

Why are attempts to find a peace settlement proving so difficult?

The Palestinians and the Jews have been fighting over the land of Palestine. Both believe that they have greater claim than the other. The Jews believe the land is theirs because they had lived there centuries ago, it was the land promised by God to Abraham thousands of years ago. The Palestinian Arabs believe the land is theirs because ever since the Jews left, the Arabs have been living there.

In 1993 the Jewish and Palestinian leaders (Rabin and Arafat) signed a peace agreement which promised; Israeli troops would be withdrawn from most of the West Bank and Gaza, elections would be held for a Palestinian leadership for five years, during these five years a final settlement would be discussed. Sadly this peace agreement was not fully implemented, as the Jewish Israeli leader Rabin, was shot by another Jew in 1995. I think the peace agreement was not fully carried out because the hatred and mistrust between the two sides and also because of the ongoing disagreements between them.

The trouble began at around 1880 because the Jews wished to settle in Palestine, these Jews were called Zionists. After WWI Britain was given a mandate (where a country controls another country until they are deemed fit to rule themselves) of Palestine, the Palestinian saw this as a betrayal because during the war Britain had said they would be 'prepared to recognise and support the independence of the Arabs' so the Arabs rebelled against their Turkish rulers and found themselves ruled by Britain. Around the time of WWII Jews were persecuted by Hitler, world sympathy and support for a Jewish homeland increased so there was increased pressure on Britain to allow more and more Jews into Palestine. The Palestinians didn't like this and when Britain suggested a partition they rebelled and fought, so Britain had to give Palestine to the UN and they enforced the partition. This resulted in war; the Arabs lost even more land causing hundreds of thousands of refugees. Over the next 25 years there were 4 more wars, the 1967 war made things especially worse because the Arabs lost control of the west bank and Gaza and each war caused more refugees.

Although the Palestinians and Israelis fight each other there are divisions within the two nations, the hardliners and the moderates. The hardline Israelis are not willing to give back any of the disputed territories or negotiate with the Palestinians it was a hardline Israeli who shot Rabin in 1995. Hardline Palestinians want all of Palestine back; most of who the Israelis call terrorists, share this particular belief. Moderate Israelis are willing to negotiate with Palestinians and give back some land for the sake of peace. Moderate Palestinians are willing to accept a portion of Palestine back and be content with that.

After all the fighting the Israelis and the Palestinians are still in disagreement on some major aspects which are blocking to the way to peace. Firstly the still argue over who has the most valid claim to the land, until one of them concedes this will remain an argument. Also there is the trouble of the Palestinian refugees, made homeless by the wars between the two sides. The Israelis won't let them back in as they claim it was the Arabs who told them to leave and the Arabs say the Israelis forced them out with threats and examples (In the Arab village Deir Yassin, the Israelis killed all the residents claiming it was terrorist threat). Another point that is a cause of controversy

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is who gets to control the city of Jerusalem, for both people of Israel and Palestine it is a sacred religious city and neither is willing to give it up. And finally the last subject which is causing much disagreement is that of the disputed territories, The Arabs want them back but if they ever decided to launch an attack on Israel it would be only too easy because the disputed territories have strategic attack positions. There is also the trouble of the inhabitants of the disputed territories because when the Israel captured the land the encouraged Israelis to go live there to give them more grounds to keep the land. If the land was ever given back to the Arabs then Israel argues that the Israelis living there would be in danger. Recently in the news Israel has said they will force the Jews to move out of some of the disputed territories to give it back to Arabs, whether this is made a reality remains to be seen.

In conclusion I think the reason peace is so hard to find in the Middle East is because there are many subjects which both sides refuse to back down on. In 1993 there was hope for progress in peace but then Rabin was shot and peace processes ground to a halt. The way things appear to be going it seems that the peace process will be locked in a stalemate until the Israelis and the Palestinians are prepared to make compromises.