



America-Eurasia Center's Middle East Program

September 21, 2023

The Israel-Palestine Conflict: 30 Years After the Oslo Accords



*Palestinian children hold keys in their hand to mark the 75th anniversary of al-Nakba or "the Catastrophe" with the creation of Israel, photographed in the West Bank
Photo Credit: Nasser Ishtayeh, The Nation via SOPA Images*

Ava Lindstrom

The America-Eurasia Center

The Middle East Program

www.EurasiaCenter.org

The America-Eurasia Business Coalition

www.usebc.org

The Impact of Over 75 Years of Israeli-Palestinian Conflict on Youth



*Residents of West Bank burn tires in protest against Israeli forces, February 2023
Photo Credit: ASharq al-Awsat*

Although the beginning of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict dates back over a century, the introduction of Israel as a nation in 1947 sparked the conflict that the world knows today when the United Nations adopted Resolution 181 (the Partition Plan), dividing the British Mandate of Palestine into the Arab and Jewish states. On May 14, 1948, Israel declared itself a sovereign state, culminating in numerous wars (the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, the 1956 Suez Canal Crisis, and the 1967 Six-Day War) between the Israeli state and several Arab states. This conflict left over 750,000 Palestinians displaced during the first war, with that number continuing to rise today.¹ After thirty years of conflict, Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty known as the Camp David Accords on September 17, 1978, in an effort to improve relations between Israel and its neighbors. Palestinians still felt unheard and unrecognized among the world's leaders as they lived under what they perceived was an illegal occupation of their land. The occupation of the West Bank and other Palestinian areas was considered illegal according to the 1967 UN Resolution 242, which called for Israel's withdrawal from the territories it had captured in the Six-Day War in exchange for lasting

¹ "Israeli-Palestinian Conflict | Global Conflict Tracker," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed September 18, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/israeli-palestinian-conflict>.

peace.² The Palestinians formed the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964 to represent the Palestinian people, it initially sought to establish an Arab state over the entire territory of the former Mandatory Palestine, advocating the elimination of the State of Israel. During the years that followed, the PLO engaged in numerous terrorist acts against Israel and international targets including American citizens and officials.

In December of 1987, after numerous failed attempts by international powers to broker peace or establish a two-state solution, Palestinian discontent grew exponentially due to Israel's continued confiscation of land and settlement expansion in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Consequently, thousands of Palestinians rose against the Israeli government in the first Intifada (1987-1993), which led to the Oslo Accords (1993) to mediate the two groups.³ The Accords enabled Palestinians to exercise self-governance in Gaza and the West Bank and establish mutual recognition between the two parties. It was during these Oslo Accords that the PLO recognized Israel sovereignty and then sought Arab statehood in the Palestinian territories (the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) that have been militarily occupied by Israel since the 1967 Arab–Israeli War.

Despite the 1995 Oslo II Accords, a second round of efforts to expand the initial agreement, Palestinians rose against the Israeli government in the second intifada in response to Israel's control over the West Bank and a lack of development on a peace agreement. In addition, Palestinians had hoped the Oslo agreement would afford them more rights and freedoms and end the Israeli control of the occupied territories. The second intifada lasted from 2000 until 2005, during which Israeli forces bolstered their presence by building a security barrier around the West Bank in 2002.⁴ The barrier was built after hundreds of terrorist attacks were conducted by Palestinians “suicide bombers” who simply crossed an open border to attack civilian targets in Israel. However, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC) opposed this construction because it breached international law and created a "permanent risk" to the situation between Palestinians and Israelis.⁵

² Ibid.

³“Israeli-Palestinian Conflict | Global Conflict Tracker,” Council on Foreign Relations, accessed September 18, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/israeli-palestinian-conflict>.

⁴Ibid.

⁵“ICJ Advisory Opinion on the Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Opt - Full Text - Question of Palestine,” United Nations, accessed September 18, 2023, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-178825/#:~:text=Settlements%20established%20by%20Israel%20in,of%20the%20wall%20severely%20impedes>.

Another reason that the ICJ and ICC opposed the construction was that Israel was defying the agreement of the Oslo Accords because the Palestinian Authority (PA) only controlled about 42% of the West Bank. They lived under zoning and restrictions imposed by Israeli soldiers. Palestinians grew impatient with the ineffective peace-making efforts. In 2012, their efforts shifted to an appeal to the UN General Assembly to recognize them as an autonomous state. They voted to admit Palestine as an "observer state."⁶ Even though the United States voted against the resolution and did not recognize the State of Palestine, they adhered to the Oslo Accords' recognition of the Palestinian National Authority as the legitimate governing body.⁷

Since then, there have been continuous yet sporadic conflicts between Hamas and Israeli forces, including the use of strikes by Israelis in Gaza, militants in Gaza firing rockets into Israel, Israeli police using stun grenades, rubber bullets, and water cannons, the use of deadly and non-deadly force by Israeli police, and Israel's use of artillery bombardments and airstrikes. This conflict continued sporadically from 2018 until a cease-fire was brokered by Egypt in 2021. Although Israel did claim that they were strictly attacking Palestinian militant groups and their infrastructure, the expansion of their campaign against these groups also killed and wounded hundreds of innocent Palestinian civilians while damaging and destroying residential buildings, media headquarters, and refugee and healthcare facilities.



*Map Card of Palestine Since 1946
Photo Credits: AUPHR*

⁶ "Israeli-Palestinian Conflict | Global Conflict Tracker," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed September 18, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/israeli-palestinian-conflict>.

⁷ "ICJ Advisory Opinion on the Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Opt - Full Text - Question of Palestine," United Nations, accessed September 18, 2023, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-178825/#:~:text=Settlements%20established%20by%20Israel%20in,of%20the%20wall%20severely%20impedes>.

There is a grave concern from the United Nations, the neighboring nations, and the international community, notably the United States, that a third intifada will break out soon between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Israeli government. The United States is highly concerned that a third conflict would affect its regional objectives, as it is a close ally of Israel. A more comprehensive and permanent deal between the two would increase regional stability, especially in Lebanon and other potentially unstable countries with an influx of Palestinian refugees.

In 2022, Israel swore in their most religious and far-right party since its creation, headed by Benjamin 'Bibi' Netanyahu and his Likud party. The Likud party comprises two ultra-Orthodox parties and three far-right parties, one being the Religious Zionism party. Governmental officials include the appointment of Itamar Ben-Gvir, the leader of the Jewish Power party, as national security minister and Bezalel Smotrich, the leader of the Religious Zionism faction, as finance minister overseeing the West Bank settlement policy.⁸ Ben-Gvir "was convicted of racist incitement against Arabs."⁹

As a result of this new power dynamic between Israeli and Palestinian governments, the West Bank is on the path to its deadliest year since 2005, with almost daily Israeli raids and attacks. Earlier this year, Hamas and Israeli forces exchanged nearly two thousand missiles over a span of five days. Furthermore, Israel approved five thousand new settler homes in June. The Israeli military has raided the al-Aqsa mosque, the third holiest site for Islamic believers, twice in one day while firing missiles in the Jenin refugee camp. In July, Israel deployed almost 2000 troops and conducted a drone strike at the Jenin refugee camp, killing 12 Palestinians and wounding 50. Hamas responded to the raid by carrying out an attack in Tel Aviv and launching missiles at Israel.

⁸"Israeli-Palestinian Conflict | Global Conflict Tracker," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed September 18, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/israeli-palestinian-conflict>.

⁹Ibid.



*Palestinian youth carry wounded in a clash with Israelis, October 2015
Photo Credits: Abed Omar Qusini via REUTERS*

Amid the violence, in August 2023, a Palestinian youth, Mahmoud Abu Sa'an, was killed during a raid in the West Bank. Israeli officials said this incident occurred during an Israeli military operation in a refugee camp that escalated into a conflict between the Palestinian refugees and the Israeli military.¹⁰ This event is not an isolated one, nor is it uncommon. Just this month, on September 18, 2023, a Palestinian youth was shot at an Israeli army checkpoint because he raised suspicion when Israeli forces claimed he tried to stab one of the soldiers.¹¹ As a result, the Israelis "neutralized" him.

In response to increased Israeli violence against them, many Palestinians, especially the youth, became more involved and affected by the movement and do not regard the army's version of events as truthful. Palestinians feel that the Israeli military often justifies the shootings of Palestinians with the argument of defending against potential endangerment.

Within the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, about 5.3 million people are living in a cramped 6,020 square kilometer area, with the median age being 19.3 years and 69% of the population being under 29 years old (2015), while the median age in Israel is 30.48 years and the percentage of

¹⁰"Eighteen-Year-Old Palestinian Shot at Point-Blank Range, Killed during Confrontations in Nur Shams Refugee Camp," Wafa Agency, accessed September 18, 2023, <https://english.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/137030>.

¹¹"Palestinian Youth Shot at an Israeli Army Checkpoint South of Jerusalem," Wafa Agency, accessed September 18, 2023, <https://english.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/137626>.

people ages from 0-14 years old being 28.17% (2021) and 15-64 being 59.9% (2021).¹² Palestinian youth have a 40% unemployment rate, while Israeli youth have a six percent unemployment rate.¹³ While Palestine has rapid population growth (the highest in the Arab countries), the area they are allowed to work in does not accommodate the need for young Palestinian people to work, as the current population density in the Gaza Strip is more than 4,500 inhabitants per one square kilometer.¹⁴ In response to the increase of danger and violence in their communities, many Israeli and Palestinian youth wonder how their future will pan out in the next few decades, as they feel unsafe in the place they call home.

The youth have been omnipresent in the news on both sides, shaping how the next period looks for the region. In a recent poll conducted by Khalil Shikaki and Dahlia Scheindlin, about half of Israelis and Palestinians believe that a political resolution cannot bring peace and that violence is the only or best way to achieve rights or a compromise.¹⁵ While that is the case for about half of each population, they also believe that each side's claim to the land is illegitimate, with Palestinians at 93% and Israelis Jews at 68%.¹⁶ They also both believe that a two-state solution will fail and is already causing a regional instability

The poll also found that a large majority within each group respected the other's religion. Both Palestinians and Israeli Jews are not happy with the current status quo. They viewed peace as a possibility between the two peoples, aside from the fact that, according to the youth, "the conflict is mostly about leaders fighting for their interests."¹⁷

¹²"Palestinian Territories Profile," BBC News, June 26, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14630174>.

¹³Unemployment, Youth Total (% of Total Labor Force Ages 15-24) (Modeled ILO Estimate) - Israel," World Bank Open Data, accessed September 18, 2023, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?locations=IL>.

¹⁴"United Nations Development Programme," Resilience Series: Youth Employment in Palestine, accessed September 18, 2023, <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-05/undp-annual-report-2021-v1.pdf>.

¹⁵"How Do Israeli and Palestinian Youth View the Prospects for Peace?," United States Institute of Peace, February 1, 2023, <https://www.usip.org/blog/2023/01/how-do-israeli-and-palestinian-youth-view-prospects-peace>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.



Israeli activist and politician Tzvi Suktot (L) is confronted by Palestinians while Suktot tries to interrupt a Palestinian rally in the West Bank town of Huwwara on March 3, 2023. Photo Credit: Middle East Eye via AFP

As a result of these escalating conflicts, there are increasing concerns of a third intifada. One of the people expressing these concerns to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is the CIA director, William Burns, warning them of the situation's fragility and its effects on the rest of the Middle Eastern landscape.¹⁸ With the remembrance of al-Nakba and the thirtieth anniversary of the Oslo Accords on September 13th, 2023, the response from Palestinians and Israeli Jews evokes sadness, anger, dissent, and denial. Among the violence, Saudi Arabia has announced that it will co-host with the United Nations General Assembly to revamp the peace processes between Israel and Palestine.¹⁹ The future is unknown, but the international community's newfound interest in the region does give hope for a new normal for Israeli and Palestinian youth.

¹⁸CIA director visiting Israel, West Bank as concern over ... - axios, accessed September 18, 2023, <https://www.axios.com/2023/01/27/cia-bill-burns-israel-palestinians-visit-netanyahu-abbas>.

¹⁹Jacob Magid et al., "Saudis Co-Hosting Un Event Aimed at Revamping Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process," The Times of Israel, September 14, 2023, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/saudis-co-hosting-un-event-aimed-at-revamping-israeli-palestinian-peace-process/>.



America-Eurasia Center