

What happened to the Palestinians
as a consequence of the 1948 War?

Now internationally known as Israel, this significant area of land (approx 10,000 square miles) is situated in the middle East at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. The capital is Jerusalem and its neighbouring countries are Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. The state language is Hebrew, however over the years the range of people populating the land has considerably grown. Hebrew, Arabic, Yiddish, German, Russian, Polish, Romanian and Persian people all occupy Israel. The land too ranges from the fertile densely populated Mediterranean coastal plains to the lowest place on earth; the Great Rift Valley.

The Israeli/Palestine conflict has been a major issue ever since the ancient times when it was originally the homeland of the Jews, Judea (meaning the area around Jerusalem). In 6 AD the Romans conquered Judea and it was renamed Palestine. The Jews were forcibly exiled from their homeland and scattered across the world. Then in 7 AD Palestine was conquered by the Arab followers of the prophet Muhammed, Arabs then occupied Palestine for thousands of years and Islam and the Arabic language became a familiar way of life for the Palestinian population. In 1516 Palestine was conquered by the Turkish ottoman Empire. In the late years of the 19th century, anti-semitism in Russia and then France became more and more severe. In 1865 a writer, Eugen Dühring, called for the extermination of all Jews. Some Jews believed that they could tackle the problem with assimilation and just try to blend in with the population whereas most Jews realised that they would only be safe in a state of their own. It was then that the Jewish movement to reclaim their homeland, Zionism was founded. Originally they were open to accepting any site as a homeland but history's biblical connections led them back to Palestine. The Jews believed that Palestine (Israel) was given to them by God and were chosen to live in the promised land. The Zionist slogan called Palestine "a land without people for a people without land", the Jews completely ignored the massive Arab population already occupying Palestine and did not seem to fully understand the fact that the Arabs were not willing to just give up their country. Zionism became a formal organisation in 1897 with their first Zionist leader as Theodore Herzl. Jews started to transfer to Palestine and by 1914 the total population of Palestine stood at 700,000 with roughly 85,000 Jewish.

In July 1915 the McMahon correspondence was set up. Sir Henry McMahon, British High Commissioner in Caira, negotiated in 1915-16 with Husain Ibn Ali, the Sheriff of Mecca, in which the British government tried to gain support against the Ottoman Empire and implied that she would support an Independent Arab state.

After Turkey had been defeated in the First World War France and Britain agreed to split the Ottoman's land between themselves in the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 (named after two diplomats Sir Mark Sykes and Francois Georges-Picot) with Palestine falling under the rule of Britain. Britain also offered to back demands for a postwar independence from the Ottomans and in return for Arab support. In 1916, Arabs led by T.E Lawrence revolted against the ottomans believing that in return Britain would help them gain back Palestine as theirs.

However Britain denied all ideas that Palestine was promised to the Arabs.

Following World War 1, a league of nations was set up which authorised Britain to control Palestine and Britain was given a "mandate" or license to govern the area.

In November 1917, Britain issued the Balfour Declaration, this was in the form of a letter sent to the Jewish leader Lord Rothshild from the British Foreign Secretary, Arthur James Balfour. The letter was not long but assured Rothshild that the British government supported the Jewish homeland in Palestine. By doing this the British hoped that they would have gained more Jewish support for the allies in the First World War. The Balfour Declaration became the basis for the international support for the founding of the Jewish homeland the state of "Israel".

The British Army entered Jerusalem five weeks after the Balfour Declaration and it was confirmed by the peace treaties that Britain had control over Palestine. Now under British rule more and more Jews immigrated to Palestine, between 1919 - 1923 20,000 Jews entered Palestine. Then when the Hitler, a very ant-semitic leader came to power even more Jews had to escape to Palestine. The Arabs felt crowded and wanted their own state back, the Arab revolt began in 1936. The revolt was led by the Husseini family, hundreds of both Jews and Arabs were killed. But the Jews kept coming as the holocaust began in Germany in 1938 there was a major influx of Jewish immigrants. By 1939, the British government had begun to regret their decisions whilst feeling sympathetic towards the Arabs and were now against a Zionist state. The 1939 White Paper decreed that 15,000 Jews would only be allowed to enter Palestine each year for five years. However the fighting still continued and armies such as the Irgun and Haganah supporting Britain against the Nazis were set up. In October 1945 a guerrilla war was started.

In February 1947 Britain announced that she would hand Palestine over to the United Nations. On 29th November 1947 the UN approved a partition to split Palestine into two states - one for the Palestinian population and one for the immigrated Jews. Although the split did not include Jerusalem they still happily accepted, however the Arabs refused point blank as they believed the split was unfair. Although the Palestinians accounted for 65% of the population but only kept 40% of the land, they were furious. Following the approval over the next few months there was increasing violence between the Jews and Arabs in Palestine. On 14th May 1948 Ben Gurion leader of the Zionist, proclaimed the state of Israel in existence, the Arabs were already angry against the Partition Plan and this announcement triggered a major response of war, immediately the Jews were attacked by the armies of 5 Arab neighbouring countries. The War of Independence had begun. Large ceasefires in between the fighting gave the Israeli Jews time to train and regroup, whereas the Palestinians did not use the time so efficiently. When the fighting came to an end in 1949, Israel held territories beyond the boundaries set by the UN - a total of 78% of the area west of the Jordan river. However the UN made no attempt to take control of the situation.

There were many consequences to the 1948 War of Independence, but the most obvious is the amount of Palestinian refugees who were either

forced or fled out of Palestine. These former citizens had to leave their homes, land and life behind them. Estimates vary from approx 520,000 (Israeli sources) to 726,000 (UN sources) to over 800,000 (Arab sources). Many are still around today and generally live in poverty stricken camps with poor overcrowded conditions.

Since 1948 the number of refugees has grown to 4.6 million people with roughly 3.7 million currently registered with the UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees) set up by the UN. Over a million of the people live in camps run by the UNRWA. Most refugees originally thought that the camps were temporary and that after time they would be able to return to their homes. However till this day most if not all are still waiting. In 1948 the Israelis believed that some of the refugees that had left were hostile and threatening. They did not want such people back in their new homeland so passed a law forbidding the Palestinians to return. So many Palestinians had to find refuge in the neighbouring countries however the Arab states did not want them and with the exception of Jordan were disinclined to give them citizenship. So not only had the Palestinians been kicked out of their home but their neighbouring countries would not willingly give them help. The Lebanese government even blocked their border, restricting access to any refugee.

The UNWRA was given a budget of \$54 million and the task of employing the Palestinians on projects in the Arab states in which they were settled. Temporary camps were set up in many areas surrounding Palestine. By the middle of 1949 the return of Arab Palestinian people to their old homes became increasingly unlikely. Many knew that these camps would not be temporary as they had nowhere else to go. Most refugees were young and spent much of their life till this day in camp conditions. The problem of refugees has been at the heart of peace negotiations ever since 1949.

Death was another consequence of the War, many innocent Palestinian lives were brutally murdered by the Jewish Israeli armies because the Palestinians would not give in and lose their land. The Jews massacred the Palestinian Arabs with tanks and planes when they had little to defend themselves with.

Military and Political leaders were also having a relatively bad time as they had been humiliated by their defeat. Bad timing and ill use of ceasefires led to the Israeli victory. Then there were the Palestinians that actually remained in the Jewish controlled areas. When the Jews came from across the world many tried to assimilate and as a result intermarried with the Palestinians. So when the fighting began they had to suffer the War around them and many may have broken due to the pressure. Also after the War, the Palestinians that stayed in their homes under Jewish control would have been humiliated and resentful at having to live under Jewish control.

But the ultimate consequence for the Palestinians from the 1948 war is that they lost their own homeland. Their religious historical connections to the land had been stripped from them. In 1948 the Arab Palestinians were only under control of the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem and the West bank. They would have to continue living in their camps knowing that they would most likely never gain back their own homeland as it would be such a large enemy to contend with. The Jews now had

America and Britain supporting them. With Germany's defeat in the Second World War the Palestinians had barely any support since their neighbouring countries did not seem too interested. The Palestinians probably never thought about the prospect of losing their home and in a matter of months many had been evicted from their own country.