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History Of Israeli Palestinian Conflict

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Introduction: A Century of Strife and Contention

The **history of Israeli Palestinian conflict** is one of the most intricate, enduring, and emotionally charged geopolitical struggles of the modern era. Rooted in competing nationalisms, religious significance, and territorial claims, this confrontation has shaped the lives of millions and influenced global politics for over a century. To understand the present-day reality in the Middle East, one must trace the long arc of events, narratives, and turning points that have defined the struggle between two peoples for the same piece of land.

This article provides a comprehensive, balanced overview of the **history of Israeli Palestinian conflict**, from its late 19th-century origins to the present day. We will explore the key milestones, the core issues at stake, and the failed attempts at peace, all while maintaining a focus on the human dimension of this prolonged dispute.

Origins in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries

The Rise of Nationalisms

The modern conflict did not emerge from ancient religious wars but rather from the rise of two distinct national movements in the late 1800s. The first was **Zionism**, the Jewish national movement that sought to establish a homeland for the Jewish people in their ancient historical land, Palestine. Persecution and antisemitism in Europe, most notably the pogroms in Russia and the Dreyfus Affair in France, fueled the Zionist dream. Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern political Zionism, convened the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897, declaring the aim of creating "a home for the Jewish people secured by public law."

Simultaneously, a nascent **Palestinian Arab national identity** was beginning to form. While part of the broader Arab world, the Arabic-speaking inhabitants of Palestine developed a distinct sense of community and opposition to the growing Zionist immigration. They saw Palestine as their ancestral home and viewed the influx of European Jews as a colonial threat. By the early 1900s, tensions over land purchases and immigration were already surfacing.

World War I and the Balfour Declaration

World War I dramatically altered the political landscape of the Middle East. The British Empire, fighting the Ottoman Empire, made conflicting promises to secure support. In the **Hussein-McMahon Correspondence** (1915-1916), Britain hinted at supporting Arab independence in exchange for an Arab revolt against the Ottomans. However, in 1917, the British government issued the **Balfour Declaration**, which stated its support for "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people."

In this declaration, Britain also pledged that "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine." The contradiction between promising the same land to both Arabs and Jews laid the groundwork for the ensuing conflict. After the war, the League of Nations granted Britain the **Mandate for Palestine** in 1922, effectively placing the region under British administration and

charging it with implementing the Balfour Declaration.

The British Mandate Period (1920–1948)

Increasing Tensions and Arab Revolt

During the British Mandate, Jewish immigration to Palestine increased significantly, particularly in the 1930s as Jews fled Nazi persecution in Europe. The Arab population, fearing dispossession, responded with growing resistance. Major violent outbreaks occurred in 1920, 1921, and 1929, including the Hebron massacre where 67 Jews were killed by Arab mobs.

The most significant Arab uprising was the **Great Arab Revolt** from 1936 to 1939. A general strike, boycotts, and armed attacks targeted both British authorities and the Jewish community. The British suppressed the revolt harshly, but it had lasting consequences. The British **Peel Commission** of 1937 proposed partition of Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state, which was accepted by Zionist leaders but rejected by Arab leaders who refused any division of the land.

The End of the Mandate and the UN Partition Plan

As World War II ended and the full horror of the Holocaust became known, international sympathy for the Zionist cause grew. The British, exhausted by war and unable to manage the conflict in Palestine, referred the issue to the newly formed United Nations. In November 1947, the UN General Assembly adopted **Resolution 181**, the Partition Plan for Palestine. It proposed dividing the land into a Jewish state, an Arab state, and an international zone for Jerusalem.

Jewish leaders accepted the plan, seeing it as international legitimacy for their state. Arab leaders and the Palestinian Arab population rejected it, arguing it was unjust and gave 55% of the land to the Jewish state, despite Jews owning only 7% of the land at the time. Violence erupted immediately between the communities.

The 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the Nakba

On May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion declared the establishment of the State of Israel. The following day, armies from Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq invaded, intent on destroying the new state. Against expectations, Israel not only survived but expanded its territory beyond the UN partition lines.

For Israelis, this war is celebrated as the **War of Independence**, a miraculous victory against overwhelming odds. For Palestinians, it is remembered as the **Nakba**, or "catastrophe." Approximately 700,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from their homes during the conflict. They became refugees in neighboring countries, the West Bank, and Gaza. The unresolved refugee issue remains one of the core points of contention in the conflict today. Israel captured significant territory, including western Galilee and the Negev, while Jordan took control of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and Egypt took Gaza. Jerusalem was divided between Israeli and Jordanian control.

The Six-Day War and Its Aftermath (1967)

A Transformative Turning Point

The **Six-Day War** of June 1967 was a pivotal moment in the **history of Israeli Palestinian conflict**. Facing threats and a blockade of its southern port of Eilat by Egypt, Israel launched a preemptive strike against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. In six days, Israel achieved a stunning military victory, capturing the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria.

The consequences were far-reaching. Israel now controlled all of historical Palestine, the entire city of Jerusalem, and significant Arab territory. This occupation placed over one million additional Palestinians under

Resolution 242, adopted by the UN Security Council in November 1967, called for the "withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict" in exchange for peace and recognition. The ambiguity of the phrase "territories" (whether it meant all or some) has been debated ever since.

The Rise of Palestinian Nationalism

After 1967, Palestinian nationalism surged. The **Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)**, founded in 1964, became the main representative of the Palestinian people. Under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, the PLO adopted armed struggle as a means to liberate Palestine. Groups like Fatah and later Hamas emerged, conducting attacks against Israeli targets. Israel responded with military incursions and occupation policies, including the establishment of settlements in the occupied territories, which are considered illegal under international law by most countries and the UN.

The Oslo Accords and the Peace Process (1990s)

A Glimmer of Hope

The 1990s brought renewed hope for a resolution. After the First Intifada (1987-1993), a sustained Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation, both sides recognized the need for a political solution. Secret negotiations in Oslo, Norway, led to the **Oslo Accords** of 1993. In a historic moment, Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin shook hands on the White House lawn. The accords established the **Palestinian Authority (PA)** and set a framework for a five-year interim period leading to a final status agreement.

The Oslo process was supposed to resolve the core final status issues: Jerusalem, refugees, borders, settlements, and security. However, the process stalled. Extremists on both sides worked to sabotage it. In 1995, an Israeli extremist assassinated Prime Minister Rabin. Palestinian suicide bombings by Hamas and other groups undermined Israeli trust. Continued Israeli settlement expansion in the West Bank enraged Palestinians. The **Camp David Summit** of 2000, hosted by US President Bill Clinton, failed to reach a final agreement, and the Second Intifada erupted shortly after.

The Second Intifada and Its Aftermath (2000–2005)

The **Second Intifada** (Al-Aqsa Intifada) was far more violent than the first. Palestinian suicide bombings targeted Israeli civilians in buses, cafés, and hotels, killing hundreds. Israel responded with massive military operations in Palestinian cities, including the use of tanks and airstrikes. The human toll was devastating: approximately 4,000 people died, the vast majority Palestinians.

In 2005, Israel unilaterally withdrew all its settlers and military forces from the Gaza Strip, an act seen by some as a step toward peace and by others as a way to entrench the occupation of the West Bank. Shortly after, the militant group **Hamas** won Palestinian legislative elections in 2006 and then took full control of Gaza in 2007 after a violent conflict with Fatah. This split created a divided Palestinian leadership: the PA in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza.

Recent Cycles of Violence and Diplomatic Stagnation

The Gaza Wars

Since Hamas took control, Gaza has been subjected to an Israeli-Egyptian blockade, severely restricting movement of people and goods. Hamas and other militant groups have fired thousands of rockets into southern Israel. Israel has launched several major military operations in Gaza, including Operation Cast Lead (2008-09), Operation Pillar of Defense (2012), and Operation Protective Edge (2014), causing widespread destruction and high casualties. The most recent and devastating war began on October 7, 2023, when Hamas launched an unprecedented attack on Israel, killing approximately 1,200 Israelis and taking over 240 hostages. Israel

responded with a massive military campaign in Gaza that has resulted in tens of thousands of Palestinian deaths and a catastrophic humanitarian crisis.

Current Status of Core Issues

The major obstacles to a two-state solution today remain:

- Borders and Territory: The pre-1967 lines (Green Line) remain the basis for negotiations, but Israeli settlements in the West Bank have expanded, making a contiguous Palestinian state increasingly difficult.
- Jerusalem: Both Israelis and Palestinians claim Jerusalem as their capital. The status of East Jerusalem, including the Old City and holy sites, is deeply contested.
- Refugees: There are approximately 5.9 million registered Palestinian refugees. Israel rejects the "right of return" for these refugees and their descendants, as it would alter the Jewish majority in Israel.
- Security: Israel demands demilitarization of a future Palestinian state and long-term security control in the Jordan Valley. Palestinians view this as a continuation of occupation.
- Settlements: The international community broadly considers Israeli settlements in the West Bank illegal. Over 700,000 Israeli settlers now live in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Conclusion: A Conflict Without Resolution?

The **history of Israeli Palestinian conflict**is a story of two peoples with legitimate historical and emotional ties to the same land, whose competing national aspirations have led to a century of violence, displacement, and mutual suffering. Countless attempts to resolve the conflict, from the Peel Commission to the Oslo Accords, have ultimately failed to produce a lasting peace. The core issues remain as intractable as ever, and the human cost continues to mount.

While a solution may seem distant, history shows that peace is possible when leaders on both sides demonstrate courage, compromise, and a genuine commitment to the well-being of their peoples. An equitable two-state solution, granting both Israelis and Palestinians self-determination and security, remains the most widely endorsed framework. However, the growing reality of a single entity controlling the entire land, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, with unequal rights for its inhabitants, raises profound questions about the future of democracy, justice, and peace in the region. Understanding the **history of Israeli Palestinian conflict**is not just an academic exercise; it is a necessary step toward building a more peaceful and just future for all who call this land home.

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