

## **Why has it been so difficult to bring peace in the Middle East?**

A major source of conflict in the Middle East during the last fifty years has been the dispute between Arabs and Jews over Palestine. For hundreds of years, the great majority of the people living in Palestine were Arabs. But at the end of the nineteenth century some Jews in Europe were becoming increasingly bitter about growing anti-Semitism. They started to talk about setting up a state of their own where they would be free from persecution. They chose Palestine because it was their birthplace of the Jewish religion.

Small numbers of these Jews, who were called Zionists, began to emigrate from Europe to Palestine. By 1914 about one tenth of the country's total population were Jews.

Since the return of the Jews to their 'homeland' in 1948 the two races have fought over what they both claim to be their Holy land. The conflict between Arab and Jews still rages, with suicide bombings, kidnapping, tortures, murders, military invasion, terrorist high jacking, and also people fighting each other.

Jews believe that God promised the land to them, and Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, is their holy city. Apart from the holy shrines and places to worship, the Arabs and Israelis were fighting over dry and dusty land lying between Europe, Asia and Africa, with little fresh water, few raw materials and no real significance except for claims upon that land by different groups who have claims going back for many centuries.

The horror of innocent people dying in September 11, 2001, organised by Bin Laden has got a lot of attention upon the Middle East, and also round the world which caused a lot of people dying. The relentless Arab Israel conflict is not directly religious as it dates back many centuries before neither Islam, nor is this conflict racial as both Jews and Arabs have derived from the same original race to history well known Semites.

Apart from the holy shrines and places of worship, the Arabs and Israelis are fighting over living space. Since the creation of the Jewish state of Israel, Arabs have waged many wars on the new territory. In every one of those wars, the Arabs lost or signed an armistice, sometimes even losing more of their territory to the Israeli. Unfortunately because of all this, it is hard to imagine that there will be a lasting peace between the Arab and Jew in the foreseeable future.

The Muslims the "Al-Sakhra", or "The rock", is precious and holy as it is regarded as the departure point for the prophet's Muhammad's night journey, while for many Jews and Christians it is likely site of Abraham's sacrifice and of the Holy of Holies of the Jewish temple.

In the time of Jesus first century AD Palestine was ruled by the Romans. In AD 70 and again in AD 135 the Jews rebelled against their Roman rulers. Roman soldiers crushed both revolts, destroyed the city of Jerusalem and expelled the Jews. Many thousands fled to neighbouring countries and over the next 200 years they settled in almost every part of the Roman Empire. Many became merchants, and farmers, bankers and crafts men.

Almost all Europeans were Christians and they forced the Jews to live in separate areas. They were not allowed to vote or even to buy their own land. Such anti-Jewish behaviour is known as anti-Semitism.

Both the Jews and Arabs say that they want Palestine and no one is willing to share the land with each other. The Jews think that they were special, chosen people of their God, Yahweh. In their Bible they state that around 1300 BC they were given the land of Canaan forever, the only country in the history where you were a citizen not by birth but by

religion. The Arabs think that they have stayed longer than the Jews and also they have a higher population in the country. They also speak the same language, Arabic.

In 1917 the British were very keen to bring the United States into the First World War against Germany. The British believed that the Jews in America could influence third government's actions and so Britain declared its support and promised to protect the Jews for its homeland in Palestine. This declaration was made in the form of a letter to Lord Rothschild a leading British Jew. In November 1917 it became known as the Balfour Declaration because it was signed by the British foreign secretary, Arthur James.

In May 14<sup>th</sup> 1948 the last British troops who had been protecting Palestine, even though there had been Jewish "terrorist" attacks against them they left. Straight after that the Arab army attacked the new state of Israel.

Then followed by the horrors of the Nazi holocaust in World War Two, when 6 million Jews were slaughtered. The Jews were now desperate to escape Nazi persecution and in huge numbers they immigrated to Eastern Europe, Russia and Palestine.

During the Second World War the British did not allow newcomers and ships to enter because to keep the trouble down. The groups of Zionists terrorists like the Irgun Zvai Ha' Leumi and the Stern Gang, were becoming to kill the British soldiers.

By 1918 both the Jews and the Arabs believed that they had the right to rule themselves in their own land – Palestine. Both the Jewish and the Arab communities fought each other in the years 1936 – 1939 the Arabs unfolded a revolt against the British. The very first problem that the British authorities had to confront was the increase in Jewish immigration. Jews were purchasing land and would not employ Arab workers, who may have been working on that land for their whole life.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of May, 1948 Britain weary from war renounced its mandate over Palestine in view of the UN resolution partitioning the territory between the Arabs and the Jews.

Early on the 15<sup>th</sup> May, troops from Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq entered Palestine in order to assist the local Palestinian Arabs, but their supposedly superior numbers proved to be no match for the co-ordinated Israeli's fighting for their existence. In the fact the Israeli army outnumbered the Arab forces 40-60,000 fighters against the Arab force of some 21,000.

The war, Israel's war of the independence that lasted until January 1949 left the new state of Israel with 80 percent of the territory that was to be divided between the two nations, further enraging Arab states.

In 1956 saw the beginning of the Suez Canal adventure. The Suez war was a war which now seems difficult to understand. An Arab nationalist regime had taken over in Egypt under the leadership of Gamal Abdel – Nasser, and nationalised the Suez Canal. The Suez was then still a key route for world trade, especially for the flow of Gulf oil into the economies of the western world.

In October 29<sup>th</sup> along with the powers of Britain and France, to join in what amounted to an invasion of Egypt.

The invasion actually failed primarily because of the opposition from the United States of America, who decided not to support Britain and France, its reputed allies.

Later on Israel was forced to renounce its gains in Gaza and Sinai. This meant that the European forces had to withdraw to Israeli territory. The war of 1956 came as a further blow on the already distant of hope peace in the Middle East.

In six incredible days in the summer of 1967, Israeli forces managed to conquer the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and the west bank, including the old city of Jerusalem, defeating simultaneously the armies Egypt, Jordan and Syria.

At the time it was clear to Israeli leaders that they would not be able to hold the lands they conquered swiftly, with the exception of the old city of Jerusalem. That all changed when settlers quickly moved into the occupied territories and created many settlements.

Tension had been building throughout the first half of 1967, with Israel warning the Arab states to end their support of the Arab Guerrillas raiding Israel from neighbouring countries.

On the Jewish day of Atonement an Israeli national holiday on October the 6<sup>th</sup>, Egyptian forces blasted their way through the sand defences, built around the Israeli lines at the Suez canal and succeeded in crossing the waterway.

Many talks and negotiations had been led in order to bring the Jews and the Arabs to their agreements. For instance President Clinton of the USA had led a “road mp for peace” however it proved unsuccessful as both sides find it impossible to come to compromise, if one side says one thing and the other side says the opposite.

As a historian it would give a critical to look at what a neutral outsider would think of to entire conflict, as it would give a better outlook to bring peace in the middle east, as it would present us a view that does not favour any side and would make the whole subject of the intractable Middle East conflict more easier to understand and judge for ourselves. Currently there seems to be no sight of peace in the Middle East as both sides are stubborn and opposing in whatever the other side says.