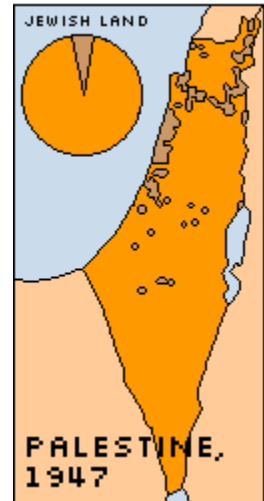




## How did the Mid-East Conflict Start?

More than a century ago, a small group of American and European Jews - known as Zionists - decided to establish a Jewish state. By doing this, they hoped to escape discrimination and outright pogroms against Jews in much of Europe. While they considered various locations for this new state, they ultimately chose the area of historic Palestine in the Middle East for their envisioned nation-state. There was only one problem with this Zionist plan for a Jewish homeland – the land they chose to "call their own" was already home to around half a million Muslim and Christian Palestinians.



Following World War I, the Zionists found a keen sponsor for their national aspirations in Great Britain: after seizing control of Palestine from Turkey in 1917, the British government officially endorsed their plan for a Jewish homeland. Over the next three decades, Jewish immigration from Europe to British-controlled Palestine provoked an increasingly hostile reaction from the local population. Following the Nazi Holocaust in Europe, the flow of Jews into Palestine increased dramatically, causing growing concern among the established population of the region. It was inevitable that fighting soon broke out between 1) Zionist militias trying to secure a safe haven for Jews from around the world, 2) Palestinians seeking to defend their homeland, and 3) the British who were trying to control their colony, and maintain a sense of balance. Ultimately, due to violent and widespread terrorist activity by both the Jews (e.g. massacre at Deir Yassin village, bombing of the King David Hotel, the assassination of Lord Moyne, etc.) and Palestinians, Britain washed its hands of its difficult colony, and turned the Palestinians' fate over to the United Nations.

## The United Nations Partition of Palestine

In November 1947, the UN General Assembly decided to divide Palestine into two separate states. Under the UN plan (Resolution 181), the Jews (who made up 30% of the population at that time, and owned 6% of the land) were to be given 55% of Palestine, while Muslim and Christian Palestinians – the majority of the population – got 45%. The Palestinians had no input into the conception and development of the plan at the UN.



With nothing to gain through agreeing to the partition, the Palestinians rejected the new state of Israel as did the neighbouring Arab countries. In the war that followed, Jewish troops seized 75% of Palestine and expelled 800,000 of its inhabitants – almost all the Arab population – into Gaza, the West Bank and neighbouring countries. They also occupied the western half of Jerusalem (which, under the UN plan, was to be an "international city") and claimed it as their own. What was left of Palestine – Gaza and the West Bank – was taken by Egypt and Jordan respectively. It is not surprising that many Palestinians now refer to this 1947 partition as "al-Nakba" – The Disaster.

## What happened to the Palestinians after the UN Partition?

After 1948, those Palestinians remaining in Israel (and in parts of the Palestinian homeland seized by Israel) were subjected to martial law and land expropriations for decades following the UN partition plan. Today, 20% of Israel's population is Palestinian – but being non-Jewish, they are treated as second-class citizens in their own land, e.g. substandard housing, education, government services, and legal recourse. More than four million Palestinians – the original refugees and their descendants – still live in refugee camps in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza. To make sure the Palestinian refugees had no homes to return to, Israel assigned their property to Jewish immigrants and destroyed 500 of what it termed "abandoned" Palestinian villages. Today, we would consider this a form of "ethnic cleansing."

## Did the Palestinians retain any Rights?

While the Israeli government tried to erase all evidence of the ties that the Palestinians had to their homeland, the international community recognized that the Palestinians were victims of war. In 1948, the UN Security Council passed a resolution (Number 194) that guaranteed the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes in what had become Israel. The UN created a special agency, UNRWA, to care for Palestinian refugees until their return home. Israel has made laws to keep the Palestinians out, but the refugees' "Right of return" still stands.

## When did Israel occupy the Remainder of the Land?

In 1967, tensions grew once more between Israel and its Arab neighbours. In June that year, war broke out, and Israel occupied all of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank – including East Jerusalem – and imposed military rule on the Palestinian communities and refugee camps there. At that point, the Palestinians were a defeated people - virtually the entire population was living in foreign refugee camps, as second-class citizens in Israel, or under Israeli military occupation.



Following the 1967 war, the UN Security Council passed a very important resolution that reflected grave international concerns over the outcome of this brief war – the “6 Days War.” First, resolution 242 emphasized, “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the need to work for a just and lasting peace in which every State in the area can live in security.” Among other things, it also called for the, “withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied,” and “the necessity [of] achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem.” Following the Yom Kippur war in 1973, when several neighbouring countries invaded Israel, the UN reiterated its commitment to Resolution 242, in addition to calling for immediate peace negotiations and the establishment of “a just and durable peace in the Middle East.” Both Israel and the Palestinians accepted those resolutions.

## What is the Status of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories?

Under the Fourth Geneva Convention, to which Israel is a signatory, the Palestinians in the occupied territories are considered a "protected population" with the right to freedom from: indiscriminate use of force against civilians, wanton destruction of property, torture, collective punishment, the annexation of occupied territory, and the establishment of colonies. Violation of certain of these rights is considered a war crime (according to Articles 146, 147, and 148) and perpetrators of such crimes can be pursued in international tribunals. However, Amnesty International, along with other international human rights organizations, has documented extensive violation of the war crimes and other articles by Israel over a period spanning decades. (See Amnesty International's archives: e.g. MDE 15/027/2002, MDE 02/005/2002, MDE 15/050/2004, MDE 15/050/2003, MDE 15/048/2004, MDE 15/033/2002, MDE 15/083/2001, MDE 15/025/2002, NWS 21/009/2001.)

## When did the Palestinians start fighting back?

Palestinian resistance to Israel began in the 1960s, with guerrilla attacks carried out particularly by Al-Fatah, a group led by Yassir Arafat. International terrorism, aimed at focusing world attention on the grievances of the Palestinians, appeared after the June 1967 War. In 1969, Arafat was elected president of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). From 1970, Palestinian fighters began shelling Israeli towns from Jordan and Lebanon. Typically, Israel would respond harshly to Palestinian attacks, often sending its air force to bomb refugee camps, targeting the same people that had been dispossessed in 1948.

## Why did Israel invade Lebanon in the 1980's?

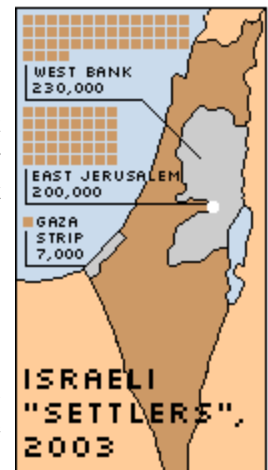
In 1982, led by Ariel Sharon (Israel's prime minister from 2001 to the present), Israel invaded Lebanon with the stated aim of "eliminating Palestinian terrorism." While the attack did strike a heavy blow to Palestinian positions in southern Lebanon, it went well beyond PLO bases – eventually leading to the occupation of Beirut, and the many Palestinian refugee camps that had been established there in 1948 and 1967. Under Sharon's authority, a local Lebanese Phalangist militia was engaged to root out PLO fighters alleged to be present in the Sabra and Shatila Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut. During the night of September 16, 1982, the Phalangist militia did not discover any PLO fighters, but instead slaughtered at least 800 unarmed civilians in these two camps. At the time of the massacre, the perimeter of the camps was secured by the Israeli Army (IDF), and the IDF turned back all fleeing Palestinians.

Following the massacre, the Israeli government launched a Commission of Inquiry led by Israeli Supreme Justice Kahan. In the report, published in the Spring of 1983, the Commission stated that there was no evidence that Israeli units took part in the massacre directly, but that it was solely due to the Phalangists. However, the Commission recorded that Israeli military personnel had several times become aware that a massacre was in progress without taking serious steps to stop it, and even that a report of a massacre in progress was made to an Israeli cabinet minister. It recommended that Israel's Defense Minister Ariel Sharon resign or be fired and also censured a number of military and intelligence officers.

## Why hasn't the Peace Process borne more Fruit?

In November 1988, the Palestinian Liberation Organization accepted the UN resolutions as the basis for a political settlement with Israel. Secret negotiations between Israel and the PLO resulted in an agreement that included mutual recognition, limited self-rule for the Palestinians, and provisions for a permanent treaty later. The Israel-Palestinian deal was based on a simple exchange: "land for peace", which meant the anticipated end of Israeli military occupation of the West bank and Gaza, and the creation there of a Palestinian state. Signed in Washington, the agreement was sealed by a historic handshake between Arafat and Israeli leader Yitzhak Rabin.

Unfortunately, many Israelis have not abandoned their dream of a "Greater Israel" that would annex all of the Occupied Territories, and would drive out all the Palestinians for good. Many Israeli extremists bitterly oppose any peace agreement – whether just or unjust – with the Palestinians. In 1995, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin himself was assassinated by an Israeli religious fanatic.



After 1967, thousands of Jewish "settlers" had begun establishing colonies in East Jerusalem and throughout Gaza and the West Bank, in open violation of the Geneva Conventions. Colonization gave Israel the excuse of continuing its military occupation to "protect the settlers." In 1980, in defiance of the UN Security Council, it declared East Jerusalem to be a part of Israel, and entrenched its efforts to colonize East Jerusalem and its suburbs. In the decades that followed – and even while it was promising the Palestinians "land for peace" – Israel expanded its program of illegal colonization in the occupied territories. Today, 236,000 Israeli "settlers" live on land across the West Bank and Gaza Strip that was

confiscated from Palestinians, while another 200,000 have occupied East Jerusalem – in defiance of UN resolutions and international law. These "Jewish pioneers" see the Palestinian homeland as part of the "biblical land of Israel" – theirs for the taking.

## **Didn't Israel make Arafat a Generous Offer in 2000 that he Refused?**

While Israel claimed that the offer was generous, it was a proposal based on a power relationship where Israel decided it should dictate all terms, and tell the Palestinians they were being generous. Israel offered to "give back" 87% of the occupied territories – which would have constituted about 20 percent of historic Palestine. In return, the Palestinians would first need to give up their "right of return." Second, though in geographic terms, the territorial concessions of Israel seemed tempting, Israel would have managed the proposed Palestinian state like a prison, controlling Palestine's borders, airspace and water supply, much as a prison warden controls the gates, cells, food and services of a prison. In addition, prime land that Israel had seized for large Jewish settlements – especially around Jerusalem – would become part of Israel. In a move that few Palestinians questioned, Arafat chose not to relinquish his people's birthright for this unseemly offer.

## **Doesn't Israel currently have a Plan to Withdraw from the Settlements?**

Israel is building a barrier up to 25 feet high – complete with electrified fencing, concrete walls, ditches and barbed wire – supposedly to protect Israel from terrorist attacks. Most of the wall will cut deep into the occupied territories, incorporating into Israel 80% of its illegal settlements and up to 40% of the Palestinian homeland, including fertile farmland and sources of water for Israeli agriculture. It will turn Palestinian farms, villages and cities into virtual prisons. The "Annexation wall" is a new step in the ongoing dispossession of the Palestinians.

The plan is to withdraw all 7,000 of the Jewish colonizers in the Gaza Strip – and move them to join the other 430,000 colonizers in Jerusalem and the West Bank. Under Sharon's "bold initiative," Israel will speed up construction of its walls around Palestinian cities and towns, then annex everything that's left and call it "Israel." It goes against all UN resolutions and international law. Nevertheless, in April, 2004, President George Bush gave the green light to Israel's land-grab, knowing that it means – in Sharon's own words – "the end of the Palestinians' dreams" of living in peace and security in their own state. The Zionists' dream of escaping European ghettos has become an unending nightmare for 9 million Palestinians, whose only "crime" is to call Palestine their home.

