

Forum: General Assembly 2

Issue: Permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory over their natural resources

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Introduction

The conflict in the Palestine area has existed longer than the United Nations itself. For centuries, the two hostile groups have engaged in territorial disputes over holy cities, such as Jerusalem, that carry great symbolic meaning for both Jewish Israelis and Muslim Arabs. However, terming this conflict as one resulting from religious differences, or any theological clashes would be incorrect, because, if put simply, this conflict is about land.

From its beginning as a state in 1948, Israel's settlement in the West Bank has been a catalyst for expanding the conflict in the area. The Six Day War was just one of many clashes between Israel and Palestine in the conflict. This conflict is not majorly about ideological differences, but rather about competing nationalism, and a war on the scarcity of resources, along with the basic human rights of a group being curbed by another group, as a clear violation of international law. However, when viewing this issue, one should look beyond the simplistic view of human rights, and religious conflict, but thoroughly evaluate all perspectives, including historical, economical, and social, which in combination lead to the escalation of a conflict.

Historically we must view how the the British policy of divide and rule initially came into play, which is why the Israel-Palestine conference is often synonymous with being a "religious conflict." This severely complicated the scenario, because when the conflict is now discussed, it is viewed from the perspective of being a conflict based on beliefs, customs and traditions, rather than the actual cause behind the problem; scarcity of natural resources.

Scarcity arises from the fact that our demands are unlimited but resources are limited, and in the case of Israel-Palestine, there is a forced scarcity of resources as Israel is controlling all of Palestine's resources as well. This then leads us to the social aspect, which shows us how, not only are their resources being curbed, but also how other basic human rights of healthcare, education and safety are also being violated.

As the international community, it is our duty to now come up with possible solutions and evaluate what needs to be implemented in order to stop this conflict from escalating further.

Definition of Key Terms

Sovereignty

The full right and power of a governing body over itself, without any interference from outside sources or bodies.

Occupied Palestinian Territory

It is the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip, which are occupied or otherwise under the control of Israel. Israeli governments have maintained that the area involved is within territorial dispute.

Zionism

The national movement of the Jewish people that supports the re-establishment of a Jewish homeland in the territory defined as the historic Land of Israel.

Nationalism

The range of political, social, and economic systems characterized by promoting the interests of a particular nation, particularly with the aim of gaining and maintaining self-governance, or full sovereignty, over the group's homeland.

The Green Line

Is it the demarcation line set out in the 1949 Armistice Agreements between the armies of Israel and those of its neighbors (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria) after the 1948 Arab–Israeli War. It served as the de facto borders of the State of Israel from 1949 until the Six-Day War in 1967.

Background Information

Historical aspect

The conflict in Palestine has existed longer than the United Nations itself. For centuries, the two hostile groups have engaged in territorial disputes over holy cities, such as Jerusalem, that carry great symbolic meaning for both Jewish Israelis and Muslim Arabs. However, terming this conflict as one resulting from religious differences, or any theological clashes would be incorrect, because, if put simply, this conflict is about land.

In the late 19th century the Ottoman Empire ruled over Palestine, wherein about 87% of the population was Muslim, 10% Christian, and 3% Jewish. The language spoken in the region was Arabic, and in Jerusalem the populations were roughly equal, which was also a representation of the religious harmony between the different communities.

The late 19th century for Europe however, was the Golden Age of Nationalism in Europe, where every different community wanted their own state. In this era of hyper-nationalism, a Jewish journalist by the name of Theodor Herzl, who once hoped that Jews could assimilate in European Nations, soon became convinced that the Jewish people needed to leave Europe and live in their own state. To gain support of the Jewish people and seeing the rise of such Zionism, the British issued the Balfour Declaration in 1917, which promised “an establishment in Palestine for the national home of Jewish people”. The interesting part about this declaration was that a year before, in an agreement with France, they had agreed to keep Palestine for themselves, and in 1915, other British officers had promised the then ruler of Mecca, Sharif Hussein, that he would rule over Palestine, if he led an Arab revolt against Ottoman rule, which he promptly did. Therefore, Palestine was promised to the Zionists, the British and the Meccans. After this, The British established a colony in Palestine to “help them govern, till they were ready to do so themselves.” In this process, they made several separate institutions for Christians, Muslims, and Jews, making it difficult for the three groups to cooperate. This made it easier for the British to “divide and rule” the Palestinians.

Yet, the British did honor the Balfour Declaration, and by 1938, the Jewish population of Palestine was 30%. Now, this growing Jewish population purchased land from the Arab landowners and evicted the Palestinian farmers living there. By trying to control the land and the labor, they hoped to establish a more secure community for themselves, which heightened the tensions between Arabs and Palestinians. Due to this, the Palestinian Arabs started to think of themselves as the Palestinian nation. Now, this nationalism erupted in 1936 when the Palestinians revolted against the British, but the British had the support of Jewish Militias with whose help the British could suppress the Palestinian revolt. After World War II, Palestine was no longer a colony of the British, so they handed the issue of Palestine to the United Nations, which proposed to divide Palestine into something like this:

As soon as this plan was announced, the 1948 Arab-Israeli war broke out, in which the Israelis won, and according to the armistice signed in 1949, Israel occupied a third more land than they would have under the UN proposal, with Jordan controlling the West bank and Jerusalem and Egypt controlling the Gaza Strip. In 1967, the Six Day War broke out, which resulted in Israel gaining control of the West Bank, Sinai Peninsula, Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights. Now there are several Jewish settlements along these areas, which are illegal in accordance with international law, but Israel counters this by saying that since Palestine is not really a state, these settlements are not illegal.

Economic Aspect

When reading up on the background information, it is also necessary to evaluate the economic reasons behind this conflict, one of which is the “green war,” or “environmental scarcity,” argument. The essence of this perspective is that the contest for control over declining natural resources, often intensified by population pressures, is a major cause of violent conflict around the world, which, when we link it to our agenda, it seems perfectly applicable. There are three dimensions of environmental scarcity which may lead to conflict: “supply-induced scarcity,” linked to the “depletion and degradation of an environmental resource”; “demand-induced scarcity,” linked to population growth and the consequent extra pressures on existing resources; and “structural scarcity,” which “arises from an unequal distribution of a resource that concentrates it in the hands of a relatively few people. This argument also overlaps with that of the social contract hypothesis, for instance, in viewing poverty as the root cause of conflict, although it points to specific environmental causes of such poverty. It can also overlap with the group motivation approach which emphasizes on how environmental pressures often lead to conflict where there are “groups with strong collective identities that can coherently challenge state authority.”

Another argument which also is relevant to our agenda is that of Group Motivation, wherein there is fighting between groups that wish to gain independence or take over the state and groups that resist

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this course of action, aiming to preserve the integrity of the nation or their power. Each group is united under a common banner, with broadly common purposes. These common purposes may be termed “group motives” for conflict. One plausible hypothesis is that conflict occurs where there are significant underlying differences in access to economic or political resources among ethnic or religious groups, providing both leaders and followers with a strong motive to fight.

The Six-Day War of 1967 arguably had its origins in a water dispute - moves to divert the River Jordan, Israel's main source of drinking water. After years of skirmishes resulted in an all-out war, with Israel quadrupling the territory it controlled and gaining complete control of double the resources of fresh water. In the 1967 war, Israel gained exclusive control of the waters of the West Bank and the Sea of Galilee, although not the Litani. These resources - the West Bank mountain aquifer and the Sea of Galilee - give Israel about 60% of its fresh water, a billion cubic metres per year. Heated arguments rage about the rights to the mountain aquifer. Israel, and Israeli settlements, take about 80% of the aquifer's flow, leaving the Palestinians with 20%.

But the Palestinians say they are prevented from using their own water resources by a belligerent military power, forcing hundreds of thousands of people to buy water from their occupiers at inflated prices. Moreover, Israel allocates to its citizens, including those living in settlements in the West Bank deemed illegal under international law, between three and five times more water than the Palestinians. This, Palestinians say, is crippling to their agricultural economy. With water consumption outstripping supply in both Israel and the Palestinian territories, Palestinians say they are always the first community to be rationed as reserves run dry, with the health problems that entails.

Now linking these two to our agenda, people fight over resources because they need them for their sustenance. Scarcity of land between groups of people causes conflict because both groups need it for their survival, but they may be unwilling to share because of either ethnic differences, or moreover, using ethnic differences as a justification to keep the natural resources rotating between only certain groups of people. The guarantee of natural resources to a group of people in such a conflicted territory is a necessary step because it helps them in easing their livelihood.

Social Aspect

In this context, we would evaluate what all Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory cannot do.

Right to Free Movement Violation

When the Israel-Palestine conflict is referred to as an “occupation,” it’s not figurative — occupied Palestinian territories, specifically the West Bank and East Jerusalem, are constantly patrolled and controlled by the Israeli military. These armed soldiers have been accused of beating, detaining and torturing Palestinians. Soldiers enforce checkpoints, blockades, curfews and other restrictions.

Restriction of necessities coming in the region

Israel maintains a strict blockade on Gaza that allows it to control what flows in and out of the territory. Israeli officials say the blockade aims to prevent Hamas, a militant political group that took over the territory in 2007, from acquiring weapons — but the crackdown on imports and exports also extends to food and medicine. Government documents show that from 2007-2010, the Israeli military calculated the number of calories people in Gaza needed to avoid malnutrition. However, these calculations have just been used to limit the food supply in Gaza, which has caused price inflation. The blockade also restricts shipments of materials, such as wood and steel, that are needed to rebuild structures like schools and hospitals leveled in past wars with Israel. In 2011, this blockade was considered a violation of international law by a panel of the United Nations.

Water Shortage

Since Israel has control over water in the occupied Palestinian territories, there are frequent water shortages in the West Bank and poor water quality in Gaza. Palestinians sometimes go days or months with water shortages. Therefore, Palestinians often resort to storing water, which can be unsanitary, or using bottled water, which can be expensive.

Poor Health Care Facilities

Due to the blockade, many hospitals in the Gaza Strip lack critical equipment and resources. Palestinians have to ask for permission from Israeli officers to go for healthcare treatments elsewhere, which are only granted by them if the patients have “urgent humanitarian and lifesaving cases.”

Restriction of Travelling

Palestinians who are not citizens of Israel are barred from living in or even visiting the settlements, along with the fact that some roads are for Israelis only, making transportation an unviable option for Palestinians. Israel has implemented strict travel restrictions in and outside the occupied Palestinian territories for decades, making it difficult for Palestinians to leave, return and travel through the areas. Along with this, Military checkpoints and roadblocks are scattered throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem, some of which have lines that can add up to five hours to Palestinians' daily commutes. Along with this, there are time bound restrictions on staying out for Palestinians.

Lack of Citizenship

Palestinians living under Israeli occupation are effectively a stateless people, who, for the most part, lack rights to citizenship in any sovereign nation.

Lack of Civil Liberties

Palestinians can be imprisoned without charge for a period of up to six months under the Israeli policy of "administrative detention, and after these six months, Israeli officials are allowed to renew the detention indefinitely — a violation of international law(Article 9, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 9 and 11, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights)

Lack of Protection under Labor Laws

While Palestinians can sue their Israeli employers, they are required to pay a hefty deposit to the court upfront before suing employers for labor law violations. The expensive fees and long process makes it harder for Palestinians to challenge mistreatment.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

United States

Historically, the US has viewed Israel as a crucial political and economic ally in the oil-rich Middle East, and has provided Israel with the highest amount of financial and military assistance of any other foreign country. Since the end of World War II, the United States has been one of the leading nations to encourage, facilitate, and arbitrate cease-fire accords between Israelis and Palestinians. Along with that,

during the Persian Gulf War, relations between the United States and the Palestine Liberation Organization soured when Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat supported Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and its threat to attack Israel. The United States and other nations moderated discussions between Israeli and Palestinian leaders, which led to the formation of the Oslo accords. Even in recent times, furthering these negotiations and peace talks, US remains engaged within the Israel Palestine Issue.

Hamas

Hamas, which is an acronym for "Islamic Resistance Movement," is the current governing body of the Gaza Strip and has been since 2007. Israel accused them of kidnapping and killing three Israeli teens in June, which sparked growing tensions between the two. Hamas also took responsibility for many of the rockets launched toward Israel. Palestinian National Authority shares the Palestinian political power with Hamas.

Israel

The IDF consists of the ground, air and navy military forces of the state of Israel. They differ from other armed forces in many ways, one being that every Israeli, man or woman, is conscripted at the age of 18. In retaliation for Hamas allegedly killing the teenagers, the IDF launched "Operation Protective Edge," an offensive set of airstrikes targeting more than 50 spots in Gaza, some of which are civilian apartment buildings.

The Palestinian Islamic Jihad

The PIJ is an Islamic militant group that deeply opposes the existence of Israel, however, unlike Hamas they have no political role. The U.S. State Department has declared the group to be a terrorist organization.

Egypt

Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi strongly condemns Hamas as they have ties with the Muslim Brotherhood. Since Sisi has been in power, the tunnel crossings on the Egypt-Gaza border have been closed. These tunnels were a huge source of income for Hamas, in addition to being a way for Gaza residents to bring in resources. In 2012, the tunnels were bringing in roughly \$750 million a year for Hamas and about 800 Palestinians used it a day.

United Nations

The United Nations suggested the two-state solution for Israel Palestine in 1948, and continues to fully advocate for human rights and avoid further civilian casualties and overall destabilization in the region. After months of debate in the Security Council and General Assembly before, during and after the 1967 Six-Day War, United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 was adopted. It became a universally accepted basis for Arab-Israeli and later, Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. In 1975, the PLO was granted permanent observer status at the General Assembly. The 1975 UN Resolution 3379 stated "that Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination". In February 2011, the United Nations drafted a resolution to condemn all Jewish settlements established in the occupied Palestinian territory since 1967 as illegal, which was vetoed by the United States.

The Arab League

The Arab League is a coalition of independent Arab states, including Palestine. They believe that "The continued attacks on Palestinian civilians by Israel is a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, the Geneva Convention and international resolutions on occupied Palestine" The Arab League bitterly opposed any attempts to establish a Jewish state and worked strenuously to defeat any partition of Palestine. When the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine was adopted in resolution 181(II) by the General Assembly on 29 November 1947, it was unanimously rejected by the Arab League. After the six day war, the Arab League developed three no's: "no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it."

As the *historical aspect* section also elaborates upon, the members of Arab League, such as Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, were also under siege with Israel, and had lost territories to Israel.

Timeline of Events

1917 - Britain seizes Palestine from Ottomans. Gives support to "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine through the Balfour Declaration, along with an insistence that "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities".

1920 - Palestine granted to Britain as a mandate, to prepare it for self-rule. European Jewish migration continues steadily from the 19th century.

1939 - British government White Paper seeks to limit Jewish immigration to Palestine to 10,000 per year, excepting emergencies.

1940s - Nazi Holocaust of the Jews in Europe prompts efforts at mass migration to Palestine. Jewish armed groups in pursuit of independent Jewish state fight British authorities.

1947 - United Nations recommends partition of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states, with international control over Jerusalem and its environs.

1948-1949 - First Arab-Israeli war. Armistice agreements leave Israel with more territory than envisaged under the Partition Plan, including western Jerusalem. Jordan annexed West Bank and eastern Jerusalem, Egypt occupies Gaza.

1956-1957 - Israel colludes with Britain and France to invade Egypt during the Suez Crisis, in order to re-open canal to Israeli shipping and end armed incursions by Palestinians from Sinai. UN buffer force set up in Sinai and Gaza, Israeli shipping allowed through Suez Canal.

1957 - Israel begins to build a large nuclear reactor

1964 - National Water Carrier completed, to bring water from the River Jordan to the Negev. Tensions rise with Arab neighbours over Jordan water allocations.

1967 June - After months of tension, Israel launches a preemptive attack on Egypt, and Jordan and Syria join the war. The war lasts six days and leaves Israel in control of east Jerusalem, all of West Bank, Gaza, Golan Heights and Sinai. Jewish settlements are set up in all of these areas in coming years, with government approval.

1987 December - First Intifada uprising begins in Occupied Territories. Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza forms Hamas movement, which rapidly turns to violence against Israel.

1993 - Prime Minister Rabin and PLO leader Yasser Arafat sign Oslo Declaration to plot Palestinian self-government and formally end First Intifada. Violence by Palestinian groups that reject Oslo Declaration continues

2001 January - Failure of restarting Israeli-Palestinian talks

2002 March-May - Israeli army launches Operation Defensive Shield on West Bank after spate of Palestinian suicide bombings. Largest military operation on West Bank since 1967.

2002 June - Israel begins building barrier in and around West Bank. Israel says barrier aimed at stopping Palestinian attacks; Palestinians see it as a tool to grab land. Route is controversial as frequently deviates from pre-1967 ceasefire line into West Bank.

2003 June - Quartet of United States, European Union, Russia and United Nations propose road map to resolve Israeli-Palestinian conflict, proposing independent Palestinian state. Israeli and Palestinian National Authority both accept plan, which requires freeze on West Bank Jewish settlements and an end to attacks on Israelis.

2004 July - International Court of Justice issues advisory opinion that West Bank barrier is illegal.

2005 September - Israel withdraws all Jewish settlers and military personnel from Gaza, while retaining control over airspace, coastal waters and border crossings.

2006 June - Hamas gunmen from Gaza take Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit hostage, demanding release of Palestinian prisoners. Major clashes between Israel and Hamas in Gaza follow.

2007 September - Israeli Air Force destroys nuclear reactor in Syria.

2007 November - Annapolis Conference for first time establishes "two-state solution" as basis for future talks between Israel and Palestinian Authority.

2008 December - Israel launches month-long full-scale invasion of Gaza to prevent Hamas and other groups from launching rockets.

2009 January - Discovery of major offshore natural gas deposits.

2017 February - Parliament passes a law which retroactively legalises dozens of Jewish settlements built on private Palestinian land in the West Bank.

2017 June - Work begins on the first new Jewish settlement in the West Bank for 25 years

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- The Faisal-Weizmann Agreement, 1919
- The Armistice Agreements, 1948
- The Camp David Accords, 1978
- The Egyptian–Israeli Peace Treaty, 1979
- The Oslo Accords, 1993
- The Israel-Jordan Treaty of Peace, 1994
- The “road map” for peace plan, 2000
- Two State Solution,
- A/RES/194
- S/RES/242
- S/RES/2334
- S/RES/1860

- S/PRST/2014/13
- S/PRST/2010/9
- 2/2016/717
- S/2014/650
- S/PV.8028
- A/69/301
- A/HRC/RES/29/25
- A/66/225
- Balfour Declaration, 1917
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Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The previous solutions to this crisis have been mostly treaty and agreement oriented in their nature, such as those listed above. They have been mostly to stop the fighting and conflict in the region by encouraging peace talks, ceasefires, acknowledgement of Israel and Palestine by either side, or the two state solution, which aimed to divide the region into two parts for the different groups of people. The most prominent ones out of these have been the Two-State Solution and the Oslo Accords.

The Two-State Solution was proposed by the 1947 UN Partition plan for the division of Palestine. It proposed a three-way division, with Jerusalem held separately, under international control. The partition plan was accepted by the Jewish leadership. However, the plan was rejected by the leadership of Arab nations and the Palestinian leadership, which opposed any partition of Palestine and any independent Jewish presence in the area. Yet, since the proposed boundaries of the two-states are not concrete divisions between two nations, or especially what borders between two nations with such a violent history of conflict should have, it was not implemented. However, the rejection of this proposed plan led to an escalation in the conflict.



The result of not accepting the two-state solution led to more territory being occupied by Israel.

The Oslo Accords are a set of agreements between the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)

Stated goals of the Oslo Accords were among other things, Palestinian interim Self-Government (and a permanent settlement (of unresolved issues) within five years, based on Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. Although the agreements recognize the Palestinian "legitimate and political rights," they remain silent about their fate after the interim period. The Oslo Accords neither define the nature of the post-Oslo Palestinian self-government and its powers and responsibilities, nor do they define the borders of the territory it eventually would govern.

A core issue of the Oslo Accords was also the withdrawal of the Israeli military from Palestinian territories. The plan was a withdrawal in phases and a simultaneous transfer of responsibilities to the Palestinian authorities for maintaining security. Along with this, the Oslo Accords mentioned a mutual recognition of both states for each other, and were the first peace talks which took place between Israel-Palestine with both entities being physically present.

Possible Solutions

While this has been an issue which has persisted for a several years, with several attempts by varied international organizations, and nations to solve it have taken place, there are some other measures that we can try and implement. The first solution could be removing the armed forces from the Gaza Strip so the Palestinians get their access to the rightful natural resources. We as the international community could also consider making the region a no weapons zone, or especially a no nuclear weapons zone to prevent further conflict escalation. Or, if we choose to refer back to an earlier UN judgement, we could follow the Two-State Solution, or divide up as new territories in the region. Another solution could be to fairly divide up the natural resources based on population size and demographics to reduce the intensity of this conflict.

While greater access to natural resources would be a step in the right direction, increasing basic human rights for Palestinians, such as specified in the Social Aspect section, should also be considered. This could include increasing job opportunities for palestinians so they can provide better for themselves and groups like Hamas can slowly fade out. Special programs to revive the Palestinian Agro-Economy could be introduced, which include an equal and fair division of water between Israel and Palestine. Or perhaps, more educational and vocational opportunities for Palestinians so that they can become self-reliant. Assimilation of Christian, Jews, and Muslims to revive a pre-British era society, wherein religious harmony was present is also an important step that we can consider as this would decrease the sentiment of hatred between the two groups which are now known as Israel and Palestine. Lastly, we could consider setting a plausible price ceiling for basic necessities like healthcare and food for palestinians in Occupied Territories, so that the prices do not unnecessarily rise and the access to basic natural resources is not lost.

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