

CIACA Model United Nations IV Chair Report

Chair Report

Forum: General Assembly 4 (Special Political and Decolonization Committee)

Topic: The Question of Israeli Settlements in the West Bank

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Introduction

With a long-standing history, the conflict between Israel and Palestine has evolved from a matter of temporary administration facilitated by Great Britain to a war which has exacerbated regional tensions across the entire Middle East in the present day. The question of Palestine's status as a nation was brought before the United Nations shortly after the end of the second World War, however included in the "Balfour Declaration" of 1917, Great Britain had already expressed support for "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people". For the next three decades, there would begin to be a large influx of Jewish immigrants entering the territory as a means to escape from Nazi persecution.

Following the announcement of the independence of the state of Israel on May 14, 1948, five Arab nations attacked Israel sparking the first Arab-Israeli war or what is commonly known as the "Nakba." Although Israel had won the war, the event saw approximately 750,000 Palestinians displaced and the territory was divided into 3 parts: the State of Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. Until 1967, these formal armistice lines remained under control by Israel, Egypt, and Jordan respectively. Due to a false report given by Soviet officials to Syrian and Egyptian governments, Egyptian president, Abdel Gamal Nasser sent large numbers of troops to the Sinai peninsula, which eventually sparked the Six-Day War; a war that ended in Israel gaining territorial control over the peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West bank, East Jerusalem, and Golan Height. Not only was the Six-Day war a success for Israel in terms of occupying more land, but the war also displaced an additional 430,000 Palestinians and opened an opportunity to build Jewish settlements in the West Bank.\

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As for the Arab population residing in the West Bank, Israel placed military rule, something that is still enforced to this day. Conflict over the West Bank continued through the 1970s when Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin began a program that funded the construction of several large-scale housing developments of Israelis in the West Bank. Most residents however, still consider themselves Arab citizens of Palestine living under an occupation and highly opposed the introduction of Israeli settlements in their territory.

Over the next few decades, Israeli settlements continue to grow but Israel themselves does not recognize these settlements as violations of international law, rather an “administration” of what it calls the Judea and Samaria district. By 2022, Israeli settlers in the West bank accounted for nearly half a million people while 3.1 million Palestinians still lived in cities and homesteads in the West Bank with Israel’s laws and rights. Despite artisan crafts, small-scale manufacturing, and having a service-oriented economy, the highly urbanized population remains underemployed. Palestinians residing in the West Bank are not considered citizens and must import food, fuel, consumer goods, and oil for electricity to survive all while being subjected to Israel’s laws and trade restrictions. New Israeli settlements continue to pop up in the West Bank while millions of Palestinians continue to live in a state of instability alongside them. Although the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has maintained the opinion that these settlements are in violation of international law, the Prime Minister, Netanyahu says, “the Jewish people are not occupiers in their own land,” continuing the cycle of occupation and genocide.

Definition of Key Terms

Hamas

Also known as the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas is a Palestinian nationalist and Islamist militant group who has governed the Israeli-occupied Gaza Strip since 2007 (Al Jazeera, 2023).

West Bank

One of two Palestinian territories that make up the State of Palestine; borders Jordan and Israel and has been under Israeli occupation since 1967 (The World Factbook).

Settlement

An inhabited area that is used to establish a new colony or community of people (Oxford Dictionary).

Two-State Solution

This solution proposes the creation of two separate states through the division of one land; used as a means to alleviate further conflict between two parties (Britannica).

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Self-Determination

The process by which the existence of a population or country is recognized and can determine its own statehood (Oxford Dictionary).

Bilateral

Refers to the involvement of two or more factions in the same conflict (Dictionary.com).

Background Information

In 1948, both Israel and Palestinian-owned territories gained independence from the colonial rule of the United Kingdom. These acts of gained autonomy resulted from the passing of the UN General Assembly Resolution 181, which allowed Palestine to determine itself as two separate states, one set for the Jewish population and the other for Palestinian Arabs. However, Israel's independence from British rule culminated in a war between said state and Arab countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria. Following the conclusion of the Arab-Israeli War, Israel took administrative control over some Palestinian territories, while Egypt took control over the Gaza Strip, and Jordan took control over the West Bank. This conflict led an estimated 700,000 Palestinians to seek refuge in neighboring countries. Less than two decades later, Israel and the Arab states fought in another war. Known as the Six-Day War, the two sides would battle over the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as the city of Jerusalem and the Sinai Peninsula. Israel was the victor, and in turn, it gained control over the aforementioned regions. In 1988, Jordan surrendered its authority over the West Bank to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

Five years later, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat met in Norway to begin negotiations that would lead to the institution of the Oslo Accords. Via a letter, the Israeli government recognized Palestine's right to exist as a singular state; thus, they worked with the PLO to establish the Palestinian Authority (PA), who would be responsible for the West Bank. While these discussions took place, Israel agreed to withdraw settlement blocs from the said region and transfer its authority to the newly formed PA. Decades later, the Israeli military still has partial control over the West Bank, as well as nearby Palestinian territories, including the expansion of civilian settlements. In June 2002, the Israeli government ordered the construction of a barrier, consisting of a wall, as well as a fence in other parts, directly on the West Bank border. The government stated that the barrier would protect Israelis living in the settlement blocs from potential terrorist attacks by neighboring Palestinians. In spite of this, it made traveling from the West Bank to Jerusalem, and vice versa, difficult for the latter population. Others were unable to travel to work due to the location of the barrier. Nevertheless, the Israeli government failed to act upon any changes, and the barrier maintains itself on the outskirts of the West Bank border. Moreover, towards the end of April 2003, the United Nations, the European Union, the United States, and Russia came together in Jordan during a World Economic Forum meeting to discuss a potential 'Road Map for Peace'. All parties worked collaboratively to set up reforms that would see Israel end all settlement activities in the Palestinian territories and allow Palestine to achieve sovereignty.

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According to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), between 2012 and 2022, the number of Israeli settlers residing in the West Bank rose from 500,000 to 700,000, with nearly 300 illegal settlement blocs built in the occupied territory. 147 of these blocs were confirmed to be outposts, which under Israeli domestic law and international law are deemed unlawful. In a statement made during a UNHRC meeting in early 2023, the State of Palestine voiced its concerns regarding the increase in settlement activity in the West Bank and that it directly violates the civil, political, and social rights of the Palestinian population, as well as what the UNHRC and International Court of Justice stand for. In April 2024, the Times of Israel stated that the Israeli Finance Minister wished to legalize a number of illegal settler outposts in the West Bank, in hopes of expanding the settlement movement. In legalizing these settlements, it infringes upon the appropriateness and effectiveness of the two-state solution and Palestine's hopes of becoming an independent country. Expansion of settlements in the West Bank translates to violating the sovereignty of the Palestinian state, obstructing development and progress, and threatening the safety and security of Palestinians.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Israel

The government of Israel maintains settlements in the West Bank region, following its initial occupation in 1967 after the conclusion of the Six-Day War. Since then, settlement activities have continued, with the expansion of Jewish communities in the region, despite ownership from the Palestinians. As of 2022, an estimated 520,000 Israeli settlers live in the occupied West Bank, but the High Commissioner for Human Rights reports that the government intends on doubling the settler population by 2027. Israel affirms that the expansion of settlement blocs on Palestinian land is done to maintain history and religion.

Palestine

The United Nations (UN) confirms in a 2023 report that the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank is heavily tied to settler attacks against the Palestinian population. 3,372 violent settler attacks have been verified by the UN, with over 1,000 Palestinians reported to have suffered injuries. Palestine has been tracking the growing settlements and widespread infringement on the rights of its people and governing bodies and calls for assistance and support from the international community.

Hamas

Hamas holds complete civil control over the Gaza Strip and does not support the notion of a two-state solution. Its hostility is mainly aimed at the Israeli government, in which the Islamic militant organization openly opposes Israel's involvement, especially with the mix of Jewish and Islamic presence in the region. Hamas sees the West Bank as belonging to Palestine and has launched attacks against Israel for their continued expansion of settlements.

Palestinian National Authority (PNA)

The Palestinian National Authority (PNA), or Palestinian Authority (PA), holds partial civil control over the Israeli-occupied West Bank. The government body is working towards establishing Palestine as its own independent state and making East Jerusalem the capital city. In addition to this, the PNA deems all existing

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Israeli settlements in the region to be illegal under the jurisdiction of international law, and prevents Palestinians from achieving statehood and threatens the efficacy of the two-state solution.

International Criminal Court (ICC)

The International Criminal Court is working with the PNA, following the latter's decision to pursue legal action against Israeli settlements in the West Bank. However, Israel deems the ICC's support for Palestine as politically biased, questioning Palestine's status as a sovereign state. Moving on, the court has opened investigations on possible war crimes and violation of human rights against the Israeli government. One of the cases being investigated is the presence of Israeli settlers in Palestinian territory, which the court labels as a war crime.

United States of America (US/USA)

In the past, U.S. administrations have been against Israel's settlement expansions in the West Bank region. Under the Biden administration, sanctions against said country were imposed for their violation of international law and continued illegal occupation of Palestinian territory. More specifically, individuals and extremist organizations faced sanctions under the Biden presidency, with the administration citing their involvement as a threat to the region's security and stability.

United Kingdom (UK)

The October 7 Hamas-led attacks saw the UK express its support for Israel and believed its response to these attacks were primarily for self-defense. A year after, in September 2024, the UK placed a partial pause on military exports to Israel and provided aid worth up to £100 million to Palestine. Since the attacks in October 2023, the British government has been on the fence about fully supporting either Palestine or Israel. With aid being sent to Gaza and visa restrictions for Israeli settlers, the UK abstained from a UN resolution calling for an end to Israeli occupation.

Timeline of Events

Date

Description

November 1947	The UN General Assembly debated whether to have a UN-run governmental body directly oversee Jerusalem and have the two Palestinian territories be divided into one Jewish state and one Arab state. This led to the creation of a UN Partition Plan, however, violent attacks between the Jewish and Arab communities kept escalating.
June 1967	From 5 to 10 June, 1967, Israel fought against a group of Arab states during what was called the Six-Day War. Before the war occurred, Palestinian attacks against the Israeli government intensified, with the former receiving support from Syria. Israel then responded with its own attacks. In the end, the Arab states lost and Israel gained control over the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem.

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- December 1987 The first of two intifada outbreaks took place on 1 December 1987. Four Palestinian civilians were killed by an Israeli in a car crash, and this caused an uproar in the West Bank region. The second intifada saw Ariel Sharon, an Israeli right-wing politician and military general, visit the Temple Mount, known for being one of the holiest Islamic sites in the world. This controversial visit was followed up by violent demonstrations that led to 5,000 casualties that involved both Israeli and Palestinian civilians. These events led to the use of the word 'intifada', commonly used by pro-Palestinians against Israel and its supporters.
- September 1993 The Oslo Accords, also referred to as the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, was passed after negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The two parties recognized the sovereignty of the other state and agreed to establish the Palestinian Authority as the organization responsible for the administration of both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Israel also agreed to withdrawing settlements from the West Bank.
- September 1995 Following the passing of the first Oslo Accord, Israel's then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat met in the U.S. to sign the second Oslo Accord. This agreement allowed Palestine to gain full control over the West Bank, authorizing the creation/continuation of public administration and security endeavors.
- June 2002 Towards the end of June 2002, the Israeli government decided to build a fence along the outskirts of the West Bank. It stated that such measures were to be implemented so that bordering Israeli cities and communities were safe from Palestinian-led terrorist attacks. Some parts of the fence were constructed directly in the West Bank, and cut off partial access to Jerusalem for some Palestinians. The Israeli Supreme Court responded to these actions by enforcing changes on where the barrier should be placed but progress has been limited.
- January 2006 Fatah, a political faction associated with the PLO, lost to Hamas in that year's Palestinian general elections. The two parties then came together to inaugurate a deal that would see them both hold authority over the West Bank. The agreement also stated shared control over the Gaza Strip, but in 2007, Hamas took full ownership of the territory.
- November 2009 The Israeli government announced a 10-month partial freeze on Israeli settlements in the West Bank. While this pause took place, Israel and the Palestinian Authority resumed peace talks, but in November 2010, the former chose not to extend the freeze. Thus, settlement blocs and construction of homes and infrastructure for Israelis resumed.

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January 2020 During Donald Trump's first term as U.S. President, his administration established an Israeli-Palestinian peace plan without approval or involvement from Palestine. The plan focused on providing aid to Palestinians and called for a two-state solution. However, political analysts voiced their concerns, stating that the plan allowed Israel to gain control of the West Bank. Despite the criticism, current Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, began invading parts of the West Bank region.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- UN Security Council Resolution 242 (1967)
- The Camp David Accords (1978)
- The Madrid Peace Conference (October 30, 1991)
- The Oslo Accords (1993, 1995)
- Gaza-Jericho Agreement (May 4, 1994)
- The Camp David Summit (July 2000)
- Fatah-Hamas Gaza Agreement (April 23, 2014)
- Ceasefire agreement between the Israeli government and Hamas (January 2025)

Previous Attempts to solve the issue

The issue of Israeli settlements in the West Bank has experienced both progress and setbacks, resulting from the deteriorated trust and association between the Israeli and Palestinian authorities. Nevertheless, there have been times when potential solutions were considered realistic and viable and fostered an expectation that these two parties could face reconciliation. The Oslo Accords, with the first one signed in 1993 and the second in 1995, provided a framework that saw the West Bank be divided into three areas: A, B, and C. Additionally, this agreement sought to give the Palestinian Authority full authority over the region. Even so, it failed to put an end to Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territory, leading the former's government to continue developing more settlement blocs. In 2003, the UN, along with the European Union, the U.S., and Russia, developed an initiative called the Roadmap for Peace. This initiative aimed to suspend all of Israel's settlement activity and

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have Israeli and Palestinian authorities resume peace negotiations. While this proposal passed, it failed to be effectively implemented and saw the relationship between the two sides grow increasingly fragmented as they both believed the other were unable to fulfill their part of the agreement.

Under the Obama presidency, the U.S. urged Israel's leader, Netanyahu, to resume peace talks with the Palestinian National Authority and work towards imposing a partial freeze on the settlements of Israeli civilians in the West Bank region. Thus, in November 2009, the Israeli government announced a partial freeze of settlement activities for a period of 10 months. In September 2010, the partial freeze was to be reversed; however, Palestinian authorities prolonged the decision until November. At this point, Israel no longer extended the freeze, and the PA stopped negotiations between both parties unless the freeze period was renewed. The opposing party disregarded the request and resumed settlement activities in the Palestinian territory. The PA's refusal to continue peace talks with the Israeli government and Netanyahu's decision to continue settlement construction caused further animosity between the two and marked a major setback in Palestine's fight for self-determination.

Moreover, the most commonly discussed solution to this ever-changing issue is a two-state solution. This would propose the establishment of two separate states, in which Palestine would gain sovereignty and be free from Israeli control. Although the Oslo Accords led to an agreement between the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Israeli government to inaugurate a two-state solution, it has only maintained itself as a formal and bilateral agreement thus far. Back in the 1940s, the UN passed Resolution 181, which would see Palestine be divided into an Arab and a Jewish state. However, this partition plan was met with criticism, specifically from the Arab states comprising Egypt and Transjordan. As a result, the implementation of a two-state solution was plausible but seemed impossible given the shifting domestic politics and questioning of state legitimacy in the region.

Possible Solutions

As previously discussed, a two-state solution should generally be the primary solution delegates focus on when working on their resolutions and when debating on this specific topic, but that is up to the delegates' discretion. To address the issue, a two-state solution would see Israel suspend all settlement activity in the West

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Bank and cede authority over the invaded Palestinian territory to its rightful owner. This results in amending the competing narratives regarding Palestine's sovereignty as a singular state and allowing the Israeli government to work with demographic realities that are within the legal boundaries of international law. Another solution to consider won't entirely focus on eliminating Israel's involvement in the West Bank, but primarily on eliminating any settlement blocs in the region. Israeli and Palestinian authorities would need to agree on removing all settlements so that, gradually, Palestine would be able to gain most, if not all, of the West Bank territory back. For Israel, it would mean determining the safest way to transport settlers back to the country. Moreover, another solution could be to implement a one-state solution. The possibility is there, but the negatives of this solution dramatically outweigh the positives. The first issue to tackle, if it were to be carried out, results from the animosity between Israeli and Palestinian authorities; therefore, finding a common ground may be difficult. In terms of governance and stability, the two leadership bodies would need to balance out their priorities and ensure that the safety and security of their people have the utmost priority. Nevertheless, a one-state solution could see Israel end its occupation of the West Bank and give back the territory to Palestine. While this solution slowly becomes implemented, the two governments can focus on establishing a singular democratic state where all citizens have equal rights and face no discrimination for their ethnic and religious backgrounds. In addition, it can help foster a more positive and collaborative relationship between the two as they work together to govern the state.

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