The International Relations of the Middle East since 1945

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When and why did the Arab- Israel conflict become the Palestinian- Israeli conflict?

# *Introduction*

The conflict between Israeli and Palestine date back to the later years of the nineteenth century. This time marks the start of conflict primarily for the purpose of territory. This conflict has threads attached to the Arab- Israel war of 1948. At the end of war in 1948, the land was parted in three ways. The new territorial distribution included the state of Israel, the West Bank, and the strip of Gaza. The minor wars after this major conflict created little changes until the Yom Kippur war of October 1973. This war concluded with the Camp David Accord of 1979. This accord bounded Egypt and Israel into a peace agreement[[1]](#footnote-1). After dispute settlement between Israel, Egypt, and Syria, there have been minor conflicts in the region which exists till date.

After Camp David accords, major conflict over the territory was resolved, but the region experienced an upsurge in minor conflicts and in Palestinian revolts. The first major uprising ‘Intifada’ befell in 1987[[2]](#footnote-2). The Intifada was a rebellion by hundreds and thousands of suppressed Palestinians. These Palestinians comprised of the population from West Bank and the strip of Gaza. The first Intifada came to a peaceful resolution with the signing of Oslo accords. These accords established the framework of self-governance for Palestinians and established working bilateral relations between Israel- as state and Palestinians (which later known as the Palestinian authority). With the settlement of a dispute in the Oslo Accords, Palestinian still believed that their grievances are not rightly addressed. It paved the way for second Intifada in 2000, which was much bloodier, compared to first Intifada[[3]](#footnote-3).

After immense violence and bloodshed, the Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas in 2015 announced his with drawl from the Oslo accords. Before this, United States wanted to revive the 1993 accords, but all went in vain when Hamas and Fatah established a joint government[[4]](#footnote-4). The peace process, however, got jolts from time to time which concluded with signing of a final agreement in October of 2017. President Donald J. Trump has- made achieving a resolution of this bilateral conflict- a priority of his administration but still a final peace formula is yet in making. Considering the developments mentioned above, this essay aims at analyzing the development which changed the Arab- Israel conflict into Israel- Palestinian conflict.

# *The Arab- Israel conflict*

The Arab- Israel conflict is a broad term referred to the political tensions, several military stand-ups and territorial clashes between Israel and the Arabs of the region. Both Arabs and Israel are inhabited on the region from centuries. They reflect cultural similarities, political strength, and alike cultural settings. However, despite such convergences, there is conflict and disagreement between both societies. The historical roots of this conflict can be traced from the rise of Zionism. The rise of Zionism conflicted with the Arab nationalism during the later decades of the nineteenth century. The Arabs and Israelis shared discords throughout but clashed for the first time in 1920. This issue started from the territorial claims, both Arabs and Israelis claim the authority of similar geographical territory, they believe belong to their ancestors. Territory claimed by the Jewish currently belong to Arabs in most parts of the Middle Eastern region. In the Pan- Islamic milieu, Arabs call this as Muslim lands.

Since the time went on the Arab- Israel conflict took over the form of sectarian conflict. This sectarian conflict resulted in an upscale civil war in the year 1947. This sectarian conflict coupled with political tensions resulted in the first Arab- Israel war of 1948. This Arab- Israel war paved the way for Israel’s independence, as during the end of the conflict the Israelis announced their declaration of Independence. This conflict kept on igniting, which resulted in many small and major conflicts. The major conflict was formally concluded with the signing of the Peace accords or in some cases in the form of ceasefire agreements. The first of its kind, pace agreement brought Israel and Egypt on the same page in 1979. As a result of this bilateral agreement, Israel withdrew its forces from Sinai Peninsula and abolished the military authority from the West Bank and the strip of Gaza[[5]](#footnote-5).

After the signing of a peace accord between Egypt and Israel, Israel unilaterally annexed the Golan Heights and Jerusalem from its eastern side. Other than political and geographical reason, the Arab Israel conflict is largely based on religious differences. Muslims believe that Israeli or Jewish is a great threat to Islam, citing much historical reason for this. Similarly while signing many peace accords, both sides have invoked religious arguments. It is the reason that many experts believe that the current rift between Arabs and Israelis is much influenced by both sides’ religious affiliations[[6]](#footnote-6). For Muslim, the area under Israeli occupation holds significant importance. They refer to the land under Israeli control as ‘Promised land’. Israelis on other hand believe that the land of Cannon according to their Hebrew Bible was promised to the people of Israel. Likewise, Muslims cite certain verses of the Quran to substantiate their argument about the ‘Chosen land’.

The religious discords are not limited to the religious beliefs, rather both side has various time presented references from the divine books to claim their geographical territories. For example, Jewish people claim, that the land of Israel was promised to the descendants of Abraham’s grandson Jacob. Whereas, contrary to the Jewish claims, Muslim offer another interpretation of this phenomena. They claim that the land of Israel was not promised to Jacob, but Ishmael, the elder son of Abraham. Also, contrary to their claim over complete territory of Israel, Muslims put forward their allegiance specific to some places. For examples, Al- Aqsa mosque, cave of Patriarchs and the Temple Mount. For Muslims, these places hold considerable importance. In the religious row between Muslims and Jews, the Christian Zionist place their weight toward the Israeli claims. Hence, the history of Arab- Israeli conflict suggests that this dispute has certain reasons which along political disputes involve history and religious aspect[[7]](#footnote-7).

# *Stirring influences in regional dispute*

There are many international experts on geography and political relations who believe that the nature of Arab- Israel conflict has squeezed[[8]](#footnote-8). They cite various reason for this. For example, some believe that Israel’s astonishing advancement in technology and military and its political influence has left Arabs with no option other than to maintain cordial relations with Israel. Similarly, some Arab states enjoy warm relations with the United States, which again compels the, to extend peaceful If not cordial relations with Israel. Along with this, the political, geostrategic and geographical developments throughout the Middle East has gone against the Muslim states[[9]](#footnote-9). The war on terror specifically has left these Arab countries with no option other than to maintain an environment which suits a gradual development in the region, since many of them are war-torn. With the time, the Arab countries of the Middle East have also involved themselves I proxy wars against each other. For such reasons some experts even argue that the concept of ‘United Muslim brotherhood’ has shattered into pieces.

In addition to this, the nature of the conflict has also shifted throughout the years. At present, the large scale conflict has reduced to Israel- Palestinian conflict. The Israel- Palestinian conflict reached to the heights during the Lebanon war. Experts of the Middle East argue that at this very time, the conflict between Arabs and Israelis took over the form of Palestinian- Israel conflict[[10]](#footnote-10). It took a turn when the Oslo accords turned down the efforts of Palestinians to rise for themselves. Such Intifada related efforts resulted in the creation of Palestinian National Authority in 1984. It came into being as part of the peace process which was aimed at establishing a long-lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. With the creation of Palestinian authority, Jordan came close to Israel, and a peace agreement was agreed by both sides. Very soon after the peace accord between Israel and Jordan, Syria and Lebanon signed the cease-fire agreement with Israel.

Regardless of the peace agreement with many Muslim states of the Middle East, the peace accords between the Organization of Islamic countries (OIC) and Israel remained far from happening. Both these entities shared heightened discords on the pressing issues of Middle East. Many, however, believe that during the mid- 2000s the Arab league and Israel came some close. With the start of the Syrian civil war, the situation in Middle East changed too much extent. Since many developments of the war were taking place close to the border of Israel, therefore, Hezbollah, Syrian opposition, Iran and Syrian Arab republic came eye to eye with each other. In the strip of Gaza, the major conflict was taking place between Israel and Hamas[[11]](#footnote-11). When in 2017, an informal coalition was built against Iran, it further improved the relations of Muslim states of Middle East with Israel. This is how Palestine was left alone, as it shares the geographical proximity with Israel, and Arab- Israel conflict became the Palestinian- Israel conflict.

# *The Palestinian- Israel conflict*

The Palestinian- Israel conflict has remained in the limelight of the world affairs from centuries. One of the most pressing causes of this conflict is the distrust both entities share toward each other. The Middle Eastern experts believe that political rhetoric, unilateral and hardcore strategies and incitement of violence has long brewed this conflict [[12]](#footnote-12). In addition to the ongoing rivalry, this dispute has put on stake the stability of the entire region. The people of Palestine support Hamas considerably, whereas Hamas openly voice for the abolishment of the Israeli state. For such reason, Israel considers Hamas a grave threat to its sovereignty and survivability. Many Israelis on other hand consider themselves vulnerable to Hamas. For many Israelis, security is the primary concern. Palestinian on others had accused Israel of demographic changes along the Palestinian border. Palestinians believe that since Israel is changing the demography and is increasing its settlement, therefore it is by no means interested in reaching a peace accord. Following are some pressing aspects of the Palestinian- Israel conflict[[13]](#footnote-13).

## *Holy sites*

Both sides share a concern about each other’s holy sites which are in possession of the opposite sides. Israelis have long been denied to visit their holy sites under Palestinian control. Similarly, Israelis have barred the entrance of Palestinian to the Holy sites. Western Wall has been closed by the Muslim inhabitants, and no Jew from whatsoever region of the world he belongs to is not allowed to visit the holy site[[14]](#footnote-14). The Mount of Olives and the Jewish cemetery is also under the control of Palestinians and they do not permit any Jew to visit these sites. Correspondingly, from 1975 and onwards Israel has closed the Joseph’s Tomb for Muslims of the region[[15]](#footnote-15). However, interestingly, Israel has left the total control of ‘Waqf’ at the Temple Mount to Muslims.

## *Israel’s security concerns*

All through the conflict between Israel and Palestine, Israel has voiced its security concern from time to time. It has categorized Hamas as a terrorist organization and has voiced its concern in front of the European Union, America and the United Nations. Israel believes that diverse motivations are behind Hamas which has also voice openly for the demolition of Israeli state. Hamas however, on other hand believe that it is their religious duty ‘Jihad’ to protect their land and free themselves from the illegal occupation of Israelis. Palestinian organizations have also resorted to using terrorism means to further their goals.

## *Refugees*

Refugees are Palestinian people who lost their lands in many wars and conflicts. At present these refugees are living in West Bank, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon[[16]](#footnote-16). Since they are the descendants of the people who migrated long before to these areas, therefore, Palestinian authorities claim that they must be allowed to migrate to their original places which are under the control of Israel.

## *Jerusalem*

Jerusalem is the holiest site on earth. It holds much significance for the people from Abrahamic religions like Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. In the present time, it holds significant political importance, since Israel's political institutions are built here[[17]](#footnote-17). Although many countries of the world do not recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, still it remains of prime importance. Palestinians concerns are based purely on religious basis, and for such reason they demand that Jerusalem must be brought in their control[[18]](#footnote-18). However, Israel has manifested considerable control throughout the length and breadth of the city.

These are some issues which have kept the issue of Palestine- Israel conflict alive. These issues are also the reasons that a much general conflict has stranded between Palestinians and Israelis.

End Notes:

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2. Jones, 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology*, vol. 4 (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. L. Carl Brown, *Diplomacy in the Middle East: The International Relations of Regional and Outside Powers* (IB Tauris, 2003), 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Louise Fawcett, *International Relations of the Middle East* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations*, 4:69. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Fawcett, *International Relations of the Middle East*, 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. James L. Gelvin, *The New Middle East: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Gelvin, 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
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11. Yapp, 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Fuad Baali, *Arab Unity and Disunity: Past and Present* (United Nations Publications, 2004), 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Baali, 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Monte Palmer, *The Politics of the Middle East* (Thomson, Wadsworth, 2007), 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
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16. William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (Routledge, 2018), 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Reinhard Schulze, *A Modern History of the Islamic World* (NYU Press, 2002), 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Schulze, 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)