

Forum:	Security Council (SC)
Issue:	The situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank
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Positions:	President, Deputy President

Introduction

The Gaza Strip and the West Bank is one of the longest and most complex conflicts in the modern world⁹. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has lasted over seventy years, creating a variety of political, social and humanitarian challenges ever since. Despite international efforts, including United Nations resolutions, peace talks and regional agreements, conflict currently persists and the tension frequently turns into violence.

The Gaza Strip has been controlled by Hamas since 2007¹⁶ and faces escalations between Israeli and Palestinian forces, leading to civilian casualties and damage to infrastructure. The West Bank, under (partial) control by Israel and the Palestinian Authority, also experiences disputes related to living conditions, military presence, and lack of human rights³².

The Security Council must maintain international peace and security, making this issue relevant. Member States should consider the security implications for the region, as well as the broader international consequences of the conflict. It is important to remember that past attempts to resolve the crisis, such as the Oslo Accords, have not worked well⁹.

Key Terms

Gaza Strip

A narrow piece of territory along the Mediterranean coast⁵, with a population of roughly 2.1 million Palestinians³. It has been under Hamas control since 2007¹⁶ and is currently subject to an Israeli-Egyptian blockade¹⁸.

West Bank

A landlocked territory east of Israel and west of Jordan, with approximately 4 million Palestinian inhabitants³². It is partially governed by the Palestinian Authority but heavily affected by the multiple Israeli settlements and military presence.

Hammas

A Palestinian-Islamist political and militant resistance organization that seized control of Gaza in 2007 and is a key party in the ongoing conflict⁶. It is considered a terrorist organization by Israel, the United States, and the European Union, among other UN members.

Palestinian Authority (PA)

The interim self-government body established in 1994 under the Oslo Accords³¹. It currently exercises limited control over parts of the West Bank but has no control in Gaza¹¹.

Settlements

Israeli civilian communities built on occupied Palestinian land in the West Bank³⁵. Their legality is disputed, with most states considering them a violation of international law²⁰.

Oslo Accords

Agreements between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) signed in the 1990s, with the intention of achieving a peace process and a two-state solution²³.

Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO):

Founded in 1964, the PLO has been recognized internationally as the representative of the Palestinian people²⁴. Unlike Hamas, it is not considered a terrorist group by the UN.

Background

This conflict initially began around the early 20th century with disputes over land and competing national movements¹⁰. Following the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and subsequent wars, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were displaced¹⁵. The 1967 Six-Day War resulted in Israel occupying the Gaza Strip and West Bank²⁵.

Peace Efforts and the Oslo Accords

The Oslo Accords in the 1990s were the most significant attempt at peace²³. They created the Palestinian Authority, (PA) the group for potential Palestinian statehood. However, disagreements over final borders, the status of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements, and the right of return for Palestinian refugees have stalled progress and nullified them²⁰.

The Situation in Gaza

In Gaza, the situation worsened after Hamas took control in 2007¹⁶. Since then, multiple rounds of conflict have occurred between Hamas and Israel¹³. The blockade by Israel and Egypt, has had devastating effects on Gaza. Electricity shortages, lack of clean water, and high unemployment persist, making the territory nearly unlivable for residents⁷.

The West Bank

The West Bank is a different but equally challenging issue. Israeli settlements have grown despite international criticism³², and conflicts between their settlers and Palestinians

occur frequently. The PA has partial authority, but Israeli military presence and checkpoints create restrictions on movement². This has weakened confidence in the two state solution³⁶.

Humanitarian Conditions

The humanitarian situation in Gaza and the West Bank is weak. UN agencies have identified shortages of food, medicine, and fuel, especially in Gaza, which is worsened by restrictions on movement and access to said resources⁷. This has compromised the human rights of millions, and contributed to the estimated death toll of around 62 thousand¹.

Regional and International Mediation

While regional parties such as Egypt¹⁹, Jordan³⁴, and Qatar²⁸ have tried mediating, the initial disagreement has still not been resolved. This shows that while diplomatic efforts have been made, the conflict is far from reaching a lasting solution.

Major Parties and Organisations Involved

Israel

The primary state actor in the conflict, having military and political authority over the West Bank and enforcing the blockade on Gaza²². Israel views Hamas as a major security threat and has repeatedly launched military operations in Gaza. Around 700,000 Israeli settlers currently live in the West Bank, adding to tensions with Palestinians¹⁷.

Palestinian Authority (PA)

The governing body in parts of the West Bank, and recognized internationally as the only official representative of Palestine¹¹. However, the PA has limited power and struggles to maintain its legitimacy due to internal conflicts with Hamas.

Hamas

The de facto ruler of Gaza⁶, engages frequently in armed conflict with Israel. Hamas is hostile to Israel's existence and rejects many previous peace agreements⁶.

Egypt

Egypt is a mediator, controlling the southern Rafah border crossing with Gaza¹⁹. Egypt has helped in organising ceasefires, although it also enforces restrictions on Gaza¹⁹.

Jordan

With a large Palestinian population nearing 2.4 million refugees³⁴, Jordan is relevant in the peace discussions. It also has a custodial role over Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem²¹.

United States

A historical ally of Israel, which formally supporting the two-state solution²⁶. US involvement has changed many aspects of negotiations, but is criticized for bias.

United Nations

Through the Security Council²⁷, General Assembly, and agencies like UNRWA, the UN has been involved in finding solutions to basic human needs and advocating for peace³³.

Timeline

The Israel-Palestine conflict is one of the longest-running and most complex disputes in modern history, deeply rooted in territorial, political, and religious issues. Key events include:

1917: The Balfour Declaration, in which Britain expressed support for a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine, set the stage for Jewish-Arab tensions (Al Jazeera).

1947: The United Nations proposed a partition plan dividing Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. The plan was accepted by Jews but rejected by Arab states and Palestinian leaders, leading to violence (CFR Education).

1948: The establishment of Israel triggered the first Arab-Israeli war. Thousands of Palestinians were displaced, and many fled to neighboring countries or into the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which were controlled by Jordan and Egypt, respectively (State Department; Britannica).

1967: In the Six-Day War, Israel defeated the Arab states and occupied the Gaza Strip, West Bank (including East Jerusalem), and other territories. This marked the beginning of Israeli military control over Palestinian areas (United Nations; AJC).

1978-1979: The Camp David Accords led to peace between Israel and Egypt, with the promise of Palestinian self-rule, but the peace did not extend to the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Israel Ed; UN).

1993-1995: The Oslo Accords were signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), leading to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA). The accords included provisions for a gradual process of Israeli withdrawal from parts of the West Bank and Gaza, but the deal failed to address key issues like the status of Jerusalem, refugees, and borders (Wikipedia; Oslo Accords).

2000-2005: The Second Intifada (Palestinian Uprising) erupted after the failure of the Camp David Summit and continued peace talks. The violence led to widespread casualties and the construction of the Israeli West Bank Barrier (UN; UNISPAL).

2007: After Hamas won the Palestinian legislative elections, it took control of the Gaza Strip, leading to a political split between Hamas in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. This division hindered efforts to achieve unity (UNISPAL; UN History).

2014: The Gaza War (Operation Protective Edge) saw a major escalation in violence between Hamas and Israel, with over 2,100 Palestinians killed and more than 70 Israelis. The war exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in Gaza (CFR; BBC).

2018-2019: The “Great March of Return” protests, led by Palestinian residents of Gaza, were met with violent responses from Israeli forces, resulting in significant casualties. These

protests demanded the right of return for Palestinian refugees and an end to the blockade on Gaza (Al Jazeera; Gaza conflict timeline).

2021: A new round of violence erupted after tensions in East Jerusalem, including clashes at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the eviction of Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah. This escalated into an 11-day conflict between Hamas and Israel, resulting in more than 250 Palestinian deaths and over 10 Israeli deaths. The international community condemned the violence but failed to broker a long-term ceasefire (CFR; Reuters).

Relevant Treaties

The Oslo Accords (1993-1995): The Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO established the Palestinian Authority (PA), granting limited Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza, and initiated a process for resolving final-status issues (like Jerusalem, refugees, and borders). Though initially hailed as a step toward peace, the process was undermined by subsequent events, including increased settlement activity and the failure to address key issues (Oslo Accords; Wikipedia).

The Camp David Accords (1978): While the main focus of the accords was Israeli-Egyptian peace, they also addressed the Palestinian issue. The accords proposed the establishment of autonomy for Palestinians, but implementation was slow, and issues such as the status of Jerusalem remained unresolved (Israel Ed; Camp David Accords).

The Quartet Roadmap for Peace (2003): This plan, initiated by the US, EU, Russia, and the United Nations (the “Quartet”), called for a two-state solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace. However, the plan faltered due to lack of political will, violence, and the failure to address Palestinian internal divisions (Oslo Accords; UNISPAL).

United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 (1967): This resolution calls for Israel to withdraw from territories occupied during the conflict (including West Bank and Gaza) and for recognition of all states in the region’s right to live in peace. This is a foundational document for international solution sets, but implementation has been stalled by ongoing violence and disagreements over borders (United Nations; Strickert).

The Arab Peace Initiative (2002): Proposed by Saudi Arabia, this initiative offered Israel full diplomatic relations with the Arab world in exchange for a full Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories and the establishment of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. While the initiative has been endorsed by Arab League members, Israel has not fully accepted its terms (UNISPAL; Washington Jewish Week).

Previous Solutions

Over the decades, numerous solutions and proposals have been offered, but none have succeeded in achieving a lasting peace. Some of the most prominent attempts include:

The Oslo Accords (1993-1995): The Oslo process was the first direct negotiation between Israel and the PLO. The accords resulted in the creation of the Palestinian Authority and Israeli withdrawal from parts of the West Bank and Gaza. While hailed as a breakthrough, the accords failed to resolve critical issues such as the status of Jerusalem, the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank. These unresolved issues led to the eventual breakdown of the peace process (Oslo Accords; CFR).

The Camp David Summit (2000): U.S. President Bill Clinton brokered negotiations between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. The summit aimed to reach a final-status agreement, but it failed due to disagreements over the status of Jerusalem, borders, and refugees. The failure of these talks was followed by the outbreak of the Second Intifada (CFR; UNISPAL).

The Gaza Disengagement Plan (2005): Unilaterally implemented by Israel, this plan saw the withdrawal of Israeli settlers and military forces from the Gaza Strip. While it aimed to improve security and reduce tensions, the move did not address the broader issues of Palestinian sovereignty or the blockade on Gaza. Furthermore, after Hamas took control of Gaza in 2007, violence escalated between Israel and Gaza-based militant groups (UNISPAL; UN History).

The Quartet's Roadmap (2003): Proposed by the U.S., EU, Russia, and the UN, this plan called for the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. However, it failed due to violence, lack of political will from both sides, and internal Palestinian divisions between the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and the Hamas-led government in Gaza (Oslo Accords; UNISPAL).

International Mediation Efforts: The United Nations, the U.S., and other international bodies have consistently called for a two-state solution and criticized Israeli settlement activity and Palestinian militant violence. However, the lack of enforcement mechanisms and the deep divisions between the parties have prevented meaningful progress (UNISPAL; CFR).

Possible Solutions

Despite the challenges, several potential solutions could move the situation toward peace:

A Two-State Solution: The Two-State Solution, the most widely supported framework, envisions an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. It requires significant compromises: establishing a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders (with mutually agreed land swaps), recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of both (potentially with international

oversight for religious sites), and addressing Palestinian refugees through resettlement, compensation, or limited return. Its feasibility is hindered by Israel's expanding settlements in the West Bank and divisions within the Palestinian leadership (Strickert; Washington Jewish Week).

Internationalization of Jerusalem: Given the religious significance of Jerusalem to Jews, Muslims, and Christians, one potential solution is to internationalize the city. This could involve shared governance of Jerusalem under UN auspices, ensuring access to religious sites for all faiths. However, this proposal faces resistance from both Israeli and Palestinian nationalists (CFR; UNISPAL).

End of the Gaza Blockade: One potential solution is the lifting of the Israeli blockade on Gaza in exchange for a ceasefire and disarmament agreement with Hamas. This would require international monitoring to ensure that weapons do not enter Gaza and that humanitarian aid is not used to fund militant activities (UNISPAL; UN History).

Regional Cooperation: Another solution could involve fostering broader regional cooperation between Israel and its Arab neighbors, as outlined in the Arab Peace Initiative. This could lead to the normalization of relations between Israel and Arab states, incentivizing both Israel and Palestine to reach a comprehensive peace agreement (Washington Jewish Week; UNISPAL).

International Pressure and Sanctions: The UN and other international bodies could exert more pressure on both sides to comply with international law, including demanding an end to Israeli settlement expansion and Palestinian militant attacks. Sanctions or incentives could be used to encourage both parties to engage in meaningful negotiations (UNISPAL; CFR).

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Map of the Gaza Strip and West Bank source Wikimedia commons 2007

