

## Why Palestinians have failed to get their own Independent Nation

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On October 7, in a deadly attack on Israel, Hamas killed at least 1,400 people and took more than 200 hostages. The attack by Hamas evoked strong reactions from the international community and Israel. In a counter-attack, Israel has launched an operation against Hamas in Gaza, and more than 8,000 people have been killed in strikes, including thousands of women and children, according to the Hamas-run health ministry.<sup>[1]</sup> Every day, hundreds of people are losing their lives, leaving their homes, and running away to survive the war. Whether it is Palestinians or Israelis, blood is being spilled. It is the common innocent people who are suffering the most. It is important to note that the attack by Hamas has brought new-found attention to the Israel-Palestine question. The carefully planned attack by Hamas was perhaps designed to bring attention to the Palestinian's cause once again.

Palestinians have been fighting a long battle with Israel for the creation of an independent homeland. The Israel and Palestine conflict is a territorial conflict between the Jewish Zionist project and the Palestinian nationalist project. Both lay claim to the same land. Even after decades of fighting and intermittent peace processes, no agreement has been reached between Israel and Palestine. Both trace their claims to the land to history. Though Israel was able to form an independent Jewish nation back in 1948, Palestinians are still fighting to establish their independent nation. There are various reasons why Palestinians are still waiting to establish their state despite many attempts and treaties. This will be discussed in this piece.

The conflict can be traced back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when Zionism started gaining traction. In 1897, Some Jews founded the World Zionist Organisation. These people called Palestine their national homeland.<sup>[2]</sup> They do it on the basis of thousands of years old history. Almost 2,000 years ago, most of the Jews were driven out of Palestine by the Romans. With the constant rise in anti-Semitism in Europe in the 19th Century, Jews looked towards Palestine for safe refuge. However, the problem was that significant population of Arabs was already living in Palestine. Though gradually Jews were settling in Palestine, they didn't have sufficient numbers to alarm the Arabs.

However, after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, Palestine became the mandate of Britain which issued the Balfour Declaration allowing Jews to form the Jewish nation for themselves in Palestine. These two events alarmed the Arabs and the resistance started. The 1936 violent protests made the British suggest peaceful plans to resolve the issue but plans were rejected. During the Second World War (WW2), thousands of Jews arrived in Palestine and settled but after the end of WW2, Britain unable to cope with rising tensions in Palestine, referred the matter to the United Nations. The UN voted for a two-state solution, leading to the formation of a Jewish state and Palestine.<sup>[3]</sup> However, the situation became more complicated after Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria attacked the newly formed Israel in 1948 and lost the war. Due to this, Palestinian people suddenly lost 3/4th of their land, and West Bank was acquired by Jordan and the city of Jerusalem was also divided between Israel and Jordan.

The subsequent wars between the Arab States and Israel made the peace settlement more complicated. For example, in the 1967 war, Israel captured the Gaza Strip and the whole of Sinai from Egypt, East Jerusalem, and West Bank from Jordan, and Golan Heights from Syria. Israel also ignored the UN order to return captured territories. This war further complicated things because many Palestinians want East Jerusalem as their capital. But after the war of Yom

Kippur in 1973, a sign of peace appeared, and in 1978 peace treaty was signed between Egypt and Israel at Camp David (Maryland, USA). Though the treaty was signed between Egypt and Israel, it had implications for Palestine as well because Egypt would no longer be able to fight for the cause of Palestine, reducing support for the Palestinians.

The frustration of not reaching an agreement on the formation of independent Palestine led to the First Intifada, a form of civil disobedience movement against Israel.<sup>[4]</sup> However, in 1993, a major peace agreement was signed between the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Israel. According to this, Israel and PLO recognised each other and the Palestinians were to be given limited rule in Jericho in the West Bank and parts of the Gaza Strip. This is known as Oslo Accord.

Israel demilitarised all of West Bank except Hebron but this does not mean the peace was established and the path for the creation of an independent Palestine state was cleared. The problem with all these peace agreements is the subjectivity. The successive governments have failed to honor these agreements in Israel. Too much discretion on the part of the Prime Minister in this matter for domestic political gains has stalled the peace processes. The right-wing governments of Israel often follow aggressive policies, even giving statements about annexing the areas. These postures and lack of continuity in Israel's policy on Palestine instill a sense of distrust in Palestinians which makes them wary of any peace move by Israel in the future.

Another main reason why Palestinians have not got their independent state is the result of Israeli settlements. These settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem started as an ideological process but soon Israel introduced various schemes like affordable housing and education which encouraged Israeli people to settle in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. It is against the proposed two-state solution because according to the two-state solution, the West Bank is supposed to be part of Palestine. The **Israeli settlements** are growing at a rapid pace. The number is so high that without dismantling all the settlements, the two-state solution for the creation of an independent Palestine state is almost impossible. This has become a major issue in the peace process. The problem is Israel does not recognise the '**illegal occupation**' of the **West Bank** and is not ready to dismantle the settlements.

Israel has built **a massive wall around Israeli settlements** in the West Bank which has cut off many Palestinians from accessing their **livelihood sources** like farms and plantations.<sup>[5]</sup>

Israel does not even acknowledge this in the peace process which is an important issue for Palestinians. This also stalls the peace process. Another contentious issue in the Israel-Palestine conflict is the **question of refugees**. After the war of 1948, many Palestinians were forced to move or migrate and became **refugees** suddenly **in their own country**. The Palestinians want to go back to pre-1948 homelands which Israel does not accept.

Thus, the lack of consensus on various issues has made any peace settlement arduous. Neither Israel nor the Palestinians are willing to concede. Israel has refused to talk to Hamas which has become a major actor in the conflict. After the advent of Hamas and the violence unleashed by it on Israel, it was designated as a terrorist organisation by Israel. Besides this, Israel's lack of consistency in any peace agreement especially by the right-wing government has led to a lack of trust among Palestinians. Israeli settlements in the 'occupied West Bank', massive walls, and no acknowledgment of the right of refugees to return to pre-1948 land, have stalled the peace process. Therefore, Palestinians are yet to get an independent state despite various attempts.

## Endnotes

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[1] Israel-Palestine crisis: Gaza's north cut off from aid; death toll rising, UN News, Nov, 2, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/11/1143107>

[2] Origins and Evolution of the Palestine Problem: 1917-1947 (Part I), United Nations, [https://www.un.org/unispal/history2/origins-and-evolution-of-the-palestine-problem/part-i-1917-1947/#Origins\\_and\\_Evolution\\_of\\_the\\_Palestine\\_Problem\\_1917-1947\\_Part\\_I](https://www.un.org/unispal/history2/origins-and-evolution-of-the-palestine-problem/part-i-1917-1947/#Origins_and_Evolution_of_the_Palestine_Problem_1917-1947_Part_I)

[3] History of the Question of Palestine, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/unispal/history/>

[4] The Origins and Evolution of the Palestine Problem, Part V: 1989-2000 – CEIRPP, DPR study, United Nations, New York, 2014, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-209471/>

[5] Israel's Occupation: 50 Years of Dispossession, June, 7, 2017, Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2017/06/israel-occupation-50-years-of-dispossession/>

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