary elections, ousting the Fatah government, but not its leader, Mahmoud Abbas.

On July 23, Hezbollah in Lebanon attacked the border regions of Israel, capturing five Israeli soldiers. Three were killed, and two were taken prisoner, resulting in new clashes between Israeli and Hezbollah forces. The Lebanese capital of Beirut, the Lebanese International Airport, and much of southern Lebanon were heavily destroyed by Israel, while Lebanese militias (presumably Hezbollah) bombarded northern Israel, striking as far south as the Israeli city of Haifa.

Ninety percent of the Lebanese casualties of Israeli airstrikes were civilians. Fears were that the situation would continue to deteriorate; however, a ceasefire was finally signed which went into effect on August 14.

2007

On June 13, the Hamas leader, Khaled Meshaal began routing out all of Fatah's forces, thereby gaining complete control of Gaza.

On November 27, the United States hosted a Peace Summit in Annapolis which attracted representatives from Israel, the PLO, and several other Arab countries. Hope was high, but no progress was made.

2008

On June 19, Israel and Hamas agreed to an Egyptian-brokered cease-fire to last for six months.

On November 14, Hamas fired a barrage of rockets into southern Israel saying that the attack was revenge for the deaths of 11 militants, as well as for the recent closings by Israel of all the Gaza crossings.

On December 19, Hamas officially declared an end to the cease-fire, saying the truce would not be renewed because Israel was failing to fulfill its fundamental conditions and obligations.

On December 27, Israel launched major air strikes throughout Gaza in retaliation for some heavy rocket fire attacks by Hamas. (Later, this was called: "The 3-Week War.") More than 200 Palestinians were killed. Israel named the attack: "Military Operations Against Hamas." The Palestinians called it: "War on the Palestinian People." The Arab World news sources reported it as: "The Gaza Massacre."

2009

On January 3, Israeli tanks and troops swept into Gaza marking the beginning of a new ground war. As of January 9, the Palestinian death toll had approached 900; Israel's was 13.

On September 9, BBC News reported that 1,387 Palestinians had been killed in the Israeli-Gaza war. One-half were civilians; 252 were children under age 16.

On September 15, the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) updated the number of Palestinians killed to 1,417. The number of Israelis killed remained at 13 (10 soldiers, 4 of which were friendly fire; and 3 Israeli civilians).

On September 29, a release in Geneva of "The Goldstone Report," which had been requested by UNHCR, caused strong condemnation from the Israeli government and rage against Israel from across the Arab World.

2010

Egypt and Israel established a blockade of Gaza, requiring all goods to be inspected before entering the strip. This was allegedly to prevent Hamas from smuggling in weapons.

In May, six ships set sail to break the blockade, which many groups claimed to be illegal. The ships refused to be searched and Israeli commandos boarded them. The "Mavi Marmara" ship commandos were attacked with iron bars and knives, killing nine Turkish activists. Turkey has demanded an apology from Israel, but Israel says its actions were justified though they did express regret for the loss of life.

This incident has led to a severe deterioration in the relationship between Israel and Turkey which had been close allies.

2011

Beginning in Tunisia on December 18, 2010, followed shortly by Egypt, citizens in Arab states began to protest against autocratic and oppressive governments. The Tunisian president left the country on January 14, and the Egyptian president resigned on February 11.

Protests have also occurred in Algeria, Bahrain, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Syria, and Yemen. Some feared that Palestinians might also begin protests which might impact the on-going "peace process" between Israel and the Palestinian Territories.

On September 23, President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority formally requested that the Security Council of the United Nations grant full membership of statehood for the Palestinian people stating: "The time has come ... (to realize) the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people." Many (most!) in the audience cheered in wildly in agreement, though the United States had set up a block to prevent any vote.

2012

In September, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas again spoke to the United Nations General Assembly. He plans another visit in late November to ask the General Assembly to bestow a "non-member status for the Palestinians." While this would bestow only a symbolic victory, the United States and Israel say it would undercut the Peace Process and could incite regional unrest.

On November 6, United States President Barack Obama was re-elected for a second term as President. Some believe the relationship between President Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu makes it difficult for the United States to act in "Israel's best interest" toward a peace settlement. Others, however, believe that the United States may now be in a better position to act as a more neutral negotiator toward a fairer settlement for both sides.

2013

On March 20, President Obama undertook a 3-day visit to Israel and Palestine to meet with key leaders. Billed as a "listening tour" to assess current thinking following recent elections in the Israeli parliament, President Obama also spoke to lay audiences in Israel and Palestine to invite renewed urgency in the need for a peace settlement.

On April 9, U.S. Secretary John Kerry made a follow-up visit to encourage re-engaging in settlement talks. He also visited other Arab leaders to remain active in the process.

In November, Israeli "expansionists" (including leading Likud ministers of Prime Minister Netanyahu's government) strongly opposed the "two-state solution." Rather, they envision Israel abandoning Gaza "to its own fate" and annexing large swaths of the West Bank into the Jewish State of Israel. The large Jewish settlements in the West Bank would thereby be incorporated into the new state, and a large archipelago of Palestinian cities ... Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah, and Hebron ... would be reframed as "Arab islands in an Israeli sea." These communities would come under an unspecified governance by Jordan.

Palestinian opposition to a "two-state solution" is also beginning to be heard. Many Palestinians have never recognized the legitimacy of an "Israeli state" and hardliners (such as HAMAS) are calling for its overthrow. Newspaper reports in December claim that some foreign elements ... including Al Qaeda ... are now eyeing the possibility of getting involved.

2014

Secretary Kerry continues to push for at least some working plan for moving forward to a "two-state" solution. He warns of the growing impatience of the international community and likely new pressures on Israel if some agreement is not reached. Among these are the growing effects of the "Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions" ("B.D.S.") movement intended to isolate Israel from participation in the world's economic communities if they refuse to negotiate a settlement.

Information assembled mainly from articles by The New York Times and The Washington Post newspapers. Items were checked by at least one other source but are limited examples of very complex issues!