

The israeli palestinian conflict politics essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

After more than 50 years of war, terrorism, peace negotiation and human suffering, Israel and Palestine remain as far from a peaceful settlement as ever. The entire Middle Eastern region remains a cauldron waiting to reach the boiling point, a potent mixture of religious extremism, (Jewish, Christian and Islamic), mixed with oil and munitions.

This paper is an attempt to trace the history of this age old conflict and analyse the viability of internationally suggested solutions. Owing to their history, going back at least 5000 years in time, the paper only throws light on the conflict, post 19th century. And this too, only a cursory overview of a timeline, rather than a detailed description.

The paper also attempts to find the bones of contention between the two peoples, clearly laying out the issues and problems along with the need to resolve them.

Finally, the paper analyses the two mainstream solutions suggested for resolution of this conflict, being the 'Two-State' theory and the 'Bi-National State' theory. IR theories of Realism and Liberalism are used to broadly analyse these two solutions' applicability in the particular conflict. The practical difficulties in the existing political diaspora is highlighted to finally decide the viability.

The limitations of the paper is that the complex issues involved do not give enough leeway to say decidedly that one solution is the right solution and the other, wrong. Also, though neutral tones have been imbibed throughout the paper, a humanistic tendency of bias towards the Palestinian cause seeps in, albeit subconsciously.

Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the ongoing struggle between Israelis and Palestinians that began in the early 20th century. The conflict is wide-ranging, and the term is also used in reference to the earlier phases of the same conflict, between the Zionist yishuv and the Arab population living in Palestine under Ottoman and then British rule. It forms part of the wider Arab-Israeli conflict. The remaining key issues are: mutual recognition, borders, security, water rights, control of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements, Palestinian freedom of movement and finding a resolution to the refugee question. The violence resulting from the conflict has prompted international actions, as well as other security and human rights concerns, both within and between both sides, and internationally. In addition, the violence has curbed expansion of tourism in the region, which is full of historic and religious sites that are of interest to many people around the world.

Many attempts have been made to broker a two-state solution, involving the creation of an independent Palestinian state alongside an independent Jewish state or next to the State of Israel (after Israel's establishment in 1948). In 2007 a majority of both Israelis and Palestinians, according to a number of polls, preferred the two-state solution over any other solution as a means of resolving the conflict. Moreover, a considerable majority of the Jewish public sees the Palestinians' demand for an independent state as just, and thinks Israel can agree to the establishment of such a state. A majority of Palestinians and Israelis view the West Bank and Gaza Strip as an acceptable location of the hypothetical Palestinian state in a two-state solution. However, there are significant areas of disagreement over the

shape of any final agreement and also regarding the level of credibility each side sees in the other in upholding basic commitments.

Within Israeli and Palestinian society, the conflict generates a wide variety of views and opinions. This highlights the deep divisions which exist not only between Israelis and Palestinians, but also within each society. A hallmark of the conflict has been the level of violence witnessed for virtually its entire duration. Fighting has been conducted by regular armies, paramilitary groups, terror cells and individuals. Casualties have not been restricted to the military, with a large number of fatalities in civilian population on both sides. There are prominent international actors involved in the conflict.

This paper details the history of the conflict, giving a purview through a timeline, rather than a detailed description. It also outlines the basic issues involved in the conflict and why their resolution is not cake walk. The two solutions proposed as a solution to the conflict is also analysed in depth, with reference to theoretical concepts of realism and liberalism in IR. The viability of these solutions are dealt with, in the current political scene, though with less insight into the actual political happenings.

History of the conflict

The origins of the Palestine problem as an international issue lie in events occurring towards the end of the First World War. These events led to a League of Nations decision to place Palestine under the administration of Great Britain as the Mandatory Power under the Mandates System adopted by the League. In principle, the Mandate was meant to be in the nature of a transitory phase until Palestine attained the status of a fully independent

nation, a status provisionally recognized in the League's Covenant, but in fact the Mandate's historical evolution did not result in the emergence of Palestine as an independent nation.

The decision on the Mandate did not take into account the wishes of the people of Palestine, despite the Covenant's requirements that " the wishes of these communities must be a principal consideration in the selection of the Mandatory". This assumed special significance because, almost five years before receiving the mandate from the League of Nations, the British Government had given commitments to the Zionist Organization regarding the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine, for which Zionist leaders had pressed a claim of " historical connection" since their ancestors had lived in Palestine two thousand years earlier before dispersing in the " Diaspora".[1]During the period of the Mandate, the Zionist Organization worked to secure the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. The indigenous people of Palestine, whose forefathers had inhabited the land for virtually the two preceding millennia[2], felt this design to be a violation of their natural and inalienable rights. They also viewed it as an infringement of assurances of independence given by the Allied Powers to Arab leaders in return for their support during the war.

The result was mounting resistance to the Mandate by Palestinian Arabs, followed by resort to violence by the Jewish community as the Second World War drew to a close. By 1947, largely through this massive immigration, the Jewish population reached a substantial 33% and owned about 6% of the land. Finally, in 1947 the United Nations decided to intervene. As per the Resolution 181[3], the UN recommended giving away 55% of Palestine to a

Jewish state – despite the fact that this group represented only about 33% of the total population, and owned under 7% of the land. Jerusalem was to have been an international city shared by all peoples of the region. The Zionist movement embraced the plan whereas the Palestine (and other neighbouring Arab nations) saw the plan as extremely unfair and rejected it. This followed the first war which was to sow the seeds of future conflicts.

The Arab League supported the Arab struggle by forming the volunteer based Arab Liberation Army, supporting the Palestinian Arab Army of the Holy War. On the Jewish side, the civil war was managed by the major underground militias – the Haganah, Irgun and Lehi, strengthened by numerous Jewish veterans of World War II and foreign volunteers. By spring 1948, it was already clear that the Arab forces were nearing a total collapse, while Yishuv forces gained more and more territory, creating a large scale refugee problem of Palestinian Arabs.[4] Popular support to the Palestinian Arabs throughout the Arab world led to sporadic violence against Jewish communities of Middle East and North Africa, creating an opposite refugee wave.

Following the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel on 14 May 1948, the Arab League decided to intervene on behalf of Palestinian Arabs, marching their forces into former British Palestine, beginning the main phase of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. The overall fighting, leading to around 15, 000 casualties, resulted in cease fire and armistice agreements of 1949, with Israel holding much of the former Mandate territory, Jordan occupying and later annexing the West Bank and Egypt taking over the Gaza Strip,

where the All-Palestine Government was declared by the Arab League on 22 September 1948.

While the Jewish people were successful in creating their homeland, there was no Palestine and no internationalization of Jerusalem, either. In 1948 for example, Palestinians were driven out of the new Israel into refugee camps in Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon and other regions. At least 750, 000 people are said to have been driven out (or ethnically cleansed, as some have described it).[5] It should be noted that many Jews were also expelled from surrounding Arab countries. Zionist organizations and even some Arab nations also encouraged many Jews to immigrate to Israel. As with Palestinians, expelled Jews often had their land and/or bank accounts and other property seized.

In 1956, Britain, France and Israel invaded the Sinai Peninsula after Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal fearing the loss of a major economic trading route entry point for the West to the rest of the Middle East. While Egypt was defeated, international pressure forced the withdrawal of the invading forces.[6]

In 1967, Israel simultaneously attacked Egypt, Syria and Jordan in a “pre-emptive strike” against the Arab troops along its borders. Israel captured key pieces of land, such as the strategic Golan Heights to the north on the border with Syria, to the West Bank from Jordan and the Gaza strip from Egypt. In fact, Israel more than doubled its size in the six days that this war took place. Since then, negotiations have been around returning land to pre-1967 states, as required by international law and UN resolutions. Even today, the

Palestine Liberation Organisation calls for a two state solution based on the pre Six Day War borders.

In 1973, Egypt and Syria attacked Israel on the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur to attempt to regain the land lost in the Six Day War, but failed. This confrontation is also known as the Yom Kippur War.

In 1978, the Camp David accords were signed between Israel, Egypt and the US, and Israel returned the Sinai Peninsula back to Egypt in return for peace between them. To the US and Israel, this was a great achievement; Egypt was obviously not to be underestimated in its capabilities, so the best thing would be to ensure it is an ally, not an adversary.

In 1978, due to rising Hezbollah attacks from South Lebanon, where many Palestinian refugees still were, Israel attacked and invaded Lebanon. In 1982, Israel went as far up Lebanon as Beirut, as bloody exchanges followed between Israeli attempts to bomb Yasser Arafat's PLO locations, and Hezbollah retaliations. The infamous Shabra and Shatila massacre was carried out during this war. In 1985, Israel declared a strip of South Lebanon to be a Security Zone (not recognized by the UN). Many civilians were killed on both sides. Israeli forces were accused of massacres on many occasions. After 22 years, Israel withdrew in May 2000. One of the leading Israeli military personnel was the future Israel Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon.

In the late 1980s came the Palestinian uprising-the Intifada. While there was much of a non-violence movement initially, the mainstream media concentrated on the violence. Young Palestinians confronted Israeli troops with nothing more than sling shots and stones. Thousands were killed by the

<https://assignbuster.com/the-israeli-palestinian-conflict-politics-essay/>

Israeli military. Many suicide activists killed Israeli soldiers and caused other damage. Many innocent civilians were killed on both sides.

1993 saw the Oslo Peace Accord, whereby Israel recognized the PLO and gave them limited autonomy in return for peace and an end to Palestinian claims on Israeli territory. With the signing of the Oslo Declaration of Principles, the PLO denounced violence and recognised the UN Security Council Resolution 242, thereby recognising the right of Israel to exist.

In 1994, Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip and Jericho, ending twenty seven years of occupation. They were replaced by a Palestinian police force.

In April 1996, Israeli forces bombed Lebanon for 17 days, with Hezbollah retaliating by firing upon populated areas of Northern Israel. Israel also shelled a UN shelter killing about 100 out of 800 civilians sheltering there.

The above merely gives a broad outline of the conflict, and a more comprehensive analysis of the underlying cause and various other issues couldn't be provided here due to the call of brevity.

The Palestine Problem and the need for a Solution

As the periodic bloodshed continues in the Middle East, the search for an equitable solution must come to grips with the root cause of the conflict. The conventional wisdom is that, even if both sides are at fault, the Palestinians are irrational “ terrorists” who have no point of view worth listening to. Our position, however, is that the Palestinians have a real grievance: their homeland for over a thousand years was taken, without their consent and

mostly by force, during the creation of the state of Israel. And all subsequent crimes on both sides inevitably follow from this original injustice.

Whether it is the Deir Yassin massacre in which the Irgun and Lehi soldiers carried out the slaughter of innocent villagers including women and children, or whether it is the suicide bombings perpetrated on Israeli civilians and soldiers by Palestine based terrorist groups, both sides have used a previous occurrences as justifications for a fresh act of violence. After decades of bloodshed, there seems to be no right or wrong anymore. And misery hasn't ceased to exist for the innocent.

The major issues that dominate the dialogues on the problem are:

Refugees

About 726, 000 Palestinians were expelled or fled their homes in 1948 in the war that followed the creation of Israel, and additional Palestinians fled in 1967. There are now about 4 million Palestinian refugees. Many of them live in crowded refugee camps in poor conditions in the West Bank and Gaza, in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. Palestinians demand that these refugees should have the right to return to their homes in Israel under UN General Assembly Resolution 194. Israelis note that an almost equal number of Jews fled Arab lands to Israel in 1948. Israelis oppose return of the refugees because that would create an Arab Palestinian majority and would put an end to Israel as a Jewish state. Most Palestinian groups, including the Fateh, agree, and openly proclaim that resolution of the refugee issue by granting right of return would mean the end of Israel.

Israeli Settlements

One of the major barriers to the creation of two contiguous, sovereign states for Palestinians and Israelis is the existence – and continuing growth – of illegal Israeli colonies (widely called “ settlements”) on land long recognized by the United Nations as part of Palestine. Despite a repeated international condemnation, the population of these settlements, which currently number 121, has grown by an average of 5% annually since 2001. That compares to an average growth of just 1. 8% for the population of Israel proper. Israel has repeatedly refused to dismantle these settlements in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Golan Heights, and has repeatedly fudged and violated various moratoriums on “ new” growth.

Palestinian State

Originally formed to regain all of Palestine for the Palestinian Arabs, the Palestine Liberation Organization signalled that it would accept a two state solution in 1988. The Oslo accords were supposed to have led to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, but continued Israeli settlement and Palestinian violence and incitement degenerated into open conflict in September 2000. Mainstream Palestinians demand a state in the West Bank and Gaza. Right wing Israelis are opposed to creating a state, because, they claim, it would be a base for terror groups. In final status negotiations, the Israeli government agreed to a demilitarized Palestinian state with limited control over its borders and resources – a ‘ state minus.’

Palestinian terror

Almost all Palestinian groups were founded with the declared aim of destroying Israel by violence, and had a history of terrorist activities. Only the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) has renounced this aim officially. In 1993, the PLO signed the Oslo Declaration of Principles, renouncing violence and agreeing to honour UN SC Resolution 242, which implicitly recognizes the right of Israel to exist. In return, Israel allowed the PLO to enter the West Bank and Gaza strip, and Palestinians gained autonomous control of most of the population of these areas. Extremist Palestinian groups that objected to the agreements began a campaign of ambushes and suicide bombings against Israel. The Palestine National Authority claimed they could not control the dissident groups. Final status negotiations faltered in September 2000.

Israeli Repression

Israel responded to Palestinian violence at the beginning of the Oslo process by limiting the flow of Palestinian workers to Israel to prevent infiltration of terrorists, and by strict checks at border checkpoints. The border closing drastically reduced the Palestinian standard of living. Palestinians who did come to work were often subjected to humiliating searches and very long waits at checkpoints. Following terror attacks at the checkpoints, nervous IDF (Israel Defense Forces) soldiers sometimes were too quick to open fire on suspicious vehicles, killing innocent civilians. Checkpoints around Jerusalem made it difficult for Palestinians to get to work in Jerusalem and to travel between Palestinian towns. The IDF has killed over 3, 500 Palestinians[7], demolished houses and uprooted olive groves. After a recent IDF study showed that the demolitions do not deter suicide bombings, demolitions of

the houses of suicide bombers were discontinued, but houses are still demolished for other reasons. In addition to measures taken to ensure security, Israeli extremist settlers have harassed Palestinians, destroyed property, uprooted olive trees and killed several Palestinians in doubtful circumstances. The perpetrators are rarely identified and almost never prosecuted.

Israeli Security

The area of Israel within its pre-1967 armistice borders is slightly less than 8,000 square miles. The distance from Tel Aviv to the green line border of Israel (West Bank) is about 11 miles. Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and other Israeli cities are within artillery range of any Palestinian state. Israel therefore insists on guarantees that a Palestinian state would be demilitarized. The West Bank has enormous strategic importance to any country wishing to invade Israel. Israel therefore insists on guarantees that the Palestinian state would not allow a foreign army to enter its borders, and has insisted on bases within the West Bank.

Water

The land has always had a scarcity of water. The Israel National Water Carrier has made possible a high population density and standard of living. [8]The carrier pumps water from the Sea of Galilee and carries it to areas in the center and south of Israel as well as for Palestinian areas. In one day it delivers the volume of water used in all of 1948, but it is not enough.[9]The aquifers that supply Israel's central area lie in the West Bank. The Jordan river flows through territory that would be part of Palestine. Both sides need

water for survival and development and want to ensure an adequate water supply from the limited resources available. Israel has reserved for its own use a large percentage of the water in West Bank aquifers

The Two State Solution

The current solution for Israel and Palestine suggests that Palestinians ought to have their own state, separate from Israel. In this way a ‘Two-State’ solution might be reached. The method by which such a solution could be implemented involves a technical division of land with walls, earth mounds, road blocks and fences. This chapter discusses the so-called ‘practical limitations’ of a ‘Two-State’ solution. Notably it questions whether a Palestinian State is a viable option.

Israel and Palestine combined are no bigger than South Africa’s Western Cape Province and yet, for such a small amount of land, the ‘Two-State’ solution seeks the establishment of a Palestinian state, separate from the current Israeli state. Palestine itself is not one land mass. It is currently divided into two territories – named the ‘West Bank’ and ‘Gaza’ respectively. Gaza has a western coastline on the Mediterranean Sea and shares borders with Israel and Egypt. Gaza is a relatively small territory, merely 45 kilometres in length. The West Bank is landlocked, sharing borders with Israel and Jordan. Although the West Bank is marginally larger than Gaza, it is not easy to freely access the territory as it is surrounded by a “723km” concrete wall, 6-9 metres high in most places. The wall has been built by Israel to separate Israel from the Palestinian West Bank. But the wall does not follow the internationally recognised border between Israel and the

West Bank. Rather, it cuts into the West Bank annexing “ 13%” of the territory for Israel.

The wall is characteristic of Israel’s selfishness in claiming Palestinian land. Despite the low percentage of land annexed by the wall, this portion of land is, nonetheless, highly fertile and densely populated – mostly by Palestinian farmers. The livelihood of these farmers depends on the productivity of their land. Palestinians whose land has been annexed by Israel live in a so-called ‘seam zone’ between the internationally recognised Israeli-West Bank border and the wall. These Palestinians who live in the seam zone are known as “Internally Displaced Persons” (IDPs). By definition they are “ person who have been forced to flee their homes as a result of armed conflict, violence, violations of human rights or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised State border”.[10]Palestinians whose land falls in the seam zone are only permitted access to their farmlands during designated hours with a required permit. If a viable Palestinian state is to be created, the status of these IDPs has to be resolved, either by Israel offering financial compensation for appropriating Palestinian land, or by moving the wall and thereby allowing Palestinian landowners to return. Both of these solutions are technical in nature and are indicative of the so-called rational approach taken by Israeli policymakers.

The vexing nature of how to divide Israel and Palestine comes without even discussing Jerusalem, a city which is contested by Israelis and Palestinians. Jerusalem is home to an estimated 250, 000 Palestinians and 200, 000 Jews. While Israel claims Jerusalem to be its ‘ official capital’, the international community treats East Jerusalem as Palestinian territory held by Israel under

military occupation. Also, the international community does not recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and the city hosts no foreign embassies.

Palestinians seek to secure a portion of the city as the political capital of a Palestinian State. Israel is, however, unwilling to relinquish any part of Jerusalem for a Palestinian capital.

So, the obstacles faced by policymakers favouring a 'Two-State' solution are obstacles of control: which areas are to be controlled by Palestinians and which areas are to be controlled by Israelis. In other words, the question for those concerned with the Two-State solution is how to delineate land which can be controlled by the state. State control over territory is a central feature of the 'Two-State' solution and. This kind of control is termed 'sovereignty'.

Policymakers seek to divide Israel and Palestine into two separate states so that each may exercise supreme authority over its territory, without interference from the other. The means by which mutual non-interference is achieved between states is through a principle of so-called 'recognition'. The term itself requires further explanation, in its relevance to the teaching and practice of IR. For IR theorists, recognition is commonly used to describe how states acknowledge one another. The most fundamental aspect of inter-state recognition is respect for each state's sovereignty. The 'Two-State' solution hinges on Israelis and Palestinians recognising each other as sovereign entities and thereby not interfering with one another's domestic affairs.

To problematize the notion of interstate recognition it is useful to consider Hegel's views. Discussing the relationship between two individuals, a Lord and a Bondsman, he says, " Each sees the other, and therefore also does

what it does only in so far as the other does the same. Action by one side only would be useless because what is to happen can only be brought about by both... They recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another.”[11]

There is a perception that Jewish sovereignty is under threat due to the low ratio of Jews to Arabs in the Middle-East. So, in order to protect the identity of this small Jewish population, Jews are insulated within their own sovereign state – Israel. Non-Jews living within Israel are viewed as a threat. The protection of Jewish sovereignty would explain why there are limited employment opportunities for Arab workers in Israel and why Arabs receive different education to Jews. Despite the fact that they share territory, it is evident that Israelis and Palestinians believe themselves to be separate nations and thus deserving of separate sovereign states. So the ‘ Two-State’ solution is seen as the so-called ‘ rational’ end for Israelis and Palestinians. Today, the two-state solution is widely accepted among Israelis and Palestinians and around the world.

Even elements of the Israeli right are now resigned to the establishment of a Palestinian state, although their conception of the nature of that state is not acceptable to Palestinians. On the Palestinian side, even elements of the Hamas leadership have hinted that they would go along with a two-state solution if negotiated by Fatah leaders and endorsed by the public, as long as they did not renounce their ideological principles.

However, a strong view is that neither side would be able to agree to a division that yielded the Temple Mount to the other side. As an attempt to

break the stalemate, U. S. President Bill Clinton proposed dividing sovereignty of the site vertically – the ground and area below coming under Israeli sovereignty, while that above the ground (i. e. the Haram al-Sharif containing the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque) would be under Palestinian sovereignty. A similar idea was suggested for tunnels and elevated roads connecting communities. In the end neither side accepted the concept.

The main point on which the two-state solution formula differs from those for an independent Palestinian state is that it calls for direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. To achieve a two-state solution, the negotiations must address and resolve a number of core issues, including the borders of the Palestinian state, the citizenship of the new Palestinian state, the status of Palestinian refugees outside the final borders, and the status of Arab citizens of present-day Israel, besides the future of East Jerusalem.

The Two-State Solution: An analysis using IR theories

Israelis and Palestinians are clearly interspersed, yet the ‘Two-State’ solution seeks to divide them into sovereign states. We have seen that the idea of sovereignty underpins the ‘Two-State’ solution based on the distinct ‘nationalities’ of Israelis and Palestinians. Sovereignty also forms the core of two IR perspectives that are used in the discipline: Realism and Liberalism.

This is not to say that that Realism and Liberalism are the only IR theories that can be used to explain the ‘Two-State’ solution. Rather, Realism and Liberalism are two of the foundational theories. Therefore it is useful to

discuss the 'Two-State' solution from the perspective of Realism and Liberalism. First, let us analyse the 'Two-State' solution through the prism of Realism, the school of thought which has been given the greatest primacy in IR.

Realism

Realists believe that there is no moral standard which dictates how states should behave toward one another. The lack of an "overriding ethical code" to structure interstate behaviour is known as so-called 'anarchy'.^[12] For Realists, power dictates how states interact with one another. Because power relations are central to a Realist understanding of the international arena, states are sceptical of trust. So, instead of trusting one another states choose their alliances based on one another's strategic value in so-called 'self-interested' behaviour. Selfishness means that interstate warfare is inevitable. In the Realist understanding, the international arena is brutal and the only way to deter actors from going to war is if the costs of doing so outweigh the benefits. So, Realists reduce human interests to strategies or games, advocating that actors constantly seek to maximize their utility through negotiations, trade-offs and alliances.

Realist Theory reduces the Israeli-Palestinian bilateral relationship to a power squabble, as each side attempts to gain the ascendancy. In these circumstances relations become a ping-pong match of provocation and conflict is inevitable. For example, a Palestinian suicide bombing in a Tel Aviv market might be reciprocated by an Israeli incursion into the bomber's West Bank village. Even cumulative small actions by one side can lead to one

large action from the other – for example, when numerous ‘ Qassam rockets’, fired into Israel by Palestinian militants, result in an Israeli military offensive. Presumably then, in the Realist understanding, peace is achieved when the costs of going to war outweigh the benefits of doing so. However, a cost-benefit analysis of going to war can