

# Israel – the presidential brief essay



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## The Current Situation In Israel And Palestine

Israel is in a situation unlike any other country around the world. Israel has been fighting for its survival since it became a country in 1948. It is surrounded by hostile nations that want to destroy or at least diminish it. There is tremendous tension between the Palestine Liberation Members and Israeli officials and citizens. There have been peaceful rallies and bloody bus bombings. People in Israel today are unsure about preceding with peace negotiations or standing firm in stopping present day terrorist activities. Protests, shouting matches, and violent disputes between Israelis are common occurrences. No one person, the college professor, the taxi driver, or the merchant is sure that their solution to these life and death problems are the right decision.

On Friday, May 14, 1948, after much deliberation the modern state of Israel was voted into existence by the United Nations. Finally the Jews around the world had a country to call their own. Unfortunately, the road ahead of them was not an easy or peaceful one.

There are many organizations that have dedicated their existence to destroying the people and country of Israel. The leader in this battle against Israel is Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement. Hamas uses many tactics to achieve its goals of terrorism. These tactics include intensive educational/propaganda programs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip areas. Suicide bombings, riots, rock throwing, car bombings, stonings, and many other destructive terrorist activities are also used periodically to gain news attention to their radical fundamentalist beliefs. Since its formation in 1988

Hamas has vowed to do anything possible to halt the peace process which they feel is unfair to Palestinians and other Arabs. The group is not condoned by the Palestine Liberation Organization, yet very little concrete action has been taken to stop this group. The philosophy of Jihad, or holy war, is the basis for Moslem actions to obliterate all Jews from this area.

To the contrary, there are many Israeli organizations that have dedicated their existence to preserving Israel and never letting it be conquered.

On the surface, the reason for the conflict over this small piece of land in the middle east seems simple: two groups of people, Jews and Palestinian Arabs, have been competing for the same piece of historical land. What has made the conflict so bitter and emotional is the fact that the land being fought over was sacred to both sides.

For Jews, the establishment of the state of Israel represented a return to their biblical homeland after 2, 000 years of exile and persecution, and the near extinction of the Jewish people in the Nazi Holocaust of WWII. For Palestinians, who had lived in the area they had called Palestine for 1, 000 years, the land was also a spiritual home for their Islamic religion.

Since 1979, there has been a movement towards peace in the middle east. After engaging in many armed conflicts between their two countries over the years, Israeli President Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar- el-Sadat signed an unprecedented peace treaty at Camp David, Maryland in 1979. Israel agreed to return the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in exchange for recognition as a country and an agreement for peace between the two

nations. This was called the Camp David Agreement and it was signed with the aid of the United States President Jimmy Carter.

Palestinians living under Israeli occupation in lands captured by Israel during several wars, however, were not affected by the Camp David Agreement. They remained very frustrated by what they considered Israeli occupation and started a movement called the Intafada in 1987. This uprising generally consisted of Palestinian boycotts, demonstrations and throwing rocks at Jewish citizens in the occupied areas. Israeli police and soldiers often fought back. These rock throwing activities and the use of armed Israeli soldiers to put down the revolt drew tremendous criticism around the world.

The peace process continued. In 1993 Israeli Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman Yasir Arafat signed a peace accord. The PLO agreed to recognize Israel's right to exist and Israel gave the Palestinians self rule in the West Bank town of Jericho and the Gaza Strip. In 1994 Jordan and Israel formally ended their hostilities and began trade and economic exchanges.

Even though the peace process was continuing, not all Israeli citizens believed in giving up land that had been won during wars for peace. As the peace process led by Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli Prime Minister, and Yassir Arafat moved at a slow but steady pace, an Israeli extremist murdered Yitzhak Rabin at a peace rally on November 4, 1995. The assassin was a Jewish - Israeli citizen who was opposed to changing borders. This shows the tremendous strain that all people in this area face.

Shortly after the death of Mr. Rabin, newly installed Israeli Prime Minister Simon Peres continued peace talks with PLO Chairman Yassir Arafat. The terror continues as well. On February twenty fifth of this year, the first of four suicide bombings within a two week period conducted by Hamas took place. The bombings resulted in a total of over sixty deaths. Over the years, Hamas has been responsible for more than 150 deaths and hundreds of injuries to Israeli citizens. Many believe Hamas continues with its terrorist activities to stop the peace process, hoping to eventually take over all of Israel and the occupied territories. Although Israel has stepped up its anti-terrorist actions by bombing and destroying the homes of accused terrorists and insisting that the PLO force Hamas to stop its terrorist activities, the peace process in the Middle East is still progressing.

#### Historical Factors That Explain The Current Situation

Theodor Herzl is known as the Father of Political Zionism, the idea to create a new Jewish State in Eretz Yisrael. His book, *The Jewish State*, attracted world attention. Herzl then organized the First Zionist Congress, the first gathering of world Jewish leaders, in 1897. Through the Congress and the World Zionist Organization, Herzl invigorated the spirit of the Jewish people worldwide, and in 1897 established the organization that would eventually result in the creation of the state of Israel.

During WWI, the Turks were cruel to the Yishuv, Jewish pioneers living in Palestine. This forced the Jews to fight with Great Britain against the Turks. The Jewish Legion, was formed which fought with British General Allenby to drive the Turks from Palestine. During the war, Chaim Weizmann, the worlds

leading Zionist, succeeded in obtaining from the British Government the Balfour Declaration, which gave official support to the concept of a Jewish national home in Palestine.

In 1920, a Jewish settlement, Tel Hai, was attacked by Arabs. The Arab leaders decided to gain control of the Middle East through violence and the British did little to stop the Arabs. In 1939 the British issued a document called the "White Paper." It announced the plan to cut off Jewish immigration to Palestine completely in five years and create an Arab state in the area. The Yishuv fought the White Paper with a passion. If the White Paper took effect, there would be no chance of a Jewish state being created in Palestine.

After WWII, the Jewish survivors of Hitler's program against the Jews had nowhere to go. There were 300,000 homeless Jews. The democracies of the West would not let them enter their countries and Britain refused to let them enter into Palestine. The result was a war between the Yishuv and the British in Palestine. Due to the continuous pressure put on the British people by the unofficial Israeli army, the Haganah, and the violent tactics towards the British by the Israeli terrorist group, the Irgun, the British turned the issue of Palestine over to the United Nations. The UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) recommended that Palestine be divided into Arab and Jewish states. The UN accepted this recommendation on November 29, 1947.

When the UN voted to create a Jewish state, surrounding hostile Arab nations set off a new wave of incredible violence in Palestine. Many people around the world doubted that a Jewish state could be created and withstand the

pressure of the surrounding hostile Arab nations. These nations were heavily armed and staffed with many thousands of soldiers. Chaim Weizmann persuaded President Truman to support Jewish independence. The Jews in Palestine then took the offensive and did whatever was possible to improve their military position. British troops gave the majority of their armaments to Arabs leaders before leaving Palestine. On May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion announced the countrys independence.

On the same day, five Arab armies attacked the newly formed state of Israel. Every able Israeli citizen fought in this immediate battle for independence knowing that if they lost this first battle there would be no other chance to retaliate. Outnumbered by the Arab soldiers by five to one, the Israelis fought with astounding tenacity and courage. Fortunately for Israel, the efforts of the Arab armies were defeated. When the battles were over, Israel was in possession of 21 percent more land than had originally been assigned by the UNs Partition plan.

When Israel was formally created, the country was opened to all Jews worldwide for Jewish immigration or aliyah. Jews from around the world sent financial support or left their own homes to fight for the establishment of this new country. .

In the years 1947-1982 Israel fought five major wars: The Israeli War of Independence (1947-49), The Suez Campaign (1956), The Six Day War (1967), The Yom Kippur War (1973), and Operation Peace for Galilee (1982). Although Israel won each war, the cost to the country was high. Tens of thousands of Israelis have died defending their country. There has been a

constant threat of terrorism and fear that their small homeland could be destroyed by fanatic Arabs.

The Arabs who left Israel in 1948 were caught in the strange politics of the Middle East. No Arab country wanted the refugees. Eventually, the Palestinians organized themselves into the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).

The Gulf War (1993) was a turning point for Israel. Iraq, who had been a long military menace, developed one of the largest armies in the world. Iraq attacked and conquered Kuwait, an Arab neighbor. The Arab nations were divided on this issue. Many feared Iraq would turn its strength on their country. Yassir Arafat and the PLO, however, had supported Iraq. Infuriated, the oil rich Arab states stopped paying for PLO operations.

#### U. S. Interests In Israel And Palestine

The United States has many varying interests, both economical, political, and moral with Israel. These interests vary in many ways. Israel has many things in common with the U. S. The most obvious is that Israel is the only country in the Middle East that is a true democracy.

Israel has similarities shared with the United States. All citizens of Israel enjoy free speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion. They vote for the representatives who form the government. In Israel, every citizen over 18 years of age may vote in national elections.

Israel has many people immigrating to Israel from around the world similar to the United States. If we watch closely we can learn from Israel and how to

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deal with the incoming people more efficiently in the U. S. Israel can serve as a model for our country. We can learn from their mistakes and improve on their achievements.

In the past, the U. S. has disagreed with the actions of many nations in the Middle East. For example, Iraq caused the Gulf War, in Iran the Aytollah overthrew the government and took United States citizens hostage, we believe Libya sponsors terrorist actions, and we went into Lebanon to stop a civil war. Because the U. S. has a strong foundation in Israel we are better able to keep a closer eye on the activities of these countries.

There is also another very important reason why America wants to have a strong relationship with Israel. This reason is its geographic location. From a military standpoint, Israel is an outstanding position to launch attacks on countries in the Middle East, Europe, North Africa, and parts of Asia.

#### U. S. Relations With Israel And Palestine

The United States must look at the current situation carefully. What caused the fighting and the distrust to originate? It was a conflict between two peoples, the Arabs and the Jews. The conflict in Palestine may have been avoided if a different course of action had been taken in the past. For example:

If the British and the Arabs had approached the subject of Jewish settlement in a reasonable way, the history may have been changed for the better. If the British had treated the Arabs and the Jews equally, and forced the Arabs

to obey the law, the two groups might have learned to live together peacefully.

If the British had permitted Jews to enter Palestine in reasonable numbers, the English and the Zionists could have joined with the Arabs to build a great land. The British did not.

As a result, the Zionists and the Arabs never interacted peacefully. They never took the time to realize what the other party was going through. Both of their views were blocked by a partition put in place by their goals and their desires.

The United States must realize that it was the unequal rule of the British that helped to start the conflict between the Jews and the Arabs so many years ago. The United States must not continue what the British started. We must continue to mediate and be friendly with these two groups of people. We must learn from the past. The United States can not take sides because that could force history to repeat itself. More conflict will arise and peace process could stop. Being the only remaining superpower of the world, the United States should send aid to both Israel and the Palestinians. This aid should be aimed at education and promoting the peace process and teaching the opposing parties how to live and interact with each other in a peaceful way. It is easy for us, as Americans so far away from hostilities, to claim that each side should compromise. Mothers who have lost their children and brothers and sisters who have lost their friends need to show tolerance towards others.

5-6-7 (Foreign Policy)

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The United States goals in the Middle East should be simple. These goals should be accomplished through peaceful action. If military might is incorporated in any way, further conflict may erupt in the Middle East and U. S. interests may be jeopardized.

The most important of the United States goals for foreign policy are to promote the well being of both Israelis and Palestinians. Trust and well being is the foundation of any peace process. Without those two crucial components, peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians will not be realized.

Secondly, resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict is crucial. To initiate peace in the region is crucial for many reasons. For years thousands of people have died for a cause in which they believed in. These deaths must stop.

To ensure that our first two goals stay intact, the U. S. must put effort into eliminating all terrorist factions. Many terrorist organizations that are based in Middle Eastern countries have a sole purpose to putting an end to Israel and the Arabs supporting the peace process. By removing these terrorist groups, the people that are living in Israel and Palestine will be able to live together in a safer environment that promotes peace between different peoples. One role the United States can perform is to get the United Nations to become more active in mediating differences between these people. The US should continue to spearhead these talks as our Secretary of State Warren Christopher is now doing.

Finally, our last goal is to build up the Middle East's economy. By strengthening their struggling economy the United States will benefit by

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opening up significant trade opportunities in the Middle East. The Israelis are extremely industrious and capable workers. Their manufacturing is at a very high level and the United States can benefit by increasing trade with this country.

The goals that the U. S. has set dealing with Israel and Palestines foreign policy must be completed. Unfortunately, there is no simple way in which the U. S. can go about completing each of the goals that have been set.

Promoting the well being of both Israelis and Palestinians is not an easy task to accomplish. One must understand the backgrounds of the two separate peoples. We must work with the Arabs and with the Israelis to initiate programs that introduce each other into a common environment in a peaceful manner. One way is to incorporate into textbooks at the schools of both sides explaining what is occurring instead of continuing the “ we are right, they are wrong” attitude. Another is to break down the physical barriers that have been set up to restrict movement. Everyone must be able to move freely about without having to fear for their safety.

Resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict is extremely important. Already, the U. S. has prompted Israel and leaders of other Arab nations to come to the peace tables. The U. S. must continue to do all that it can to bring peace. For example, President Clinton agreed to reduce Jordans \$702 million debt to the U. S. by \$220 million as part of an inducement to get Jordan to make peace. By encouraging the Arab nations in the Middle East we will be able to speed the peace process.

Eliminating all terrorist organizations in the Middle East is a substantial task that we must undergo, and with the help of other countries of the world. . More than one step will be necessary to dispose of terrorist activity. If the CIA works together with the Mossad, Israels equivalent of the CIA, we have a chance of eliminating the leaders of terrorist activity. Another step is to condemn and put strict economic sanctions on any countries that the U. S. feels is not doing all it can to stop terrorist acts from occurring.

Finally, our last goal is to build up the Middle Easts economy. This is not an easy thing to do. By lending more money to countries and Palestinians in the Middle East the U. S. will enable their economies to grow. As a result of its growth, they will have more to lose if peace efforts fail. Trade will also be expanded. The middle eastern countries will need more materials from outside nations. We can set up trade between these newly developing countries and the U. S. and we can both benefit financially in the long run.

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