

Modern World Study : The Arab Israeli Conflict

The Roots Of The Conflict

Both sides have very strong religious historical claims to the land of Palestine. The Jews were the first to settle in Palestine in 1200 BC. 1000 years later the Jews were driven out of Palestine by the Romans. 500 years later the Arabs conquer Palestine. Both Nations have lived in Palestine for at least 1000 years, giving them both historical claims to Palestine

Jerusalem is where the Wailing Wall is situated. It is also the home of the Dome Of The Rock, site of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. For these reasons Jerusalem is the Jews' most Holy city.

The Dome Of The Rock also has significance for the Arabs; it is the site of Mohammed's Night Journey. Palestine is also the site of El Aqsa, the final judgement will take place. But for the Arabs, Jerusalem is only their third most holy city.

Because of these claims, both sides can call Palestine their homeland, both historically and religiously. This means that by favouring the claims of one side, the other side will be offended.

Events since 1948

Since 1948, the state of Israel has been involved in many wars. There have been five wars in the last 50 years. In each case, the Israelis have won the war, and with few exceptions the Arabs have been embarrassed. In the 1920s the Jewish immigration encouraged large numbers of highly skilled intelligent and wealth Jews to Palestine. They fuelled the already strong sense of nationalism and more and more Jewish people began to believe in the possibility of fulfilling their religious and historical destiny. This caused hatred of the Jews by the Arabs. They began to take back their land forcefully, claiming that it was theirs, even though they had sold it.

Due to both sides being able to call it their homeland, the UN could not have enforced a law determining which side Palestine belonged, uproar and riots and the inevitable bloodshed would have ensued, which at the time was unacceptable.

In the McMahon letters the Jews had been promised a 'National Home for the Jews' in 1915 but in 1939 Britain broke this agreement. She was about to enter a war and decided that the Arabs would make a better ally due them having control over the oil plains. Both promises made were overlooked by the UN when the partition was suggested in 1948

In its history Israel has been involved in 5 wars. The cycle of conflict continues after the wars due to terrorism, suicide has become very popular in the last few decades. Israel is now contemplating a huge wall to be constructed to contain the west bank and its people to stop possible future attacks. Since the state was created in 1948 it has been effectively at war with the Arabs, though not constantly in battle, the threat is constant and so both sides build up their defences and offences in anticipation, also to warn off the other. When it was created by the UN, the Arabs rejected Israel's right to

exist, immediately launching an attack. During her infancy in 1948 through to 1949, Israel expanded her territory, taking advantage of the wars and using them as an excuse to take land from the Arabs. The Arabs were again defeated in 1956, again in 1967. In 1973 the fortune of the Arabs changed and they won back respect when they attacked Israel during a Jewish holiday, the state of Lebanon was destroyed as a result. In 1982 Israel launched a pre-emptive strike on the Arab states, fearing they might attack as they were building up their forces. The Arabs were not strong enough to retaliate; their forces were destroyed.

The consequences of the 1967 war are still preventing peace today. Israel took a lot of Arab territory in the war. During the six days of fighting Israel captured Sinai, the West Bank, the Gaza strip, Golan Heights and East Jerusalem. The territories gained were Arab and had been given to the Arabs by the UN as part of the divide in 1948. The newly acquired territories are under military control even with the large hostile Arab population. The Jewish state has compensated for this by enforcing a law whereby every Israeli has to do at least one year military service. The Israeli forces intentionally destroyed any Palestinian settlements that might have developed into centres of resistance. Even though there were virtually no Israeli inhabitants, only 200,000 and over a million Arabs. After the war was over the taken land was put under military control. It was concluded by the government that the occupied territories should be run differently than the rest of Israel. The Arabs were allowed to live their lives as they had done previously but they had no vote. They were Palestinians living in Israel, they were not allowed to become Israeli citizens and therefore not allowed to vote. In this occupied territory, Israel began to establish Israeli settlements, encouraging Israelis to move to the new territory by low house prices. Israel was preparing for the future, she was populating the enemy lands with her citizens, giving them a reason not to give the land back.

The West Bank is not part of Israel under International law; it is occupied territory and is under Israeli military rule. The UN originally gave the land to the Arabs in 1948 when the partition took place. When the war took place Israel captured the land from the Arab forces, and decided it was too valuable to give back, both for tactical and religious reasons. This is an immediate cause of conflict, as the Arabs want it back as it is legally theirs. Due to the West Bank not being accepted as Israeli territory, the government attempted to find political reasons to gain legal control of her newly acquired land. During the 1980s vast numbers of Israeli settlements were established.

Another factor is the establishment of settlements in occupied territories, land under military rule. The Israeli government began to develop settlements in the occupied territories in the 1980s. It is a political and economical factor. The settlements were established so that the Israel people had a significant presence in the territory, giving the government a reason not to give the land back to the Arabs. Also they were built for tactical reasons, many of the settlements were well armed and there are huge numbers of them, ensuring that Israel's borders are well protected. The settlements are all placed in strategic places, near Arab towns, on hills, on major and important roads and on the best land. It is an economic factor because to get the Israeli people to move to the settlements the government greatly decreased house prices; it was also much cheaper to live in the settlements so huge numbers of Israelis flocked to the settlements taking advantage of the government of the low prices. Many of the

migrants also moved for religious reasons, believing that they were taking back the land that had been given to them by God. The violence in the Middle East has fuelled the expansion of the settlements in the Arab territory, when the Arabs attack Israel, settlements are often singled out as weak points and many Jewish killed. Because of this they feel even more perseverance to stay in the conflicted environment.

There are 3.7 million refugees in the Middle East alone. During the 1947 and 1967 wars Palestinians were forcibly removed from their homes by Israeli forces. Israel has the responsibility for the refugees as many of them are in the country, and it is her fault they are refugees, but the Israeli people do not want them in the country, yet no surrounding Arab country will take them, yet the Arabs want them to be treated fairly. This is a very important factor as it affects both sides and peace cannot be achieved until something is done with them. There is also a link with refugees and terrorism. Many terrorists come from refugee camps where children are brought up to hate the state of Israel and its people. It is a very political factor, for both sides because both sides believe that acts such as suicide bombing will get them into heaven. The reason there are so many terrorists is because of the 1967 war when thousands of Palestinians were made refugees and put into camps. It is also political because it is also done in attempt to force Israel to give the territories back. It is a short term factor as it has only recently developed but it is very important as acts of terrorism builds up hate on each side and continues the cycle of violence.

Jerusalem is a holy site to both sides, and both sides believe it should be theirs and both want to control it. Before the war each side had half of the holy city, but during the war the Israeli forces took East Jerusalem and placed it under military rule. The Israelis do not want the Arabs in Jerusalem and the Arabs want to be allowed into Jerusalem to visit their holy sites. This cause conflicts and tends to end in violence. There have been many attempts at peace, normally started by the US. In spite of problems there have been some agreements made by the two sides. Two such agreements were, that in return of the PLO accepting Israel's right to exist and to give up its armed struggle against Israel the Palestinians would be allowed to partially self-rule. Despite these agreements, peace never occurred because the most difficult problems such as settlements, refugees and Jerusalem, though left till last, were never resolved. The problems in carrying out the peace agreements show just how difficult peace is to achieve.

There are many factors that have been very important obstacles to peace. The first is the West Bank. Both sides claim that the land is theirs and both sides want to rule it. It was given to the Arabs in 1948 but Israel took it during the 1967 war. It is a long-term factor; it has been preventing peace since 1948. Although peace will never be achieved until the dispute is solved, I do not think that it is the most important factor as there are many other disputes that prevent peace and will continue to prevent peace even if the dispute over the West Bank is solved.

It is pressure from the US that has led to the peace talks in Middle East. The US supply Israel with money and weapons, and also military support. Without the pressure for peace from the US, Israel would have no reason for peace, but it is because of the US that Israel has become so powerful because they have equipped them with the most technologically advanced weapons, making them far superior to the Arabs. Also many highly skilled scientists from America have moved to Israel because they are Jewish and believe they are fighting a holy war against the Arabs.

Some people argue that religion is the most important factor is religion. The two religions have opposing religions, they both lay claim to the land, and because of their religious differences, sharing it is impossible, and neither is willing to be forced out of their homeland.