

## CLOSE ALLIES: AUSTRALIA AND ISRAEL

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CONFLICT



### OVERVIEW

The modern-day conflict between Israel and Palestine extends to the creation of Israel in 1948.

Prior to this, Muslims, Christians and Jews had lived alongside one another for centuries under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there were growing calls for Palestinian independence. In 1914 the population was 84% Muslim, 11% Christian and 6% Jewish.

During WWI, Britain pledged to support independence for the people of the wider region in return for them rebelling against the Ottomans. However, they had secretly agreed to divide the area between Britain and France, at the same time promising to establish a national home for Jewish people in the area.

Britain occupied Palestine in 1917, remaining until 1948. In 1947 Britain approached the Western-dominated UN to determine Palestine's future. In an area where the Jewish population made up a third of residents, the report recommended creating a Jewish state on 56% of the land. The Arab and Palestinian delegates refused to accept the planned partition of their homeland, but in 1948 Israel was established unilaterally.

By 1949, over 700,000 Palestinians had fled or been expelled from their homes. They became refugees in traditional Palestinian homelands of Gaza or the West Bank, administered by Egypt and Jordan respectively, or further afield in Lebanon, Syria and other nations. Palestinians refer to this period as Al Nakba, (literally: the Catastrophe/Disaster/Cataclysm) which is commemorated annually on 15 May.

Another key period is the Six Day War (or Third Arab—Israeli War), 5-10 June 1967, between Israel and Egypt (then the United Arab Republic), Jordan & Syria. It commenced when the Israeli government launched strikes against Egyptian airfields in response to Egyptian military mobilisation along the border. At the end of the six days, Israel had occupied the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), Gaza, the Sinai Peninsula area of Egypt, and the Golan Heights area of Syria. Over 300,000 Palestinians fled the West Bank and became refugees, predominantly in Jordan.

On 22 November 1967, the United Nations Security Council passed resolution 242, which set out a "land for peace" formula. It called on Israel to withdraw from all

Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), and recognised the rights of "every state in the area to live in peace within secure and recognised boundaries free from threats or acts of force."

The Sinai was returned to Egypt in 1978, following the Camp David Accords. Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005, though still maintains a military blockade of the area. Both the West Bank and the Golan Heights remain under military occupation by Israel to this day, contravening international law<sup>1</sup>.

For over 60 years, Palestinians have been denied the right to self-determination and statehood. Those Palestinians who remained in what is today the state of Israel, also face discrimination and are second-class citizens.

### ROADBLOCKS TO PEACE: THE ILLEGAL SETTLEMENTS

The Israeli government has operated a formal policy of evictions, home demolitions and land-grabs since 1967. Today there are over 350,000<sup>2</sup> Israeli colonists living in what are referred to by international law as "settlements" across the West Bank.

The number of colonisers on Palestinian land has more than tripled since the Oslo Peace process began. These colonies breach UN Security Council Resolution 465, which calls for their dismantling, yet a number of them are the size of cities. The Israeli-only roads, farming land and universities push Palestinians off their land, out of their homes and into isolated and increasingly impoverished urban centres.

With their own livelihoods gone, many Palestinians have little option but to take low-paying jobs, like in manufacturing or agriculture, servicing the lifestyles of their colonisers.

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## GAZA

The Israeli government removed its military and the colonies from Gaza in 2005, following the Second Intifada. However, Israel is still regarded as an occupying force by the UN and other international organisations, because Israel controls the movement of people in or out of Gaza by land, air or by sea and monitors the often closed border that Gaza has with Egypt.

The Israeli blockade, extreme trade restrictions, and large-scale military incursions in 2008/9, 2012 and 2014 have crippled the economy<sup>3</sup> of Gaza and left its people impoverished. The water table beneath Gaza has cracked and now seawater and sewerage pollute the local water supply.

Around 1.1 million of Gaza's 1.7 million people are Palestinian refugees from 1948, 1967 or other conflicts. Over 80 per cent of the population require daily assistance from the UN or other international organisations to survive.

## THE SEPARATION WALL

In 2000 the Israeli government began constructing a barrier along and within the West Bank, which in urban areas is an eight metre high concrete wall. Only 20 per cent of the Wall is on the UN mandated 1967 Green Line and on completion the Wall will completely annex and isolate around 8.5% of the West Bank.

The Wall annexes illegal colonies, aquifers, agricultural land and completely encircles Palestinian towns like Bethlehem. It violates<sup>4</sup> the Geneva Convention, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The creation of this artificial border has not only undermined peace negotiations, Palestinians who live near the wall have their movement and livelihoods severely restricted. Many villagers have been cut off from their agricultural land, others are now unable to commute to the state of Israel for work.

## PALESTINIAN REFUGEES

Palestinian refugees are the largest<sup>5</sup> displaced people in the world, living predominantly in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, often in sub-standard conditions.

The "Right of Return" for Palestinian refugees is a constant sticking point in peace negotiations. Of the estimated 11 million Palestinians worldwide, approximately five million are refugees under the care of the UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency) - a UN body created specifically for Palestinian refugees.

The Six-Day War, Gulf War and the current Syrian crisis have made even more Palestinians refugees<sup>6</sup>.

## JERUSALEM

The Holy City is significant for three of the world's major religions. In 1967 the UN mandated that Jerusalem should be governed jointly by Israel and Palestine. However, Israel's Apartheid Wall completely separates East Jerusalem from the West Bank, isolating Palestinians on both sides of the Wall.

Home demolitions and evictions of Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem are also common. It is estimated that over 2,000 Israeli settlers have moved into Palestinian properties in East Jerusalem, following evictions or demolitions.



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