

Israeli Settlements

Background Information

Israel's government has allowed Israeli settlers to take land in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem (remember that the West Bank and East Jerusalem are two regions where the majority of people are Palestinian). Some of these settlers believe that God granted the land to the Jews and therefore they have a right to the land. By 2014 there were some 700,000 Israeli Jews living in settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The Palestinians believe that the Israeli settlers are stealing their land. Under international law, the Israeli settlements are illegal.

Israeli Perspective

Here in brief is the case for Jewish settlements in the West Bank: It is in Israel's best interest to prevent the West Bank from serving as a Palestinian terrorist base. From the West Bank, the Palestinians can launch rockets, mortars, and other weapons. The only way effectively to prevent these Palestinian terrorist attacks is by allowing Israeli settlers to move to the West Bank. A larger Israeli population in the West Bank will make it more difficult for Palestinian terrorists to continue to attack Israel.

Source: Steven Plaut, (Business Professor at Haifa University in Israel)

Parts of the West Bank are the ancient homeland of the Jewish people. Israelis have the right to live on this land. This land is an important part of Jewish culture and to deny Jews the right to live there would be morally wrong. Furthermore, the settlements have employed thousands of Palestinians. Preventing the construction of more Israeli settlements would mean fewer jobs for the Palestinians.

Source: Mudar Zahran, PhD (Secretary General of the Jordanian Coalition of Opposition, in a July 13, 2012 article)

Palestinian Perspective

The construction of Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory must not continue. Israeli settlers must not take more land. These settlements create problems and obstacles: they hurt the peace process between Palestinians and Israelis. Palestinians feel that their land is being taken and that makes it harder to convince them to live in peace with the Israelis.

Source: Mahmoud Abbas (leader of the Palestinian Authority)

A potential solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a plan known as the **Two-State Solution**. This plan would make the West Bank part of a Palestinian country. Israel would remain its own country. Therefore the Palestinians would have their own country and the Israelis would also have their own country (hence the name of the plan: Two State Solution). Many people believe that the Israeli settlements in the West Bank will prevent this plan from happening. In the view of many people, the Israelis are taking land that in the future should be part of a new Palestinian country.

The United States strongly opposes the construction of more Israeli settlements in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. Settlement construction threatens the Two State Solution and calls into question Israel's commitment to peace. Source: The United States Department of State (July 29th, 2015)

Palestinian Refugees and the Right of Return

Background Information

Because of the fighting in Palestine/Israel between 1947 and 1949, the majority of the Palestinian Arab population became refugees. During the war, Arab forces forced Jews from their land and Jewish forces forced Palestinians from their land.

Most Palestinians fled to the Gaza Strip or to the West Bank. According to the United Nations, there are almost five million Palestinian refugees.

Palestinians argue that they and their descendants have a right to return to their homes (which are in Israel). This right, known as the **Right of Return**, is denied by Israel. Israel refuses to allow Palestinian refugees to return to Israel.

Israeli Perspective

What is a Muslim, Christian or Jewish state? It is one where Muslims, Christians or Jews are in the majority... Do not expect the Jewish people to lose our majority in our land and stop being a Jewish state. We have suffered enough throughout history, including in Europe, and we do not need to justify our independence.

The right of return of the Palestinians would change the population of the country and mean the end of the Jewish country of Israel (allowing all Palestinians to return to Israel could mean that Israel's population would not be mostly Jewish). We want to help solve the refugee problem, but we are not ready to bring an end to Israel as a mostly Jewish country.

Source: Shimon Peres (former president of Israel)

After the creation of Israel, the Palestinians, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria attacked Israel. This war created two refugee problems. Both Jews and Palestinians lost their homes and became refugees. Tiny Israel took in all of the Jewish refugees, while the Arab countries that surround Israel refused to take in the Palestinian refugees. It has been almost seventy years since the war and it doesn't make sense for Palestinian refugees to be given the Right of Return to Israel now.

Source: Benjamin Netanyahu (current Prime Minister of Israel)

Palestinian Perspective:

The return of the Palestinian refugee to his or her home is a constant right that can never be argued and a solution to the refugees issue would never be fair as long as it doesn't include the right of Palestinians to take back the land that once belonged to them. The Right of Return will remain sacred for every Palestinian who was forced by the Israeli army to leave his or her home and land in Palestine.

Source: Mahmoud Abbas (president of the Palestinian Authority)

In 1948, the United Nations passed Resolution 194, which said that Palestinian refugees should be permitted to return to their homes in Israel. Some Palestinian refugees still have the old deeds and keys to their homes. Israel's government allows Jews who live in other countries the right to live in Israel. It is very unfair that a Jew born in America, France, etc. has the right to move to Israel, while a Palestinian refugee is denied the right to return to their homeland. Source: Council for Arab-British Understanding (CAAMU)

Terrorism

Background Information

What is the definition of terrorism? Although the leaders of the world have not formally agreed to one universal definition to the term terrorism, the United Nations defines terrorism as criminal acts to cause terror among the general public. Acts of terror target civilians (not soldiers or police) and are not justified.

Hamas is a political organization that is popular among many Palestinians. Israel, however, believes that Hamas is really a terrorist organization.

Founded in 1987, Hamas argued that Israel/Palestine is an Islamic homeland that cannot be surrendered to non-Muslims. It encouraged its followers to wage a holy war against Israel. Hamas is popular among Palestinians because it stood up for the rights of the Palestinians against the Israeli occupation. Members of Hamas are part of the Palestinian government.

According to the United States, the European Union, and Israel, Hamas is a terrorist organization. However, supporters of Hamas believe it to be a legitimate fighting force that defends Palestinians against Israeli occupation. The question is this: Is Hamas a terrorist organization?

Israeli Perspective:

Between the years 2000 and 2004, Hamas committed 425 terrorist attacks. These attacks led to the murder of 377 Israelis and wounded over 2,000 Israelis. Along with rocket attacks, Hamas is also responsible for ordering suicide attacks against Israel.

Source: Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Since 1994, Hamas (and other Palestinian organizations) have ordered more than 80 suicide bombings. The terrorists have blown up buses in major Israeli cities, as well as shopping malls, cafes, and other civilian targets.

Source: The Council on Foreign Relations

Hamas has used violent means, including terrorism, to pursue the goal of establishing an Islamic Palestinian country in place of Israel.

Source: The United States Department of State

Palestinian Perspective:

Hamas runs many relief and education programs for Palestinians. This is important because many Palestinians are poor and cannot find work. Hamas pays for schools, orphanages, mosques, healthcare clinics, soup kitchens, and sports leagues.

Source: Al Jazeera Magazine Online

A major point of disagreement is the definition of what terrorism is. From the perspective of many Arabs, Hamas is not a terrorist organization. On the contrary it is an organization that fights for the freedom of the Palestinians against the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The Palestinians have a right to defend themselves against Israel.

Source: Nawaf Obaid (a strategist in an interview given)

Hamas came to power ... as a result of democratic, legitimate elections and we must respect the choice of the Palestinian people. We have to look for solutions for the Palestinian people, for the international community, and also for Israel... We have never considered Hamas a terrorist organization.

Source: Vladimir Putin (President of Russia)

The Security Wall

Background Information

During the height of the Second Intifada (uprising), which lasted from 2000 to 2006, Palestinian suicide bombers travelled easily from the West Bank into Israel's main cities. Many Israeli citizens demanded that a security wall be built between the West Bank and Israel (since 1994, a similar barrier has surrounded the Gaza Strip). This wall would help protect Israeli citizens from Palestinian attacks. Construction of the wall started in 2002 and still continues to this day. Palestinians are opposed to the construction of the security wall for a variety of reasons.

Israeli Perspective

The security fence serves one purpose and one purpose only: to prevent terrorists from carrying out deadly attacks on Israeli civilians. Since the construction of the fence began, there has been a significant decrease in the number of attacks originating in Judea and Samaria... Suicide attacks have decreased by 100%. Shooting attacks have decreased by 93.5%... Overall Israeli casualties from Palestinian terror have significantly declined since the early 2000s:

Source: Israeli Defense Forces (IDF)

The Government of Israel has an obligation to defend its citizens against terrorism. This right of self-defense is anchored in international law. The anti-terrorist fence is an act of self-defense that saves lives. Until the Palestinians act to stop terrorism, Israel must take the necessary actions to protect itself.

Source: The Embassy of Israel in Dublin

Palestinian Perspective

The wall severely restricts Palestinian movement and access throughout the West Bank. It blocks the ability of some Palestinians to access their land and it also prevents access to key resources (such as water). This hurts the ability of Palestinian farmers to earn a living.

Source: Ban Ki Moon, former leader of the United Nations

The barrier negatively affects the lives of thousands of Palestinians. It separates Palestinian communities and families from one another. In some cases, it makes it very difficult for Palestinian workers to get to their jobs or for Palestinian children to travel to school. Because of the wall's construction, some Palestinians have lost their land. The United Nations declared the wall to be illegal.

Source: The Council for Arab-British Understanding (CAABU)

Water

Background Information

A cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the dispute over the water resources in the region. The climate of Israel/Palestine is mostly dry which makes access to water resources (rivers, underground wells, etc.) really important. Water is life, without water it is impossible to survive. An obstacle to peace is who gets access to the few water sources that are available. Obviously, both the Israelis and the Palestinians need and want to be able to control land where water is available.

The key question becomes: Do Israelis and Palestinians have equal access to water? The Palestinians accuse Israeli settlers of consuming as much as ten times more water per person than do Palestinians. Over 200 Palestinian communities in the West Bank claim that they are not connected to a water network.

Israeli Perspective

The Palestinians claim that the water consumption of the average Israeli is four times greater than that of the average Palestinian. However, this claim is not factually supported. In 1967, there was indeed a large gap in the consumption of water between Israelis and Palestinians. This gap, however, was reduced and there is barely any difference now. The statistics that the Palestinians use are inaccurate.

Source: Haim Gvirtzman (Science Professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

It comes back again and again: The lie that Israel is denying West Bank Palestinians water rights. Palestinians illegally tap into Israel's water lines. Also, the Palestinians waste water. Palestinian leaders refuse to negotiate over water resources. In reality, Israelis and Palestinians have mostly equal access to water.

Source: David M. Weinberg (from an article in the Jerusalem Post)

When Israel first gained control of the West Bank in 1967 (after the Six Day War), just four of the 708 Palestinian towns and villages could access running water. Now, 641 of those areas – and more than 96 percent of the Palestinian population – have access to running water. Israel has boosted the West Bank's access to water by building pipes that carry water. Israel provides 30 percent more water to the Palestinians than it agreed to in the peace process.

Source: The Israel Project (an educational organization)

Palestinians Perspective

The Middle East is one of the world's most water-stressed regions. It is therefore essential that water is shared equally. Since the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian land, Israel has completely controlled the water resources and deprived the Palestinians of access to a sufficient share of water. This is a violation of international law. Israel forces Palestinian communities to purchase water from Israeli companies at high prices. Israel uses approximately 86 percent of the available fresh water resources, leaving the Palestinian population with less than 14 percent of the water.

Source: The Palestinian Liberation Organization

In the 1967 Six Day War Israel gained control of the waters of the West Bank (including an important aquifer—water located underground). Heated arguments rage about the rights to the mountain aquifer. Israel takes about 80% of the aquifer's flow, leaving the Palestinians with 20%.

The Palestinians say they are prevented from using their own water resources by Israel's military. This forces Palestinians to buy water for Israel at high prices. Furthermore, Israel provides its citizens between three and five times more water than it gives to the Palestinians. This, Palestinians say, hurts Palestinian farmers.

Source: The BBC (September 2nd, 2010)

Dispute over Jerusalem

Background Information

The ancient city of Jerusalem is central to the religion of Israeli Jews and the religion of the Palestinians (most of whom are Muslim; however some Palestinians are Christian). This makes it the most emotional of all the issues in between Israelis and Palestinians. It is generally thought that Jerusalem is the most difficult problem to solve.

Jerusalem is holy for worshippers of Christianity, Islam and Judaism. The city is sacred for many millions of people. The heart of the dispute over Jerusalem is the Old City (East Jerusalem). It is there we find the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (sacred to Christians), the Western Wall (sacred to Jews) and the al-Aqsa Mosque/Dome of the Rock (sacred to Muslims).

The city of Jerusalem is seen as the national capital of both Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs. It was the central city in the Kingdom of Judah, and thus the only identifiable capital Jews have had in their history. Palestinians came to view Jerusalem as their capital because it was their commercial (trade) center and also their center of culture.

The international community does not technically recognize either Israeli or Palestinian control over any part of Jerusalem. In 1947, the United Nations decided that Jerusalem would be an international city; meaning that neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians would control it. Yet because of the conflicts that followed, Israel took over the city. Today, Jerusalem is controlled by Israel; however, most countries do not recognize Jerusalem as Israel's official capital city.

Israeli Perspective

Jerusalem should be considered the capital city of Israel. Israel has controlled Jerusalem since 1967. Since taking control over the city, Israel has ensured total religious freedom for Christians, Jews, and Muslims. It has respected the rights of all religious worshippers. Israel has earned the right to control Jerusalem.

Source: adapted from One Jerusalem

A united Jerusalem under exclusive Israeli control is the key to peace and security in the city. Israel maintains security and safety within the city. Without Israeli control of Jerusalem, it is possible that the city would become a place of violence and warfare.

Source: adapted from David M. Weinberg, Founding Vice President of Jerusalem Institute for Strategic Studies (JISS)

Palestinian Perspective

The Palestinian position is that Jerusalem should be the capital of the nation of Palestine. This does not mean that Palestine has to have control over all of Jerusalem. It would be possible to divide the city between Israel and Palestine."

Source: Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)

"From the Palestinian and my own personal point of view, East Jerusalem ought to become part - indeed, the capital- of the Palestinian nation..."

Source: Haig Khatchadourian, PhD, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Wisconsin

