The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Its Origin and Potential Solutions

Lindy Pokorny

Government 12 CC Block 5

Dr. Joyner

1 June 2017

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is infamous for being one of the most intricate, longstanding, and confusing diplomatic ongoings in modern politics. With such a long and convoluted history, it's not hard to understand why. Peace negotiations have been made more difficult by the continuous violence within the region, settlements built on opposing territory, refugees that should be allowed by international law to return to their homes, opposing religious claims to the area, and so on. This has made some– especially those who don't fully understand the conflict– believe that peace is impossible. Peace between Israel and Palestine is possible, and it can be achieved by uniting the Palestinian people, initiating a formal cease-fire, freezing the settlement of Jewish people in the West Bank and other Palestinian territories, and implementing a two state solution.

The creation of a Jewish state started over a hundred years ago. Zionism, the belief that Judaism is a nationality as well as a religion and that Jewish people have a right to their ancestral homeland, starting gaining popularity in the 19th century. In 1917, the United States supported the Balfour Declaration, which endorsed the creation of a Jewish national homeland in Palestine. Over the years, more and more Jewish people immigrated to the area, and as early as 1942 the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Palestine) had begun appealing to the US for their support of an official state. President Truman officially announced his support of the establishment of a Jewish state in May of 1946. The United Nations Special Commission on Palestine advised that Palestine be split into two separate Jewish and Arab states, with Jerusalem remaining a corpus separatum (under international control due to its shared religious importance). On November 29, 1947, the UN adopted Resolution 181, commonly known as the Partition Resolution, officially creating two independent states in Palestine.

Since this resolution, there has been universal controversy surrounding the issue. The UN plan was met with resistance, particularly from Arabs, and multiple wars ensued over whose territory was rightfully whose. This is primarily what established the borders we recognize today, although they are still somewhat unclear (hence much of the controversy). For instance, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank have changed hands many times, and are now largely occupied and governed by Arabs: an Islamist extremist group known as Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian National Authority in the West Bank. Peace has been unattainable in the region for a variety of reasons. For one, the continued building of Jewish settlements in Palestinian territory (like the West Bank) angers Arabs and leads them to believe that Israel is actively trying to destroy the possibility of a Palestinian state. Israel is skeptical that any kind of peace agreement will stick, due primarily to the structure of the Palestinian government. Fatah, the secular nationalist political party that largely controls Palestinian politics, runs the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which conducts peace talks on behalf of Palestine and controls the Palestinian National Authority (which governs the West Bank). However, the PLO has no real power over Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, and all attempts of uniting Hamas and the rest of the Palestinian state have eventually failed. Therefore, Israel has no reason to believe that any agreement they make with the PLO will be upheld in the Gaza Strip, making peace talks effectively useless in their eyes. The Israeli government is simple by comparison: a democratic system not entirely unlike America's. Today, in the United Nations, Palestine holds the title of a non-member observer state, while Israel has membership as a "peace loving country."

The conflict has spilled out of the region into neighboring countries like Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, with many others participating in peace efforts; even countries outside of the middle east, like France, Russia, Norway, and the US actively support negotiation. The US has been a vocal

supporter of Israel for some time now, maintaining strong diplomatic ties with the state. Israel consistently votes with the US at the UN, and allows the US to establish military bases on their territory. There is also a free trade agreement between the two. In general, the US has interests in the middle east because of oil trade, anti-terrorism (the US does consider Hamas to be a terrorist group, in particular), etc. The conflict between Israel and Palestine endangers these interests, hence the US belief that creating a resolution is in their best interest.

The US's support of Israel is useful, but not necessarily essential. While the benefits of close diplomatic ties are apparent, it's been taken to a bit of an extreme. For instance, the US should be able to publicly condemn Israel's refusal to stop building settlements on Palestinian land, which clearly hinders peace efforts. The blind support of Israel may be doing more harm than good– which is not to say that supporting Israel is harmful, simply that supporting it without question is. However, this does put the US is in a prime position to help facilitate a peace negotiation between Israel and Palestine.

Peace negotiations should begin with uniting the Palestinian people. Before even considering a one or two state solution– or any kind of solution, for that matter– there needs to be two distinct entities responsible for peace talks. Therefore, the first negotiation needs to be between the Palestinian Liberation Organization and Hamas. Once there is a stable agreement between them, discussion with Israel can begin. That discussion begins with a formal cease-fire; despite the fact that the states are not technically at war, that does not make it a peaceful region by any means, and a formal cease-fire could help eliminate smaller scale attacks and general violence. Next, an agreement must be made by Israel to freeze the construction of settlements. There is no realistically plausible way for Israel to continue this practice and simultaneously

conduct peace talks; Palestine will not be willing to negotiate if they cannot accept that fairly simple request.

Potentially the most difficult point to negotiate will be how to handle the Palestinian refugees. Under international law, they have the right to return to their homes– which are in Israeli territory. This presents a big problem for Israel, because it directly threatens their core identity: that of a democratic, Jewish state. Arabs far outnumber Jews in that region, and if they are allowed to become citizens of Israel, it will no longer be a Jewish state because Jews will be the minority. However, if Arabs are not allowed to become citizens of Israel, Israel cannot claim to be a democratic state.

One potential solution to this is the "One Homeland" solution, which sounds great in theory, but unfortunately will likely not be considered. This solution proposes that the states semi-unite, dealing jointly with security, the economy, infrastructure, and human rights (not unlike the European Union), with Jerusalem as their shared capital. There would still be a separation of citizenship and residency to allow both states to maintain their religious values and connections to the Holy Land, but citizens of one state could live in the territory of the other; this would also allow Jewish settlements to remain in the West Bank. It sounds perfect, but it's hard to imagine that after this many years of brutal and bitter war between the two states that they can operate this closely with one another, and more importantly, agree to do so in the first place.

This leaves the most logical resolution: a two-state solution. There is no world in which Israel will peacefully allow Palestine to exist as the sole state in the region, and vice versa. The simplest way to create peace is to withdraw Israeli forces from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, leaving that territory solely to Palestine. This includes moving Israeli settlers in those areas (who wish to remain part of the Jewish state) back into official Israeli territory. Obviously, the

trickiest thing to divide up land-wise is Jerusalem, which both the Jewish and Islamic states have a religious claim to. There are three potential solutions to this. One is that the states suck it up and share it, allowing it to be governed by international law as originally intended by the UN, and they can both claim it as their capital if they so please. Another is that they split it down the middle (or split it using the pre-1967 borders), allowing Israel to keep West Jerusalem and Palestine to keep East Jerusalem, and they'll just have to accept that if they can't share, neither can expect to claim every religious site; maybe they could allow easy passage within the city and establish harsher borders beyond that to officially divide the states. A third is that they hash it out and one state gets Jerusalem as their capital and the other figures something else out (although it's unlikely that either state would abandon their claim to it).

Peace between Israel and Palestine is possible as long as each state is willing to discuss openly and make certain concessions. They must unite the Palestinian people, agree to a cease-fire, freeze the settlement of Jewish people in the West Bank and other Palestinian territories, and implement a two state solution. Mr. Netanyahu, the current prime minister of Israel, and Mr. Abbas, the current president of the State of Palestine, are responsible for carrying out this great task. It is time to make some concrete progress and bring an end to this longstanding and bloody conflict, and finally bring peace to a suffering region.

Works Consulted

Abrams, Elliott. "Is Palestine a State?" *Council on Foreign Relations*. Council on Foreign Relations, Pressure Points, 4 Apr. 2012. Web. 17 May 2017.

Black, Phil, Ben Wedeman, and Jethro Mullen. "Israeli Palestinian Conflict: 2 Views; 1 Tragic Outcome." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 21 Oct. 2015. Web. 18 May 2017.

"Creation of Israel, 1948." *U.S. Department of State*. U.S. Department of State, n.d. Web. 28 May 2017.

Fisher, Ian. "Gaza Is Outwardly Rebuilding, but Inwardly Fearful." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 21 Feb. 2017. Web. 17 May 2017.

Hammond, Jeremy R. "The Simplicity of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict." *Palestine Chronicle*. The Palestine Chronicle, 24 May 2010. Web. 18 May 2017.

Harris, Emily. "In The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Even Calm Is Deadly." *Morning Edition*. NPR. 14 Apr. 2016. *NPR*. Web. 18 May 2017.

"Is Israel Abandoning a Two-State Solution?" *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 28 Dec. 2016. Web. 17 May 2017.

Sarig, Ido. "Why Does the US Support Israel?" *Quora*. N.p., 21 July 2014. Web. 23 May 2017.

"The Birth of Israel." *My Jewish Learning*. N.p., n.d. Web. 20 May 2017.

Thrope, Samuel. "Israel-Palestinian Conflict: Is One Homeland the Solution?" *BBC News*. BBC, 29 Jan. 2016. Web. 18 May 2017.

Waheidi, Majd Al, and Isabel Kershner. "Killing of a Hamas Leader Could Signal a New Conflict With Israel." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 27 Mar. 2017. Web. 17 May 2017.