AN OVERVIEW OF THE ISRAEL/PALESTINE CONFLICT

For centuries there was no conflict. In the 19th century the land of Palestine was inhabited by a multicultural population – approximately 86 percent Muslim, 10 percent Christian, and 4 percent Jewish – living in peace.

Zionism

In the late 1800s, a group in Europe decided to colonize the land of Palestine. Known as Zionists, they represented an extremist (radical) minority of the Jewish population. Their goal was to create a Jewish homeland, and they considered locations in Africa and the Americas, before settling on Palestine.

At first, this immigration created no problems. However, more and more Zionists immigrated to Palestine with the wish of taking over the land for a Jewish state and the indigenous (native) population of Palestinians became increasingly alarmed. Eventually, fighting broke out. After the Holocaust, many more thousands of Jewish refugees immigrated to the land of Palestine in hopes of returning to their religious homeland. Conflict and violence increased between the Jewish refugees and the native Palestinians.

UN Partition Plan

Finally, in 1947, the United Nations decided to intervene (get involved). However, rather than sticking to the principle of “self-determination of peoples,” where the people themselves create their own state and form of government, the UN chose to go back to the old-fashioned strategy. In this strategy, an outside power decides for them and divides up other people’s land.

Under significant Zionist pressure, the UN recommended giving away 55% of Palestine to a Jewish state – despite the fact that Jews represented only about 30% of the total population, and owned less than 7% of the land. This was the plan that was put into place in Palestine.

1947-1949 War

While it is widely reported that the War of 1947 eventually included five Arab armies, less well known is the fact that throughout the war Zionist forces outnumbered all Arab and Palestinian combatants combined. Additionally, Arab armies did not invade Israel – almost all battles were fought on land that supposed to be part of the Palestinian state according the UN plan.
Finally, it is important to note that Arab armies entered the conflict only after Zionist forces had committed 16 massacres, including the horrific massacre of over 100 men, women, and children at Deir Yassin. Future Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, head of one of the Jewish terrorist groups, described this as "splendid," and stated: "As in Deir Yassin, so everywhere, we will attack and smite the enemy. God, God, Thou has chosen us for conquest." Zionist forces committed 33 civilian massacres total.

By the end of the war, Israel had conquered 78% of Palestine; almost one million Palestinians had been made refugees; over 500 towns and villages had been demolished; and a new map was drawn up, in which every city, river and hill received a new, Hebrew name, as all remainders of the Palestinian culture were to be erased. For decades Israel denied the existence of a Palestinian population, former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir once saying: “There was no such thing as Palestinians.”

**1967 War**

In 1967, Israel conquered even more land. Following the “Six Day War,” where Israeli forces launched a highly successful surprise attack on Egypt, Israel occupied the final 22% of Palestine that had avoided it in 1948 – the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Since, according to international law it is prohibited to get territory by war, these are occupied territories and do not belong to Israel. The Israeli forces also occupied parts of Egypt (now returned) and Syria (which remain under occupation).

**Current Conflict**

There are two primary issues at the center of this continuing conflict. First, the difficulty in maintaining a state that gives preferential treatment to only certain ethnic groups while neglected others causes instability in the region. The original population of what is now Israel was 96% Muslim and Christian, yet, these refugees are prohibited from returning to their homes in the self-described Jewish state (and those within Israel are subjected to government supported discrimination).

Second, Israel’s continued military occupation of the West Bank, and control over Gaza, are extremely oppressive (unfair, restraining), with Palestinians having little control over their lives. Thousands of Palestinian men, women, and children are held in Israeli prisons. Few of them have had a legitimate trial; Physical abuse and torture are common. Palestinian borders (even internal ones) are controlled by Israeli forces. Men, women, and children are strip searched; people are beaten; women in labor are prevented from reaching hospitals (at times resulting in death).

According to the Oslo Peace Accords of 1993, these territories were supposed to finally become a Palestinian state. However, after years of Israel continuing to take away land and conditions steadily worsening, the Palestinian population rebelled. This uprising, called the “Intifada” (Arabic for “shaking off”) began at the end of September 2000.

As the living situation for Palestinian refugees worsened, radical Arab groups started to form to resist the Israeli occupation. Two of these groups, Hamas and Hezbollah, are viewed by Israelis as terrorist groups but the groups are viewed as heroes by the Arab Palestinians. Hamas and Hezbollah wage jihad (holy war) against the Jews by using suicide bombers and other terror attacks to deter (scare) the Israelis and gain back their native land.

**U.S. Involvement**

Largely due to special-interest lobbying (promoting), U.S. taxpayers give Israel an average of $8 million per day, and since its creation have given more U.S. funds to Israel than to any other nations. The United States supports the state of Israel.