9. Palestine–Israel

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BACKGROUND

Palestine is an area of about 26 000 km², located to the southeast of the Mediterranean, and is comprised of modern-day Israel, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. This area contains sacred sites for Jews, Christians and Muslims. Since the late 19th century, it has been subjected to conflicting claims by Jewish and Arab national movements. Jewish claims are based on the biblical promise to Abraham and his descendants that Palestine was the site of the Jewish kingdom of Israel, destroyed by the Romans. Palestinian claims are based on continuous residence for hundreds of years, and on constituting the majority of the population at various times in the conflict, including the end of the British Mandate and the creation of the State of Israel, in 1948. Some also add that, since Abraham's son Ishmael is the forefather of the Arabs, then God's promise to the children of Abraham also includes the Arabs (Beinin and Hajar, 2014, p. 1).

Waves of Jewish immigration arrived in Palestine during the Ottoman Rule and the British Mandate.¹ In 1917, the British promised a Jewish homeland in Palestine through the Balfour Declaration (Balfour, 1917), which contradicted their promise to the Arabs of Palestine, of their own independent state on the same land (Antonius, 2010).² Concerned over a demographic threat and a gradual loss of land to the Jewish migrants, the Palestinian Arabs rioted against the British Authorities, accusing them of conspiring with the Jews. With support from different sources, the influence of the Jewish population expanded as tensions continued to escalate (Pappé, 2006; Elnakhala, 2014).

Palestine was demarcated over various phases during the British Mandate. Article 22 of the League of Nations' Covenant established the Mandate over Palestine, which included today's Jordan. The United Kingdom (UK) decided to detach the land to the east of the River Jordan, giving it to the Hashemites as an independent state that became the modern-day Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Article 25 of the British Mandate for Palestine specifically defines Palestine as the area west of the River Jordan (*Mandate for Palestine*, 1922).

After World War II, the UK relinquished its Mandate over Palestine and requested the intervention of the United Nations (UN). The UN proposed a partition plan, with a state for the Jews, another for the Palestinian Arabs, and an internationalised Jerusalem. The Arabs rejected the proposal since it gave the Jews more land than the Arab majority; thus, the fighting broke out between the British-trained and armed Jewish militias and the local Palestinians. On the same day that the British departed, the Jews proclaimed the creation of the State of Israel, following which a number of Arab countries immediately attacked Israel and the 1948 war began.³ After Israel won this war, an armistice agreement was signed between Israel and the Arab states. As a result, Palestine was divided into three sections: 77 per cent under Israeli control; the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, under Jordanian rule; and Gaza Strip under Egyptian control (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014).

In 1967, Israel occupied the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, as well as Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and Syria's Golan Heights. To religious Jews, this move was necessary to gain control over the holy sites of East Jerusalem. Israel immediately started to build Jewish settlements on West Bank hilltops and in the Gaza Strip, and it established a military administration to govern the Palestinians, tightly controlling the population (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014). By the end of the 1980s, the situation of the Palestinian population was akin to living in a pressure cooker and the resultant explosion of this pressure became the First Palestinian Intifada (or 'uprising').

The Oslo Agreement was signed in 1993 between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) following prolonged secret negotiations between the two sides. The Agreement created the beginning of the Oslo Process that sought to create a peace treaty based on the Palestinians' right to self-determination. It divided the Territories into smaller zones (Figure 9.1):

1. Area A: Palestinian population centres; the Palestinian Authority (PA) is fully responsible for internal security, public order and civil affairs.
2. Area B: 450 Palestinian towns in the West Bank; the PA controls civil authorities but Israel maintains overriding security authority.
3. Area C: scarcely populated areas of the West Bank; Israel alone has full administrative and security control (Newman, 2002, pp. 638–639).

By the end of 2005, Israel had withdrawn from the Gaza Strip and dismantled all its settlements there, but to this day, Israel maintains control over Gaza's borders, underground resources and airspace (Rynhold and Waxman, 2008). Area C constitutes 60 per cent of the West Bank and, under international law, it is an occupied territory. The Israeli authorities prohibit Palestinian development in Area C, while allowing Israeli settlements to be extensively expanded. Data from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics estimates the 2018 settler

Source: ‘Phased redeployment ...’ (2004).

Figure 9.1 The Palestinian Territories after the Oslo Agreement

population in Area C as 427 800, spread across 132 official settlements.⁴ Israel has approximately 121 outposts in Area C and retains control of security and

land management ('Number of settlers by year', 2018). With Jewish-only roads that link various Jewish settlements cutting through the West Bank, together with the barrier project launched in 2002, the West Bank towns on the map resemble isolated islands rather than a contiguous body of terrain (Figure 9.1). The Israeli settlements have been ruled to violate international law ('Israeli settlements remain ...', 2019), although United States (US) President Trump declared in November 2019 that his country does not consider those settlements illegal (Moran, 2019).

In the 1948 Arab–Israeli War, Israel took control over the western part of Jerusalem, while Jordan retained control of the eastern part. East Jerusalem includes the old walled city containing important Jewish, Muslim and Christian sites. The 1949 armistice line cut the city into two sections, east and west. In June 1967, Israel captured and immediately annexed East Jerusalem from Jordan. Israel regards Jerusalem as its 'eternal capital', while Arabs and the international community consider East Jerusalem as part of the occupied West Bank (Beinin and Hajar, 2014). The areas encircling Jerusalem have experienced the highest rates of settlement activities (Thrall, 2015), and the city's holy sites are central to the daily tension, especially around the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif. This site is sacred for both Muslims and Jews and thus has been at the centre of regular disputes (Hassner, 2009). In July 2017, for example, Israel shut down al-Aqsa Mosque when three Palestinians shot two Israeli police officers ('Israel shuts down ...', 2017). As expected, these measures were followed by several weeks of protests and civil unrest.

In May 2018, the Trump administration moved the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to East Jerusalem. The move was welcomed by Israel, but was condemned by the Palestinians and the international community as it confers a degree of legitimacy on the Israeli control of the city and thereby obstructs the Palestinians' aspiration to establish their future capital there ('US relocates embassy ...', 2018).

NATURE OF THE CONFLICT

Scholarship on the Palestinian–Israeli conflict is riddled with controversies. Some contend that conflict was born from a colonial regime that enabled the creation of the State of Israel and ignored the Palestinians' national aspirations (Klein, 2010, p. 9), while many Israelis simply see the establishment of their state as an outcome of a war that led to national independence (Shlaim, 2008). Overall, the Palestinian–Israeli conflict is extremely multi-faceted and involves land, religion and ethnicity, among other issues.

Religion

Muslims believe that Palestine is an Islamic *waqf*, that is, a land that is part of the Muslim religious trust.⁵ In 1937, David Ben Gurion repeatedly cited the Bible to remind people of the Jewish right to the land of Israel (Eldad, 2013). When Israel occupied East Jerusalem in 1967, control over the city's holy sites became a central issue. An agreement was reached, concluding that the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa mosques were Islamic *waqfs* under Jordanian responsibility, while Israel would be in charge of external security of the compound that houses both mosques. Accordingly, non-Muslims, including Jews, can enter the sites, but only as tourists rather than worshippers. As expected, the agreement was not respected at all times ('The protectors ...', n.d.), particularly by hard-line groups such as Temple Mount Faithful and the Temple Institute that aspire to rebuild a third Jewish temple on the same site ('Five things ...', 2017).

Israel identifies itself as a Jewish state, while the large majority of Palestinians are either Muslims or Christians.⁶ Beyond religious beliefs, sacred places are at the heart of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. Several sacred places for Jews and Muslims occupy the same locations. For instance, the Temple Mount for the Jews and Haram al-Sharif for the Muslims are believed to be in the same location (Hassner, 2009), as are the Western Wall for the Jews and the Wall of Tears for Muslims, and Hebron's Machpelah Cave for Jews and Haram al-Ibrahimi for Muslims (Abou Ramadan, 2016, pp. 182–183).

Territory

Both the Palestinians and the Israelis make claims about the same territory, and there have been several attempts at dividing this land, but so far all have failed (Allen, 2020). The Israeli West Bank barrier, launched in 2002, is another attempt at partition that annexed large strips of Palestinian land and subsumed them within Israel's borders (Elnakhala, 2014). The fact that Israel annexed more land in the 1967 war, trebling the size of its territory, confirms the territorial dimension of the conflict (*The Economist*, 2017). This expansion continues, with Israeli settlement activities in the West Bank annexing Palestinian land, mostly privately owned, and further adding to the evidence that this conflict has a significant territorial dimension (Hatuqa, 2013).

As a result of the 1948 war, some 750 000 Palestinians fled their homes to seek safety elsewhere. The properties and land of those displaced were mostly taken over by the Israeli government, which reclassified the majority of them as absentee properties, a policy later enshrined in the Absentee Property Law of 1950. The law created the Development Authority which is authorised to sell these properties to the government, the Jewish National Fund or other

public agencies, a practice which resulted in many Palestinians losing their land, possibly forever. This law is still used today by Israel to take over individual houses, agricultural land and property of Palestinians in East Jerusalem and the West Bank (Hatuqa, 2013).

Ethnicity

Following the 1967 war, the conflict adopted a more ethnic form. According to Klein:

Ethnic Nationalism claims a right to National self-determination, with the nation based on a common origin and ‘tribal’ affiliation of its members, a shared history, culture, language, and most often, a common or dominant religion ... both Zionism – the Jewish national movement – and its Palestinian counterpart are ethno-national movements. (Klein, 2010)

The constitutive texts of both sides, such as the Israeli Declaration of Independence and various PLO documents, support the idea advocated here by Klein.

In May 2018, the Israeli Knesset passed the Nation-State Bill, which defines Israel as the ‘home of the Jewish people’ (‘Jewish nation state ...’, 2018) and emphasises the Jewish character of the State of Israel. There is evidently an inconsistency here. On the one hand the state is claimed to be a Jewish state. On the other hand, the state is claimed to be a democracy. However, since many of the members of this state are not Jewish, the existence of, or at least the commitment of this state to, the democratic political and civil rights of the members of the population who are not Jews becomes questionable. Given that Israel’s control system also extends to the Palestinian Gaza Strip and the West Bank, this additionally widens the tension between Israel’s dual natures of being democratic and Jewish⁷ (Klein, 2010).

Oren Yiftachel contends that an ethnocratic regime fosters the expansion and domination of the dominant group in a contested territory, and he sees Israeli ethnocracy manifesting itself in the long-term Zionist strategy of Judaising⁸ the homeland, the very territory perceived by Palestinians as their rightful historic homeland (Yiftachel, 2006, p. 3). On the ground, the ethnic nature of the conflict manifests itself in several forms. Israel has established a two-tier system – economic, legal, social, infrastructural, medical, educational, and so on – in the West Bank; one system for the Palestinians and the other for the Jews. According to Human Rights Watch, this system has resulted in various forms of discrimination against the Palestinians as they are deprived of basic services in certain zones of the West Bank,⁹ such as electricity, water, schools

and access roads, while neighbouring Jewish settlers are able to access all these state-provided services ('Israel/West Bank ...', 2010).

MANIFESTATIONS OF THE CONFLICT

After the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict had various phases. In its early days, the conflict was a direct confrontation among states, whereas in the past few decades, it has taken the form of a conflict between a state (Israel) and Palestinian non-state actors, with the Arab states mostly playing the role of mediators. A constant manifestation of the conflict, however, remains the Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian Territories, and the Palestinian response to this occupation.

Inter-State Wars

After continued fighting in Mandate Palestine between Jewish gangs and local Palestinian militants,¹⁰ Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq attacked Israel immediately after the announcement of the creation of the State of Israel (Pappé, 2006). By early 1949, Israel had achieved a decisive victory against the combined armed forces of five Arab countries ('Why the Arabs ...', n.d.). The fighting was ended by the UN-mediated Armistice Agreement of 1949. The Armistice Lines, also known as the Green Line, run along the borderlines of British Mandate Palestine, except in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In these latter two areas, the lines were determined by the outcomes of the 1948 war (*1949 Armistice Agreement*, 1949). While Israel calls this conflict 'the war of independence', the Palestinians call it al-Nakba, or 'the Catastrophe', due to the massive negative impact it had upon them.

On 29 October 1956, Israel, France and the UK attacked Egypt after President Gamal Abdel Nasser's decision to nationalise the Suez Canal. Until then, the canal was controlled by the Suez Canal Company, which was itself controlled by French and British interests. Nasser also blocked the Gulf of Aqaba, barring Israel's access to the Red Sea. Nasser's decision followed the US and the UK refusing to finance the construction of the Aswan High Dam. Through intervention of several international actors, including the USA, the war ended. A ceasefire came into effect and a UN emergency force was stationed along the canal, which remained under Egypt's control (*Al-Jazeera English*, 2008).

From 1948 until 1967, the Gaza Strip was under Egyptian rule and the West Bank was under Jordanian rule. Another war erupted in 1967, this time with a full-scale air and artillery battle between Israel and Syria on 7 April 1967, after a long period of tension. On 13 May, Moscow warned Cairo that Israel was massing troops on the border with Syria. Two days later, Egypt expelled

UN peacekeepers who had been patrolling the border with Israel since the end of the 1956 war, and moved troops into Sinai (Bowen, 2017). On 5 June, Israel launched Operation Focus, which destroyed the Arab air forces on the ground. By the sixth day, Israel had captured the Gaza Strip and Sinai from Egypt, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan (Bowen, 2017).

On 6 October 1973, the Syrian and Egyptian armies took Israel by surprise, by launching an attack on the Israeli holy day of Yom Kippur, in an attempt to regain their respective territories occupied in 1967. Egypt eventually regained possession of Sinai through a US-mediated peace process, but the Syrian surprise assault to regain the Golan Heights was thwarted (Connolly, 2013). Syria and Israel signed an armistice in 1974, and a UN observer force has been in place on the ceasefire line since that year. Israel unilaterally annexed the Golan Heights in 1981, a move that was not recognised internationally ('Golan Heights profile', 2015), although in March 2019 the Trump administration in the US recognised the Golan Heights as Israeli ('Golan Heights ...', 2019).

Invasions and Large-Scale Military Operations

On 6 June 1982, Israel launched Operation Peace for Galilee, by invading Lebanon to end the threat from the Palestinian militias basing themselves there. Syria immediately advanced through the Biqaa Valley, and a clash between Syria and Israel ended with the Israeli Air Force destroying most of Syria's missile batteries located in Lebanon. In collaboration with the Lebanese Christian militias, Israel besieged Beirut to force PLO and Syrian troops out, which happened in August. Christian militias then massacred Palestinian residents in the Sabraa and Shatila refugee camps, while Israeli troops looked on (Security Council Resolution 521, 1982). Afterwards, the US brokered the withdrawal of all foreign armies from Lebanon, including Israel, Syria and the PLO, and it brokered a ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon. By 1985, Israel had completely withdrawn from Lebanon, except for the Lebanese buffer zone in the south, from which it eventually withdrew in May 2000 ('1982 Lebanon invasion', 2008).

In February and March 2002, after a series of Palestinian suicide bombings, Israel launched Operation Defensive Shield, invading Palestinian towns and cities that were under full Palestinian control. Israel justified these incursions as self-defence against Palestinian attacks, and Israeli forces targeted weapons, people, tunnels and infrastructure associated with violence. As Palestinian attacks in Israeli city centres continued, Israel launched a series of additional, similar military operations, some of which continued throughout 2003 (Reich, 2008).

Since December 2008, Israel has launched a number of military operations in the Gaza Strip. Operation Cast Lead occurred between 27 December 2008 and 18 January 2009, Operation Pillar of Defence between 14 and 21 November 2012, and Operation Protective Edge between 8 July and 27 August 2014. These operations targeted the militant organisation Hamas,¹¹ and in particular Hamas's infrastructure and military capabilities. However, all three operations, particularly the first and the third, caused devastating damage and casualties among the civilian population. Operation Cast Lead left more than 1300 civilians, mainly Palestinians, dead and thousands more wounded, plus ten Israeli soldiers and three civilians killed. Operation Protective Edge resulted in 2100 Palestinians being killed, the majority of them civilian, with 66 Israeli soldiers and seven civilians also killed. Israel was heavily criticised by human rights organisations and the UN for its use of disproportionate force and for deliberately targeting civilians. Each operation was followed by a mediated truce between Israel and Hamas, although these did not necessarily end the tensions ('Gaza crisis ...', 2014).

Military Occupation

In parallel to direct military action, there is a regime of Israeli military occupation that has been imposed in the Palestinian areas. Observers and politicians are divided over when the occupation started, with some believing that it began in 1948 with the war that gave birth to the State of Israel, while others believe the occupation started with the 1967 war, when Israel annexed the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The 1948 war was followed by international recognition of the State of Israel, while the 1967 war by contrast was followed by condemnation of the occupation of the Palestinian Territories.

Many, however, agree that the Israeli occupation has changed over time. Soon after the 1967 war, Israel established military rule to govern the Palestinian areas. Initially, Israel tried to administer all aspects of Palestinian life and to normalise the occupation while exploiting the territories' resources, including land, water and labour. The 1990s marked a shift towards an Israeli separation from the Palestinians, with Israel abandoning administration of the territories while continuing to exploit their non-human resources such as land and water. This exploitation of resources was facilitated by the Oslo Peace Agreement (Gordon, 2008, pp. xix–xx), which maintained Israeli control over the borders, underground resources and air space (Weizman, 2007, pp. 5–6).

While violence may be a daily characteristic of life in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, two episodes in the history of the conflict are marked as Intifadas. The First Intifada started in late 1987, due to Israel's excessive control measures, its suppression of nationalism, as well as economic and other forms of subjugation. In the First Intifada, the Palestinians largely refrained

from using firearms and explosives. By the early 1990s, Israel was burdened by the costly response to mass riots, which in part motivated it to begin negotiations with the Palestinians (Khalidi, 2007, p. 178; Gordon, 2008).

The Second Palestinian Intifada started in September 2000, largely due to Palestinian disappointment with the peace process. Triggered by a visit by then Opposition leader Ariel Sharon to the al-Aqsa Mosque compound, the Intifada initially consisted of riots, with most of the violence limited to throwing rocks at armed Israeli troops. Two months on, various Palestinian factions started to launch armed attacks against Israel, a feature that distinguishes the Second Intifada from the First Intifada. The employment of extensive Israeli repression confirmed to the Palestinians that they were still under occupation, despite the peace process (Khalidi, 2007). The Second Intifada left many more Palestinians and Israelis dead than the First Intifada¹² (Gordon, 2008).

PROTAGONISTS

Israel

Israel is a representative democracy with a Prime Minister, and a diverse range of policies have been adopted by different prime ministers regarding the conflict. While Rabin signed a peace agreement with the Palestinians, Netanyahu's cabinet expanded Israeli settlements in the West Bank and launched some of the widest-scale military operations against the Gaza Strip. Israel retains control over Palestinian borders, natural resources and even daily movement (Abou Jalal, 2015), and it relies on a very strong military capability, built through extensive Israeli efforts but also with assistance from friendly states. Today, Israel is by far the strongest military power in the region (Vekstein and Mehrez, 1997).

The Palestinians

The Palestinians are far from constituting a unitary actor, and several players have a key role on the Palestinian side. First, the Palestinian Authority (PA) was established in 1993 by the Oslo Agreement¹³ to implement Palestinian self-rule by administering Palestinian affairs inside Palestinian cities and taking over internal security and public order responsibilities. The PA entered the Palestinian Territories in 1995. In fulfilment of the Agreement, the PA cooperated with Israel on security issues, including terrorism (Roy, 2011). After the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip in 2007, the PA became divided into two bodies, the Fatah-controlled PA based in the West Bank, and the Hamas-controlled PA in the Gaza Strip, which is boycotted by Israel and the West. Since 2007, the Fatah-PA has received international and Arab support

that resulted in it strengthening its security apparatus. It also has been involved in security cooperation with Israel (Zanotti, 2010; Elnakhala, 2014).

Second, since the establishment of Israel, various Palestinian factions have emerged, all of which have had military wings that launched attacks against Israel. They all aspired to the establishment of an independent state of Palestine. Until the early 1980s, all factions operated from abroad, mostly composed of Palestinians who were displaced by the various wars. They organised under the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), and until the late 1960s, Fatah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) were the most important PLO factions. Both are secular movements that launched attacks against Israel in the 1960s and 1970s, and in 1974 the Arab League and the UN recognised the PLO as the 'sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people'. In the 1980s, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and Hamas were established in the Palestinian Territories. Both these organisations have religious ideologies (Giacaman, 2013, pp. 24–25).

Since its establishment in 1964, Fatah has been the largest political faction under the PLO. It enjoyed unchallenged popularity among the Palestinians until the 1980s. Until the mid-1980s, Fatah advocated establishing a Palestinian state on all of historic Palestine, which naturally conflicted with Israeli claims to the same land. In November 1988, however, during the PLO's 19th Palestinian National Council's (PNC) meeting in Algiers, the PNC made a declaration proposing a clear and concise peace strategy, along with explicit acceptance of UN Resolutions 242 and 338¹⁴ and the recognition of Israel (Hassassian, 1994).

On 13 September 1993, the Fatah-led PLO and Israel signed the Declaration of Principles, known as Oslo I and later Oslo II, giving the Palestinians control over the Gaza Strip and West Bank cities. The PA was granted limited autonomy to administer Palestinian cities. After settling in Gaza, Arafat's forces did their best to demonstrate commitment to the agreement with Israel (Roy, 2011). The peace negotiations officially collapsed in the summer of 2000, followed by the deterioration of the security situation leading into the Second Palestinian Intifada in September. Fatah veterans in the West Bank established the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades in October 2000, units which launched attacks against Israel until 2007 (Atkins, 2004, p. 21).

The death of Arafat, former Palestinian president and former leader of the PLO, in 2004 and Hamas's victory in the 2006 parliamentary elections escalated the ongoing tensions between Hamas and Fatah, which culminated in direct clashes in 2006 and 2007. Hamas forces expelled the Fatah leadership and operatives from the Gaza Strip in June 2007. The Chairman of Fatah and President of the PA, Mahmoud Abbas, immediately dismissed the Hamas government and declared a state of emergency in the West Bank ('Timeline ...', 2011). This resulted in a political division between the West Bank and the

Gaza Strip, with the first being under Fatah control and the latter controlled by Hamas. Officials of the Fatah-led PA in the West Bank signed a security agreement with Israel, mediated by the USA, and since 2007 there have been several attempts at reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, the last of which came in October 2017 (Abu Amer, 2017).

Despite the agreement, tension still characterises the relations between the two groups. In 2017, President Abbas slashed salaries by one-third for 45 000 Gaza-based civil servants who were still paid by the PA, and ceased to pay for Gaza's electricity bill supplied by Israel (Harel, 2017). At the end of 2019, Fatah, with Egyptian backing, pressured Hamas to take administrative control over PA institutions in the Gaza Strip (Rasha, 2019). These developments were reported just a few months after President Abbas called for general elections in Palestine, with the participation of both Hamas and Fatah, in 2020 (Abu Amer, 2019).

Since its establishment in 1987 as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas has become increasingly influential in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (Hroub, 2009). Hamas's Charter explains that (historic) Palestine is an Islamic trust that should be liberated from the oppressors; that is, Israel. The Charter clearly states that to liberate Palestine, Hamas should adopt jihad as a strategy, which in part entails fighting Israel ('Hamas's Charter', 1988). Over time, Hamas issued several official documents adding to and modifying its founding Charter; the last of those was published in April 2017. The document expressed Hamas's willingness to accept a Palestinian state in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which constitutes a remarkable shift, since Hamas previously advocated a Palestinian state comprising the entire area between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean (Salah, 2017).

Hamas established a wide-ranging welfare programme that provides a broad range of social and educational services to the Palestinian society. In addition, Hamas created a military wing known as the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, responsible for training new militant recruits, developing the organisation's arsenal and conducting attacks against Israel ('The qualitative development ...', 2003).

Hamas opposed the peace process with Israel, and it launched a wave of attacks against Israel in the 1990s (Kydd and Walter, 2006, p. 51). It also rejected the institutions established by the Oslo Accords and refused to participate in the Palestinian political process in 1996. Hamas, however, shifted its position in 2005 by participating first in the local elections, and later in the parliamentary elections of 2006 ('Profile: Hamas ...', 2014). Although Hamas won the majority of parliamentary seats in the 2006 election, it was boycotted by the international community.

Regional and International Actors

Egypt is a key regional player and was one of the Arab countries that fought in the 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973 wars against Israel. Egypt, however, signed a peace agreement with Israel in March 1979, which ended the state of war between the two sides (Gwertzman, 1979). Egypt continues to play a leading role as a regional actor, which is evident in its brokering of several truces between the Palestinians and Israel, as well as mediating reconciliations between Hamas and Fatah. Similar to its predecessors, the Egyptian government controls the Rafah border, south of the Gaza Strip. Since the 2013 military coup, the Rafah border has been open only sporadically (Abou Jalal, 2015). The closure of the Rafah border has been one of the key tactics employed in the Israeli siege of the Gaza Strip. Moreover, Egyptian President Sisi has been very cooperative with Israel on security issues, particularly those concerning the Gaza Strip and Sinai. He launched several campaigns against the Rafah underground tunnels, such as the one in September 2015 (Hadid and Nassar, 2015).

Jordan is another Arab state that participated in the 1948, 1967 and 1973 wars. During the wars, Jordan received the highest number of Palestinian refugees. Unlike other Arab countries, Jordan granted full Jordanian citizenship to the majority of those refugees (Oroub, n.d.). In fulfilment of the original Armistice Agreement, Jordan ruled the West Bank until the Arab defeat of 1967 (*1949 Armistice Agreement*, 1949). Following the 1967 war, Jordanian rule of the West Bank ended, but it still maintains guardianship over the Christian and Islamic holy sites of East Jerusalem today. Jordan signed a peace agreement in 1994 (*Israel–Jordan Peace Treaty*, 1994) and has always played an important diplomatic role in support of the Palestinian cause (Zanotti, 2010). Jordan backs a two-state solution between the Palestinians and the Israelis (*US News*, 2017).

Qatar recently mediated several truce agreements between the Palestinians and Israel (Synovitz, 2012). Since Hamas distanced itself from the Syrian regime and its allies in 2012, Qatar has become Hamas's main source of external funding. Qatar has often helped Gaza and Hamas through several projects, for example the development of roads and the construction of schools, hospitals and the residential Hamad City. Following each Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip, Qatar was among the first to contribute to its reconstruction ('Qatar launches ...', 2012). These projects are believed to help Hamas sustain its rule in the Gaza Strip (Stephens, 2017). In June 2017, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Bahrain severed relations with Qatar due to its 'sponsoring terrorist groups and backing Iran's plans in the region' ('Severing relations ...', 2017). Several observers explained the move

as playing a pressure card on Qatar, to force it to cut relations with Hamas, and also pressurising Hamas to give up more concessions (Othman, 2017).

Turkey has repeatedly announced its commitment to a peaceful solution to the conflict. Following the violent incident of the MV *Mavi Marmara*,¹⁵ a ship filled with international activists and Turkish citizens that tried to break the Gaza Siege on 31 May 2010, Ankara became very critical of Israel (Gurcan, 2016). Tensions between Ankara and Tel Aviv decreased in 2016 when an agreement was reached with Israel, resulting in the payment of \$20 million in compensation by Israel, for those killed during the *Mavi Marmara* raid (Sabah, 2017). Despite this, Turkey and Israel expelled each other's senior diplomats on 15 May 2018 during protests along the Israel–Gaza borders.

Despite their Shiite background, Iran, Hezbollah and, formerly, Syria¹⁶ provided significant military resources, logistical support and training to Hamas, a Sunni group. Hamas learnt how to construct rockets and also imported more advanced rockets, transported through underground tunnels along the borders with Egypt from Hezbollah, Syria and Iran. Hamas was also trained by Hezbollah in the use of suicide bombings and tunnel attacks (Elnakhala, 2014).

After Hamas's victory in the 2006 legislative elections, Iran channelled an estimated €15–17 million per month to Hamas, for governing costs. Iranian aid, however, has stopped following the outbreak of the Syrian civil war. After years of disagreement over the situation in Syria, there have recently been several signs of rapprochement, most likely due to regional developments such as Egypt's crackdown on underground tunnels along the Rafah borders. This situation, combined with other factors, left Hamas short of funds. Since 2017, Tehran has resumed funding Hamas, although at a much lower rate than pre-2011 (Abu Amer, 2018). Iran is considered a serious threat by Israel, in particular because of its nuclear programme, and its military and covert presence in Syria. Hezbollah has also built an extensive arsenal and significant fighting capabilities that Israel considers a serious threat. Despite its involvement in the war in Syria, Hezbollah is expected to turn south and launch attacks against Israel in the near future (Anderson, 2019).

The US was a key player in the Peace Process of the 1990s, and the Oslo Agreement was signed on the White House's South Lawn. On the one hand, Israel receives the largest amount of US military aid every year, valued at billions of dollars. On the other hand, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has been providing assistance in different forms to the Palestinians, particularly to the Fatah-led, West Bank-based, Palestinian Authority (Hammond, 2016). In January 2020, the US administration proposed a peace plan known as the 'deal of the century'. The Israelis welcomed the deal, but the Palestinians felt completely excluded from the negotiations leading to the plan (Bowen, 2020).

Between 2000 and 2019, the European Union (EU) has provided more than €770 million in humanitarian aid to help meet the basic needs of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. In 2019, €14.5 million was allocated to humanitarian programmes in Gaza, with another €3.7 million allocated to budget lines such as access to safe education ('Palestine', 2019). European governments of countries such as France, the UK and Germany also provide support for the Palestinians in different forms, mostly backing good governance and state-building efforts.

The UN has practiced different roles since the beginning of the conflict, including mediating peace and proposing solutions, but arguably its most important initiative is the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA). This agency specialises in providing aid and basic services for the Palestinian refugee camps in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan ('Palestine refugees', n.d.).

TRAJECTORY OF THE CONFLICT

Overall, the Palestinian–Israeli conflict could lead to one of three paths: a two-state solution, one bi-national democratic state, or one undemocratic state with no equal rights for its citizens.¹⁷ The two-state solution, with Palestinian and Israeli states living peacefully side by side, is the solution most widely supported by the international community. UN Resolutions 242 and 338 back this idea with the borders of the Palestinian state in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank ('UN Resolutions ...', 2004); it has been behind many international efforts, including those of the US and the EU (Willsher, 2017), and this proposed solution has support from people on both sides of the divide.

Yet, facts on the ground tell a different story. Israel has been expanding its settlements in the occupied West Bank, which makes the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, with territorial integrity, practically impossible. To solve this problem, Israel would need to dismantle its settlements, which is considered highly unlikely (Levy, 2017). The complete isolation of the Gaza Strip also forms a major obstacle to the territorial integrity of any future Palestinian state. To establish the territorial integrity of a Palestinian state, Israel will need to give up some of the land between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which is again unlikely. Another solution is to build a highway across Israeli-controlled land, connecting northeast of the Gaza Strip to the southern West Bank. The latter was proposed by the Oslo Agreement, as well by President Trump's so-called 'deal of the century', and was implemented for a short period of time in 1999,¹⁸ but any permanent reopening of such a route does not seem to be happening anytime soon.

Resources are one of the necessary elements of an independent state, and land is a highly important resource, especially given that Palestinian land

has been continuously confiscated since 1948. Both land and other resources would therefore be scarce commodities if a Palestinian state were to be established tomorrow. Israel has previously used its Absentee Law to seize property left behind by Palestinians who fled the 1948 war. Since 1967, Israel has relied on several other policies to annex still more land. These measures, all of which bolster Israel's land appropriation policy, have include the construction of the physical barriers which separated many Palestinians from their farmlands, the construction of settlements and their continual expansion, and the by-pass roads used to connect the different settlements. A World Bank report from 2014 noted that the Palestinians could potentially derive an annual income in excess of \$3 billion from the resources in Area C of the West Bank, but as discussed above, Palestinians have barely any access to Area C. Its water, land, minerals and other resources, including those in areas under the nominal control of the PA, are still under the *de facto* control of Israel. As part of its blockade of the Gaza Strip, Israel has imposed a naval siege which deprives Palestinians from access to fishing zones, or to the much-needed gas resources (Jabarin, 2014).

Moreover, the power gap between the Israelis and Palestinians is so profound that it appears scarcely possible that a joint solution can be found through bilateral negotiations. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not only about the binary concepts of peace and war, but is also about the asymmetric distribution of the means of authoritative rule over Palestine (Beck, 2015). A two-state solution would thus leave the Palestinian side in a very unprivileged situation, given this power gap.

Many observers have declared the death of the two-state solution, which therefore leaves only one likely solution: a bi-national, democratic state. This option is possible in theory, but it would almost certainly be very difficult for it to function in practice. It is possible because Israel's policies have made complete separation between the Jewish and Palestinian populations almost impossible, and because natural and other resources are, in theory at least, shared between both sides. It would be difficult, though, because both the Palestinians and the Israelis would need to rethink everything, including fundamental concepts such as Zionism and Palestinian nationalism. Israelis would have to rethink the very concept of the 'Jewishness' of their state, and also the sharing of privileges with the Palestinians tomorrow that they themselves enjoy today. Indeed, it would be a long and painful road, but it appears currently to be the only practical solution (Levy, 2017).

Israel has a third option, which is to continue the current status quo. This, however, would arguably solidify an undemocratic Israeli state. Different practices, including new discriminatory laws, new settlements, new roads and new means of transportation, indicate that Israel is forcefully heading in exactly this direction. This would result in a one state-solution for the two

nations, but based on undemocratic values and constant violations of basic human rights (Levy, 2017). This trend has been identified by a 2017 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) report that generated considerable controversy, resulting in the resignation of the UN Under-Secretary General and ESCWA Executive Secretary Rima Khalaf (Perry, 2017), and the withdrawal of the conclusion of the reports. Many commented on these developments, noting that even if the entire report is withdrawn, the Israeli practices would remain discriminatory. This is evident in Israel's immigration laws that allow any Jewish person, anywhere in the world, to become an Israeli citizen, even if they have never been to Israel or Palestine. By contrast, Palestinian refugees or their antecedents, who were born in Palestine-Israel and owned land in Palestine, now the modern-day State of Israel, cannot return to their original homes and land (Reimann, 2017).

NOTES

1. The Mandate for Palestine was granted to the United Kingdom by the League of Nations in 1920 after the partitioning of areas of the Ottoman Empire, following the end of World War I. The Mandate provided for the British administration of Palestine (and Transjordan), lasting until 1948, when the State of Israel was created on the day the British Mandate expired.
2. The British also struck the Sykes-Picot Agreement with the French and the Russians that contradicted their promises to the Jews and the Arabs. This agreement partitioned the Middle East into French, Russian and British zones of influence.
3. Transfer of the Arab population began before May 1948. The Jewish militias tended to attack Palestinian towns and villages. Some argue that these attacks amounted to the level of massacres. Before Israel's declaration of independence in May 1948, over 200 Palestinian villages had already been emptied and about 175 000 Palestinians were already refugees. Some had fled in fear; others were expelled by Zionist militias. Such expulsion was no coincidence, and was pre-planned in Jewish military documents such as Plan Dalet (Khalidi, 1988).
4. According to the Foundation for Middle East Peace, the settler population in all of the West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem, reached 382 031 in mid-2014 ('Settlements', 2014). B'Tselem data of the same year indicate that settlements in East Jerusalem housed 205 220 settlers ('Statistics on settlements ...', 2017). Peace Now provides estimates for 2018, setting the number (excluding Jerusalem) at almost half a million. Given the fast pace of settlement expansion, it is likely that the population will have increased by the time this book is published. Moreover, these numbers cover populations in official settlements. Given that there are many unofficial settlements, the settler population on the ground is almost certainly higher than the data presented here.
5. In Arabic, *waqf* literally means 'detention'. When a property is considered a *waqf*, that means this property is under detention, that is, its produce or income may always be available for religious or charitable purposes. When a *waqf* is created, the property is tied up forever and thereafter becomes non-transferable.

6. There is a small minority of Palestinian Jews and Druze who reside in both the Palestinian Territory and Israel today (Farber, 2010; Strickland, 2013).
7. On 17 May 2020, Benjamin Netanyahu was sworn in as Israel's Prime Minister, heading a unity government in which he shares power with his electoral rival, Benny Gantz, in a deal that is expected to see the annexation of large sections of the West Bank ('Netanyahu takes ...', 2020).
8. Judaisation means making the land Jewish by emphasising its Jewish elements and ignoring and sometimes eliminating its non-Jewish characteristics.
9. These are largely Palestinians living in Area C.
10. Sometime around February 1947, fights erupted between Jewish gangs and local Palestinians. The Hagana, a Jewish militia, had a detailed plan (Plan Dalet) with a central goal to evacuate the Arab-Palestinian villages of their residents (Pappé, 2006).
11. From an Israeli perspective, Hamas is the most militarily active Palestinian faction with threat capabilities. For more details on the group, please refer to the next section, on 'Protagonists'.
12. The death toll of the Second Intifada, including both military and civilian, is estimated at more than 3000 Palestinians and 900 Israelis, as well as 64 foreigners. In the First Intifada, more than 1300 Palestinian and more than 100 Israelis were killed ('Fatalities', 2020; 'Fatalities in the First Intifada', 2020).
13. The Oslo Agreement was signed by Israel and the PLO. Fatah is the largest Palestinian faction in the PLO.
14. These resolutions called on Israel to withdraw from the territories occupied in 1967, that is, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem ('UN Resolutions ...', 2004).
15. The incident occurred when activists sailed six vessels towards the Israeli naval blockade on the Gaza Strip with the aim of breaching it. Israeli commandos boarded the vessels and fighting broke out between the commandos and activists on the MV *Mavi Marmara*. Ten activists were killed, and the injured included at least 55 activists and ten Israeli commandos.
16. With the outbreak of the Syrian revolution in 2011, Hamas sided with the people against the regime. Ever since, relations between Syria and Hamas have waned (Roy, 2011).
17. Some argue that such a trajectory resembles an apartheid state.
18. As part of implementing the Oslo Agreement, a safe passage was opened between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in October 1999, but this was closed down a year later.

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