

Research Report

General Assembly IV

The situation of the Palestinian refugees in the near East

MUNISH '14



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Forum	General Assembly 4
Issue:	The situation of the Palestinian refugees in the near East
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Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one that has caused a deep divide in the region of the Near East. Spanning back to the times of World War I and the British Mandate of Palestine to the Declaration of independence by Israel and the 1948-1949 conflicts, tensions have always been high. But after the 1948-1949 conflicts, a new factor came into play that has had, debatably, the biggest role in creating tension between the two states and the region itself, and that is the situation of Palestinian refugees in the near East.

To date, there are around 5 million Palestinian refugees worldwide, a number that is only increasing. To solve this issue, it is important to look at what caused it, and to keep in mind that a solution to this issue might not be as direct and simple as one might think.

Definition of Key Terms

Palestinian Refugee

Defined by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency as “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict.”

Palestinian Refugee Camp

This is a site or land on which the UNRWA can conduct relief missions and on which the UNRWA has control of the proceedings.



British Mandate of Palestine

This is a legal commission for the administration of territory formally under the control of the Ottoman Empire. It was confirmed on the 24th of July 1922, and put into effect on 29 September 1923.

Zionists

These were Jews that made their way to Palestine, bought up Palestinian land and created farms and settlements in order to found a Jewish national homeland. (Zion is the Jewish word for Jerusalem)

Iron Dome Defence System

The Iron Dome is deployed to intercept short-range missiles and mortars, with the goal of protecting civilians in the path of rockets and artillery shells. The Iron Dome's "batteries" - which are made up of radars and three launchers that are each capable of firing off 20 Tamir interceptor missiles - stop artillery that was fired from locations 4 to 70 kilometers away in all weather conditions.

General Overview

Though the issue of Palestinian refugees in the near East did not become a prominent issue until after the 1948-1949 crisis, it is important to look at the events that lead to the conflict, and for that, it is important to look at World War I (WWI).

By 1917, the British were entrenched in the fight against the Germans, and sought out a quick end to the war that had been going on since 1914. For this, they looked towards the United States, a modern day powerhouse, to join the war effort and finally end the war. To do so, the British sought to capitalize on the increasingly growing Jewish population of the United States, many of which had arrived in the United States after being the victim of Anti-Semitism in other parts of the world, such as Eastern Europe or the Middle East. The British government thought that this part of the population could influence the US government, so in November 1917, the British government formally announced its support for a Jewish homeland in the territory of Palestine, signed by the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Balfour.

In 1917, the British entered Jerusalem and drove out the Turks and in 1919 a mandate was given to the British to govern over Palestine. The Arabs of Palestine were however disgruntled at the fact that instead of being given freedom, they were just put under

another country's rule. They were also outraged with the increase of Jewish immigration into their territories and accused the British of being pro-Zionist. But even then, for the next 30 years, the British government was to rule the country.

In the 30 years of British rule in the region, there were many clashes between Jews and Arabs. These started off as riots between the two sides, with Arabs asking for restriction or complete closure of immigration of Jews into Palestine, while Jews saying that it should remain unrestricted. Clashes were also quite prominent in Jerusalem, the Holy City for both Muslims and Jews.

Then in 1936, Arab bands attacked Jewish settlements, prompting a harsh response from the British, who hung several Arab Leaders and destroyed houses suspected of harbouring terrorists or weapons. In 1937, a commission was brought together to seek possible solutions to the violence. The recommended solution was a partition (division) of Palestine into a Jewish and Palestinian state. The Arabs rejected this idea and kept on fighting, so the plan was put to the side. Then in 1939, when the rebellion stopped, the British government said that it would limit Jewish immigration into the territory. They adopted this due to the fear of impending war and the fear that German leaders might try to establish relations with Arab nations. The British did not want this, as they needed to keep oil supplies from the Middle East coming to Britain.

After the war, with food and supply shortages present, the British government could not afford to keep 100,000 troops in Palestine, so at the end of 1947, the British government handed over control of Palestine to the United Nations (UN).

In November 1947, the United Nations voted to divide Palestine into Palestinian and Jewish states. Population and land ownership would determine the division of land. The Arabs were quick to oppose the idea. They would be receiving a smaller territory of land, and they felt as if the Western powers should find another place for the Jewish homeland. The majority of Jews were happier, yet some were not seeing as some of the Jewish settlements would be located in Palestinian territories.

On 14 May 1948, the Jewish state of Israel was proclaimed. Immediately, armies from neighbouring Arab states invaded Israel, not recognizing the legitimacy of the newly proclaimed state. However, the Arab armies were disorganized and not well trained. With Jordan being the only state with an efficient and experienced force, they took and held the eastern part, the Old City, of Jerusalem. The Israelis ignored a ceasefire ordered by the UN and reorganized themselves and acquired new weapons, with fights breaking out two more times before January 1949, when the Israelis pushed the Arabs out of their territories and

even managed to occupy some land given to Palestine by the UN mandate. In addition to that, 700,000 Palestinians fled their homes, Israel refused to give back the land they had occupied, and Arab countries still did not acknowledge the existence of Israel.

After the aforementioned conflict, in 1967, Israel fought the Six-Day war with Egypt (then known as the United Arab Republic), Syria and Jordan. Fearing the possibility of attack by the latter three countries due to increasing hostilities at the time, Israel launched a first strike offensive, bombing and taking out the airfields of the Egyptians, effectively gaining air superiority and ending the conflict faster than even they had thought. Because of this victory, Israel received the Gaza Strip and Sinai Desert from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan and the Golan heights from Syria, though the Sinai Desert was later given back as part of the Camp David Accord. From this point on, the Gaza Strip and West Bank were administrative parts controlled by Israel.

There has been much struggle and unrest surrounding Gaza in particular, with Israel making a Gaza-Israel barrier in 1996 to prevent people from crossing the border, or at least making it harder to do so. Then from 2000-2005, there was the second Intifada, which the Palestinians viewed as a fight for freedom against the Israeli oppressor, while Israel viewed this as an act of terrorism. This eventually ended and culminated in the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza.

Then in 2006, when Hamas won the 2006 Palestinian legislative election, gaining a majority in the house, relations with Israel intensified, causing them to lock their border with Gaza and ending a free flow of people as well as many exports and imports. Qassam rocket attacks still continued in that period of time, even increasing and targeting border Israeli settlements.

Having seen the devastating effects of rocket attacks on their territory, the Israelis built and implemented the Iron Dome Defence System, managing to target many of the missiles shot by Hamas insurgents and destroying them before they reached their targets.

In the years between 2006 and 2014, there have been many Israeli operations on the territory of Gaza, the most famous being the 2007 Battle of Gaza, Operation Pillar of Defence in 2012 and now, the on-going Operation Protective Edge.

Operation Protective Edge sought to destroy the Hamas tunnel system in Gaza, which they claim was being used to conduct cross border raids on Israeli territory. However, this Operation has been met with international outrage, as the bombing campaign by the Israelis has caused a shocking amount of loss in life in terms of Palestinian citizens, with now a reported 1,800 civilians dead and more than 10,000 wounded (80% of the current citizens).

A breaking point came when bombings designated for the tunnel systems managed to hit schools being used by the UN as shelters, at one point killing 15 people in the building. Condemnation came from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who called it a “criminal act”. This was before the Israelis had fallen back to defensive positions, sighting that the task of the tunnel systems had been accomplished.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

State of Israel

Israel is in direct opposition with the “right to return” given to Palestinian refugees. They believe that it is a threat to Israel’s entire statehood. Israel claims that the influx of Palestinian refugees into Israel would upset the state’s demography. Furthermore, it states that the reason why there are these Palestinian refugees is due to acts of aggression directed towards Israel from its neighbouring Arab states. Instead, Israel promotes a three-step part to ease the situation: “resettlement of refugees and their descendants in the nations where they currently reside, international efforts to improve quality of life in refugee camps, and restricted readmission based exclusively on humanitarian considerations.”

State of Palestine

The state of Palestine is considered an observer state by the UN, so while it cannot vote in any of the resolutions that could be implemented, it is allowed to have its say and the ability to state its opinion. In that respect, they believe in an absolute right to return for Palestinian refugees, which were pushed from their homes. That is why they are quick to denounce any plans or ideas of having Palestinian refugees in their current countries, and do not wish to promote any projects that might compromise this claim in the future. However, they do not go against improving the refugee camps that many Palestinians are currently residing in.

United States of America

The United States have, in more recent times, tried to act as a mediator with regard to the Palestinian and Israeli talks. Though they at first had a more pro-Israeli outlook due to the increasing Jewish population in their borders, they have in recent times become friendlier towards Arab states as well. This has led them to try and end the conflict, hosting the Camp David Talks in 1978 and the 1993 Peace Agreement in Washington DC.

United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)

The UNRWA is an agency founded in 1949 to provide relief and support operations for Palestinian refugees. The body was created to set up camps and provide food, clothing and shelter to those who needed it. Though it is seen as a positive step by most UN member states, Israel claims it only pushes the divisions in the region, giving Palestinian refugees a separate UN body as well as allegedly spending up to three times as much per Palestinian refugee as per any other refugee. Due to no visible end to the issue of Palestinian refugees, its mandate has been prolonged multiple times, most recently until 30 June 2014.

Timeline of Events

1880-1914	Settlement of 60,000 Zionists in Palestine
November 2 nd 1917	Declaration of British support for a Jewish homeland (“Balfour Declaration”)
1919-1923	Creation of British Mandate of Palestine
1936-1939	Arab rebellion against Jews
July 7 th 1937	Peel Commission comes to the conclusion of a partition
1947	Mandate given over to the UN
November 29 th 1947	UN votes to divide Palestine into Jewish and Palestinian states
May 14 th 1948	Declaration of independence of Israel
May 15 th 1948 – January 1949	Arab states attack Israel, as they do not acknowledge it. Israelis push them back and manage to occupy land given to Palestine by the UN, 700,000 displaced
December 8 th 1949	UNRWA established

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- Right to Return, 11 December 1948, **(A/RES/194) (III)**
- Lausanne Conference of 1949, 27 April – 12 September 1949
- Creation of the UNRWA, 8 December 1949, **(A/RES/302) (IV)**
- Jordan, Law No 6 on Nationality, 1954



- The Madrid Process, 30 October 1991

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

There are a multitude of reasons why the talks between Israel and Palestine might not have been as effective as they could have been. One of them is that when entering these talks, neither side came with the purpose of working together for a mutual benefit. Almost the contrary; they came with the idea and the purpose of showing off the negative side of their counterpart, bringing up points that the other does not follow a certain agreement (Palestine on Article 11 of Resolution 194 (III) towards Israel) or that they are not legally obliged to follow it, or that it imposes on their rights.

Another hindrance to the process of solving the issue is the fact that the issue of Palestinian refugees has never really been exclusively talked about. It has always been additional topic of discussion, after the “main” article of discussion such as the statehood of Palestine. Real focus has never really been given to this issue in particular. This is an issue by itself that could take multiple conferences to resolve.

Other than proposing and brokering peace talks between nations, the idea of integrating Palestinian refugees into other Middle Eastern countries has been brought up by Israel, which states that in the surrounding of multiple other countries in the area with the same religion as the Palestinians, which the Israelis claim is a big part of integration into these countries, they should be allowed to integrate into the populations of those countries. However, this has been met with some backlash, with only Jordan signing a law that allows that sort of integrations. Other countries are less willing to allow this integration, as they do not wish to have Palestinians residents in their country, seeing as Palestinians will have a lower standard of living, forcing the country to provide monetary aid to bring them to a higher level. Not only that, but they are also worried that with the addition of Palestinians into their country, the balance between native and immigrant shall become skewed.

Possible Solutions

When going into debate on this issue, there are a couple of points to remember. This issue will never be solved quickly. One cannot just say that all Palestinians should return to the territories they were forced from or that they will remain in the countries that they reside in now. The fact of the matter is that it is impossible to fully appease all those who have

some sort of stake in this debate. What is possible, however, is to try and get the sides to open up a dialogue about the issue of refugees, and have this dialogue be the centre stage of the conference, not just an addition to it.

Another point to remember is that you can utilise the idea of long term projects to help the refugees, not just short and quick solutions. One might be interested to look into the Israeli claim that they will allow individuals back in cases of “humanitarian consideration”. You might try to expand on that and maybe make it a bit more flexible or see how the Israelis wish to approach it.

Additionally, concerning the refugees at the present moment, one might consider improving the camps that they reside in so that they will be able to live in conditions suitable for adults and children. But whilst improving the conditions is a good idea, one should be wary of the metamorphosis of these camps into cities, as the countries they are situated in might not take kindly to their establishment.

What delegates will have to come back to is this: this issue has been on-going since the late 1940's. Whilst the odds of solving this issue in one debate are very improbable, what should be remembered, and I, as your expert chair, cannot stress enough, is that an active dialogue between all countries and parties involved must be created. This is because single-minded thinking is what started this entire issue, but collective thinking might just be the thing to resolve it.

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Appendix or Appendices

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_3A6_qSBBQ

This is a video made in 2011, presented by Israel's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Danny Ayalon in which he gives his stance on the subject of refugees. The video provides the Israeli view from the perspective of a top official. Furthermore, he has also made videos concerning the perspective on the UN and on Palestinian territory.

