

The Arab-Israeli Conflict

Both the Arabs and the Jews have lived in this fertile area of Israel since Biblical times. Both also claim to be descendants of Abraham;



Jews are descended from Isaac. Arabs are Ishmael. After biblical time the Romans conquered the Middle East, the Jews living in Israel were persecuted, and so when they revolted against the Romans in AD 135 they were expelled and never allowed to return. As a result of this Jews were dispersed and resettled in Europe and Asia. Meanwhile the Arabs stayed in this area and renamed it Palestine. In 1516 the Ottoman Empire conquered Palestine and drove the Romans out. By the beginning of the 19th century the Ottoman Empire was becoming weak and other European countries were becoming interested in the Middle

East. The United Kingdom in particular were interested in this piece of land as they had colonised India and the Suez canal, Egypt, meant that this would make transporting goods like spices and silks a lot easier than having to go round Africa. The United Kingdom even bought shares in the canal because they were so interested in the use of it. The reason why the canal was of such great importance to the British was because journeys to the east would be a lot faster and safer than travelling round the south of Africa. The Arabs wanted to be independent as they were sick of being dictated to by the Turks and they looked for help from strong countries like Britain. In World War 1, the allies protected the Arabs from the Germans but they also promised the Jews that they would help them set up their own state and give them protection from the Germans. For example the Balfour Declaration which was for the protection of the Jews and how the British government acknowledged the set up of a Jewish homeland. In a letter from McMahon to Sherif Hussein he stated how "Great Britain is prepared to recognise and to support the independence of the Arabs in all regions within the limits demanded by Sherif of Mecca. Obviously, by the end of the war, there was a lot of confusion over the Middle East situation as the British had promised both the Arabs and the Jewish independence. In addition, during this time a secret agreement was made between Sir Mark Sykes and Charles Georges –Picot about the eventual partition of the Turkish Empire. Here are some of the terms of the Sykes-Picot Agreement:



1. That France and Great Britain are prepared to recognise and protect an independent Arab states in the area (A) and (B) marked on the annexed map, under the suzerainty of an Arab Chief...
3. That in the.... Area {marked C on the map} there shall be established an international administration, the form of which is to be decided after consultation with the other allies, and representatives of the Sherif of Mecca

In addition, with the set up of Zionism it seemed that the creation of a Jewish state was a reality rather than a dream. With both sides claiming to have equal share to the land and neither willing to back down and the series of wars that followed only worsened the situation in fact all they did was cause bitterness between the two. So if they could not solve it through violence after fifty years will they be able to solve it through peaceful means now in the year 2000 and beyond.



For the last nineteen centuries, the Jews have had no homeland, since they were forbidden to return by the Romans. Because of this they were scattered throughout Europe and were constantly being persecuted as during the Spanish Inquisition, the Crusades and even the Black Death. So they have always traditionally been used as escape goats. In the 19th century Jews suffered a lot, 1.5 million Jews resettled in the U.S.A. after the terrible persecution they had had. Because of the persecution so many

were forced to endure, Theodor Herzl set up Zionism in 1880. In 1896, he published his first book

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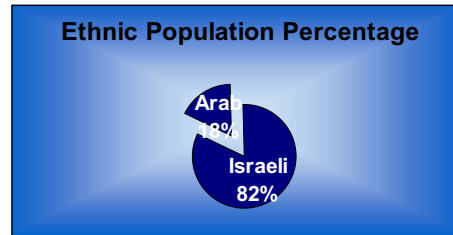
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called 'The Jewish State.' Then in 1897 he held a congress in Switzerland where he made an official statement called the Basel Declaration, which the main means was the creation of a Jewish State.

The Basal Declaration:



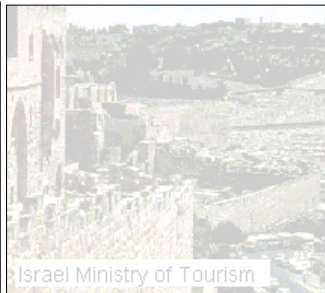
Theodor Herzl



Numbers taken from Encarta dated 1996 .

The Arabs had always wanted liberty from the Turks and it seemed as though they were going to be given this opportunity after the First World War by the british. In 1905 they set up the League of Arab Father Land, this was set up by Sherif Husan of Mecca who had two son Abdilla and Faisal whose aim was to set up a Arab empire and unite all of the Arabs together because they had the same religion, Islam, and language, Arabic. In 1913, they issued the Arab Nationalist Manifesto. The aim of the Arabs was independence and freedom from their overlords.

The main problem that the Arabs and the Israelis have is where they live; they have tried dividing the land fairly, some areas being strictly Palestinian and some being strictly Israeli areas. (As suggested by the UN) However, some areas have had to remain neutral, like Jerusalem, as the holy town is sacred to the both of them. However in the land division the Israelis got a higher percentage of land coverage,



Israel Ministry of Tourism

the Jews made up a third of the population but was given over 50% of the land, but the Palestinians had control of most of the land surrounding Jerusalem. There was limited access for the Jews. There was also restrictions on the roads that they could use. However, in the many wars that have followed, mostly the Israelis gained land of the Palestinians and other Arab countries

like Egypt, Lebanon and Syria, the Arabs have found it hard to regain land through violence because of the size and efficiency of Israel's army.. The loss of this land to the Israelis meant that many Palestinians have lost their homes and their farmland and only to live in refugee camps.

The many wars that they have had are a big factor to why peace is going to be a very difficult and complicated long progress. Because in the four major wars that they have had there has always been great losses of lives and land and their have been always many refugees as a result. A good example of this would be the losses in the Yom Kippur War, 1973, where the Israeli lost 2800 live and the Arabs lost over 16000. The reason why the Israelis were so much more successful is because they had an army that was four times as large; they had a uniform and the use of

modern weapons, they also had a compulsory military service which meant they had a constantly large army. The Arabs downfall was that they were not united and were badly



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organised. Although somebody did win, each of the wars it did however not mean it was the end of the conflict. For example at the end of the Six-Day War the Israelis won and there was a surge of Palestinians into the refugee camps which led to another war. Many of the Palestinians in the refugee camps believed the only way to regain Palestine was by force. In the 1950's groups of activists, Fedayeen (self-sacrificers) began to attack Israeli settlements. With all wars, it means loss, but land loss has been a major problem in the conflict, for example after the Six-Day war the Israelis captured the West Bank the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights and Sinai. After the Suez war, the Israelis captured the Sinai Peninsula; this meant loss of land and even more bitterness toward the Israelis. During the Six Day War the Israelis managed to capture the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the Golan height the only remaining Palestinian habitats in Israel, this did not help as it meant there was a surge of refugees into camps in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. After the Yom Kippur War the Sinai Peninsula was given back which did ease some of the tension between the two. UN in 1967 decided to pass Resolution 242 that later became the basis of the Palestinian demands in the future.

- I. Withdrawal of Israel from the occupied territories.
- II. Acknowledgement of the sovereignty and territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the Middle East.
- III. A just settlement to the refugee problem.

However, Israel did not comply with this, which did create some problems, and tension between Israel and the other Arab countries involved.

Another big factor in this conflict is terrorism this will also be one of the reasons why peace will be difficult. A recent attack on a school in Lebanon is an example of the awful terrorism that goes on between the two (see newspaper article 2). In the attack, one child was critically wounded and other had minor injuries. The Hizbullah guerrillas are threatening to retaliate for the shelling of the school in Arab Salim. This complicates issues between the two as it also involves another country, Lebanon, another Arab country for Israel to compete with yet another Arab country complicating the argument further. Nevertheless, incidents like these between the two will certainly not help the peace progress as it causes even more hostility between the two. Terrorist attacks have been happening since as early as 1956. For example in the 1950's the Fedayeen was set up, many were young boys, they launched attacks on Israeli settlements killing mere civilians. In 1968 the PLO were able to resist the Israelis at Karameh resulting in the loss of tanks, planes and lives gaining back some of their confidence and the gain of some valuable weapons that they could use in the future against Israel. In 1982 under the operation Galilee the Israelis invaded Lebanon where the PLO headquarters were, the Lebanese government were fearful of another attack so they expelled the PLO from there country. This meant that the PLO no longer had a head quarters and would very quickly become disorganised and opened easily to attack from the Israelis. There was other opposition to the PLO like the Hamas and the Hezbollah. These two groups do not help the peace progress as they only relinquish violence when the Arabs are returned previous lands causing bitterness between the two and managing to help there country take a step backwards in the peace progress. There were often street battles between the two for example in a street battle in 1992 three people was killed and 100 injured.

Other international bodies did get involved such as the UK, the USA and the USSR. However, they normally did not get involved for the good of the conflict because they were being blackmailed using oil or the Suez Canal. For example during the Yom Kippur War Saudi Arabia raised its price by 70% and cut its production by 10%, there was even petrol rationing in Britain at this time (1973). Or they got involved because of an other war for example the cold war the Russians supporting the Arabs and supplying them with weapons, tanks and fuel, whereas the USA were supporting the Israelis supplying them with the same. Also the conflict affected the world on another level, terrorism, for example in 1972 at the Olympics in Munich some of the Israeli team were kidnapped and later massacred the German force and security were unable to save any of the athletes during gun fire between the polices terrorists.

However, there have been moves to peace so we should not totally dismiss a peaceful solution.

Peace is not a recent thing they have been discussing it for 27 years since the end of the Yom Kippur War. That is when Henry Kissinger the National Security Advisor successfully achieved some cease-fires and the Geneva peace talks in 1973. Nevertheless, one of the biggest peace movements was in September of 1995 when Yasser Arafat and PM Rabin signed the "Middle East Peace Accord at the White House in the USA. Things are really starting to look positive in the East or are they?

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Both the Israelis and the Palestinians want security and that is what recent peace accords have been aiming for, they are often called, 'Land for peace.' Recently Israel have agreed to remove its troops from the Golan Heights along South Lebanon in return the Syrians have guaranteed Israel security along this border. In that respect I think that it will very easy for the Israelis to make peace with its neighbours but try to solve the refugee enigma will be a lot harder. Since the Camp David Accord in 1979, it stated that Egypt would recognise Israel's right to exist, in return Israel would withdraw from the Sinai Peninsula and give it back to Egypt. Sadat and Begin also pledged to start talks about a Palestinian self-rule. In 1990 at the Madrid Conference, President Bush of the USA stated that any peace agreements would be based in the UN resolutions 242 and 338. In 1993 Yasser Arafat and Yitzhat Rabin met and began to negotiate about land. Despite their disagreements the first ever Arab-Israeli agreement was signed on 9 February 1994. Israel was victorious. In addition, in the same year, Rabin signed another treaty with King Hussein of Jordan; this in turn secured the eastern border of Israel.. In 1995 Yasser Arafat and PM Rabin signed the Middle East Peace Accord at the White House in USA on the 28 September 1995. The historic handshake was thought to be a signal for peace in the Middle East.

Very recently, peace meetings have been in progress, so it does seem as though they are coming to some agreement between Israel and Syria for the hand back of land. A sign of peace could be that land is being given back to the Palestinians and roads are being reopened. The Gaza Strip the West Bank and the Golan height are to be given back to the Palestinians as a place for them to live and work. Nevertheless, it is not just the Palestinians that the Israelis have to make peace with it is the other Arab countries as well, like Syria, Egypt and Jordan. Again outsiders have been there helping, the involvement of the USA recently. President Clinton quoted after a recent meeting: "We are witnessing a new beginning in the effort to achieve a comprehensive peace in the Middle East." Talks were held in January this year on which borders should be returned and to which countries. Damascus of Syria wants the borders to return as they were in June 1967 but the Israelis would probably be unprepared to do this as this would give them some shoreline onto the Galilee Sea.

None of the countries involved wants the conflict to continue but compromise is hard. If Israel is to return some of the original borders, of 1967 means that Israelis, will loose their homes and land, which will no doubt cause antagonism, full circle of annual problems.

With the current refugee state, pressure is being put on both sides for reconciliation. In the refugee camps there is severe poverty, resulting in famine and disease. "The foreign press come here and take pictures of us standing in queues to get food rations. This is no life." A quote from a Palestinian refugee camp in the Gaza strip in 1993. There was 800000 refugees living in camps in 1948, the number has quadrupled by in just 40 years. It is obvious that both the representatives for each country want amity otherwise, they would not have attended the meetings.

I think that the next few years are going to be very difficult for the countries involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the wars that they have endured together have certainly not aided the situation and the loss of family and friends is not easy forgotten. But I think that it is good that they are moving towards peace. I think that it will be easier for the Israelis to returns to its old borders but when it come to the Palestinians returning the situation will deteriorate again. With the interference of terrorist groups like the Hamas and the Hizbullah, the fighting will continue as the Palestinians return as the Israelis will loose land so that the Palestinians can resettle there. As there is so much antagonism between the two because of wars and terrorism so, I cannot see them living together in the near future peacefully.



I think that the problem is that the leaders of the countries are pushing for peace because of the cost of war and it has been dragging on for a long time but have they considered what it will be like when the Palestinian return. Where are they going to live? What are they going to do for a living? In addition, will the country yet again be split; will a wall be put down the middle like in Germany? I think that these sorts of problems will take a lot longer to solve, as it is a very difficult and uncomfortable

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situation to tackle. I think that there will always be a slight conflict between the two even if it is just verbal as there is a lot of resentment and it will take them along time to forget the p ast.

Before the invasion of the Romans they must have lived in peace, so maybe it is suggestible that they will be able to eventually live together as one again.

I don't think that there is a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, they will always be bitterness between the two, I am pleased with the very recent peace movements and I hope that one day they will live together again like they did 2000 years ago. However, with terrorist attacks happening nearly every week they may not live together in amity for another 2000 years.