

University of Connecticut

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute

The Arab-Israeli Conflict Part II:

Cutting Through the Myths & Misinformation and Negotiating a Solution

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Core Issues Between the Palestinian Arabs and Israelis

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The key issues which must be resolved in negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs include:

- Borders
- Jerusalem
- Refugees
- Settlements
- Security
- Two States
- End of Conflict
- Water

This summary includes background on each along with, as appropriate, the basic positions of the Palestinian Arabs and Israelis.

Complicating the entire situation is the internal Palestinian Arab conflict between Fatah and Hamas, the division between the West Bank and Gaza, and the legitimacy or lack thereof of the Palestinian Authority. This summary concludes with some background about those.

Major Palestinian Arab Groups

Fatah originated in Kuwait in 1957 as a Palestinian resistance group. It was led by Yassir Arafat until his death in 2004 and formed the largest group in the PLO. Its constitution may be found at <<http://www.mideastweb.org/fateh.htm>>.

The PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) is the umbrella organization of the Palestinian resistance. It was founded in 1964, with Ahmed Shukhairy as chairman, but Shukhairy was soon replaced by Arafat as Fatah became its most prominent component. The PLO Charter may be found at <<http://www.mideastweb.org/plocha.htm>>.

Both the Fatah and PLO Charters call for the destruction of Israel. Under the terms of the Oslo Accords, the provisions calling for the destruction of Israel were supposed to be removed from the PLO Charter, but they remain in place.

Hamas is an acronym for “harakat al-MuqfÅwamat al-IslfÅmiyyah,” meaning “Islamic Resistance Movement.” Hamas is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood movement and was established in 1987. It originally eschewed terrorism and at that time was viewed by Israel as possibly being a less fanatical alternative to the PLO, but that quickly changed. Hamas is Islamist, while Fatah is viewed as more secular. Its charter, which may be found at <<http://www.mideastweb.org/hamas.htm>>. The Hamas charter calls for the replacement of Israel and the disputed territories by an Islamic state. Hamas is not part of the PLO.

The Palestinian Authority was formed as part of the Oslo Process to administer those portions of the disputed territories transferred to Arab control. It now controls Gaza and about 40 percent of the West Bank; about 95 percent of the Arabs in the disputed territories now live in the parts administered by the Palestinian Authority. Since 2007, Gaza is controlled by Hamas and the Palestinian Authority administering the West Bank is controlled by Fatah, with those two groups in sharp conflict and disputing each other’s legitimacy.

Borders Background

For centuries prior to the first World War, large portions of the Middle East were part of the Ottoman Empire. With Turkey on the losing side, the Ottoman Empire broke apart.

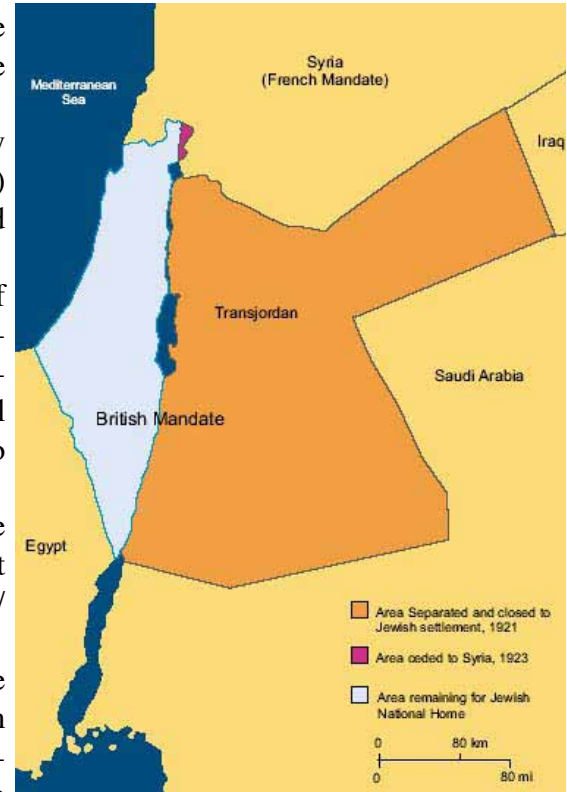
Zionist leaders (Zionism is probably most concisely and accurately described as the national liberation movement of the Jewish people) wanted to reestablish Jewish sovereignty over Eretz Yisrael, the Land of Israel, creating a modern Jewish state.

In 1917, the British government issued a formal statement of policy, generally called the Balfour Declaration after Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour, declaring in part: “His Majesty’s government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object.”

At the time of the Balfour Declaration, the boundaries of Palestine were not formally determined, but it was comprised roughly of what today are Jordan, Israel, the disputed territories (Judea and Samaria/ West Bank and Gaza) and the Golan Heights.

When the League of Nations was formed in the aftermath of the war, it granted temporary control of Palestine to Great Britain, with the understanding that Britain would act in accordance with the Balfour Declaration and facilitate the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.

By the time the League of Nations Mandate took effect in 1923, Great Britain and France agreed the bulk of the Golan Heights would be part of the territory administered by France and it was ultimately



Palestine Mandate at the time Transjordan was separated from the rest of Palestine. Courtesy of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs <<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Facts+About+Israel/Israel+in+Maps/Separation+of+Transjordan-+1922.htm>>.

incorporated into Syria.

The Churchill White Paper in 1922 partitioned the Palestine Mandate and transferred roughly 76 percent of that territory to Prince Abdullah (an ancestor of today's King Abdullah) and renamed it Transjordan. It is now called Jordan.

After World War II, Britain wanted to wash its hands of the Palestine problem and turned to the United Nations, successor to the League of Nations. In 1947, the United Nations General Assembly approved what is known as the United Nations Partition Plan.

The United Nations Partition Plan called for roughly 55 percent of what remained to become a Jewish state and 45 percent to become an Arab state, with Jerusalem coming under international control.

The Zionist leaders accepted this second partition; the Arabs rejected it, with five Arab armies (Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon) invading Israel on the day the British Mandate expired and Israel declared its independence, May 14, 1948.

That war has never officially ended, but armistice agreements were signed in 1949 defining what were supposed to be temporary armistice lines. At the insistence of the Arab states, they were specifically determined to not be borders. For example, the agreement between Jordan and Israel included the provision: "The Armistice Demarcation Lines defined in articles V and VI of this Agreement are agreed upon by the Parties without prejudice to future territorial settlements or boundary lines or to claims of either Party relating thereto."

At the time of the armistice agreements, Israel was in control of approximately 70 percent of western Palestine (the portion left after 76 percent was transferred to Transjordan) and Egypt and Jordan occupied the remainder, with Egypt controlling the Gaza Strip and Jordan controlling Judea and Samaria, which it started calling by a new name, the West Bank.

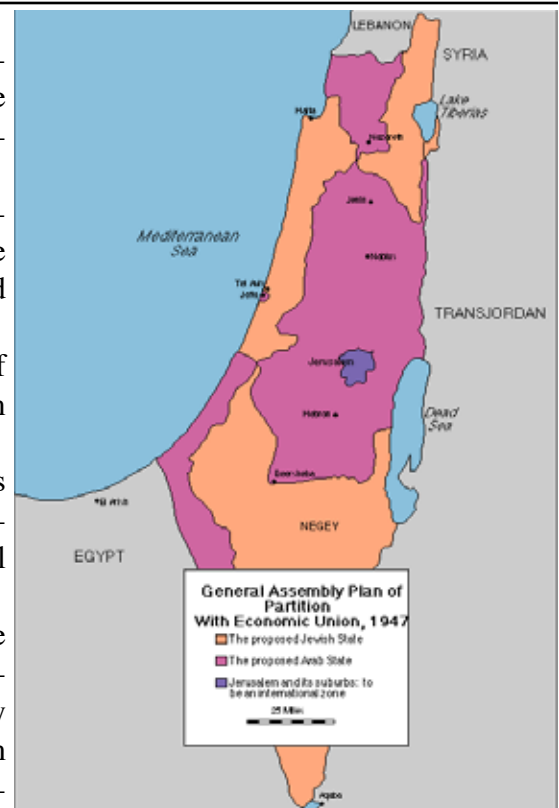
Jerusalem was divided. Israel controlled most of the newer areas, sometimes referred to as West Jerusalem, while Jordan controlled the "Old City," including the Temple Mount, Western Wall and Jewish Quarter. Jordan annexed the West Bank in 1950, but that annexation recognized only by Great Britain.

In the 1967 War, Israel captured Gaza from Egypt and the West Bank from Jordan. It offered to return both, in exchange for peace, but that offer was refused.

It has been reported that during the negotiations for the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, following Anwar Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in 1978, Israel offered to return Gaza to Egypt but Egypt refused. The peace treaty called for autonomy to be implemented for the Palestinian Arabs living in the disputed territories and negotiations for a permanent arrangement, but those negotiations never took place.

In 1993, Israel began secret contacts with the PLO, with which it had previously refused to deal. The initial meetings took place in Oslo, leading to the term "Oslo Process." The resulting agreements between Israel and the PLO are known as the "Oslo Accords."

Most of Gaza and approximately 40 percent of the West Bank, including areas in which roughly 95 percent of the Arabs lived, was transferred



United Nations Partition Plan. Courtesy of *MideastWeb*.



Postwar armistice lines. Courtesy of *MideastWeb*.

to the administrative control of the newly created Palestinian Authority by the mid-1990's.

In 2000, during negotiations at Camp David, the Israeli government offered to turn roughly 95 percent of the disputed territories, including all of Gaza, over to the Palestinian Arabs, but the offer was refused.

In 2005, Israel turned all of Gaza over to the Palestinian Authority, forcibly removing all the Jews then living in Gaza. Gaza has since then been under the total control of the Palestinian Arabs and is effectively no longer disputed territory.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert says that in negotiations in 2008, he offered the equivalent of 100 percent of the disputed territories to the Palestinian Arabs, but the offer was refused. (His offer called for Israel retaining a small amount of territory in the large settlement blocs, while transferring an equivalent amount of territory from Israel's side of the armistice lines to the Palestinian Arabs.)

Arab Position:

All the disputed territory must be transferred to the Palestinian Arabs, with all Jews living there removed.

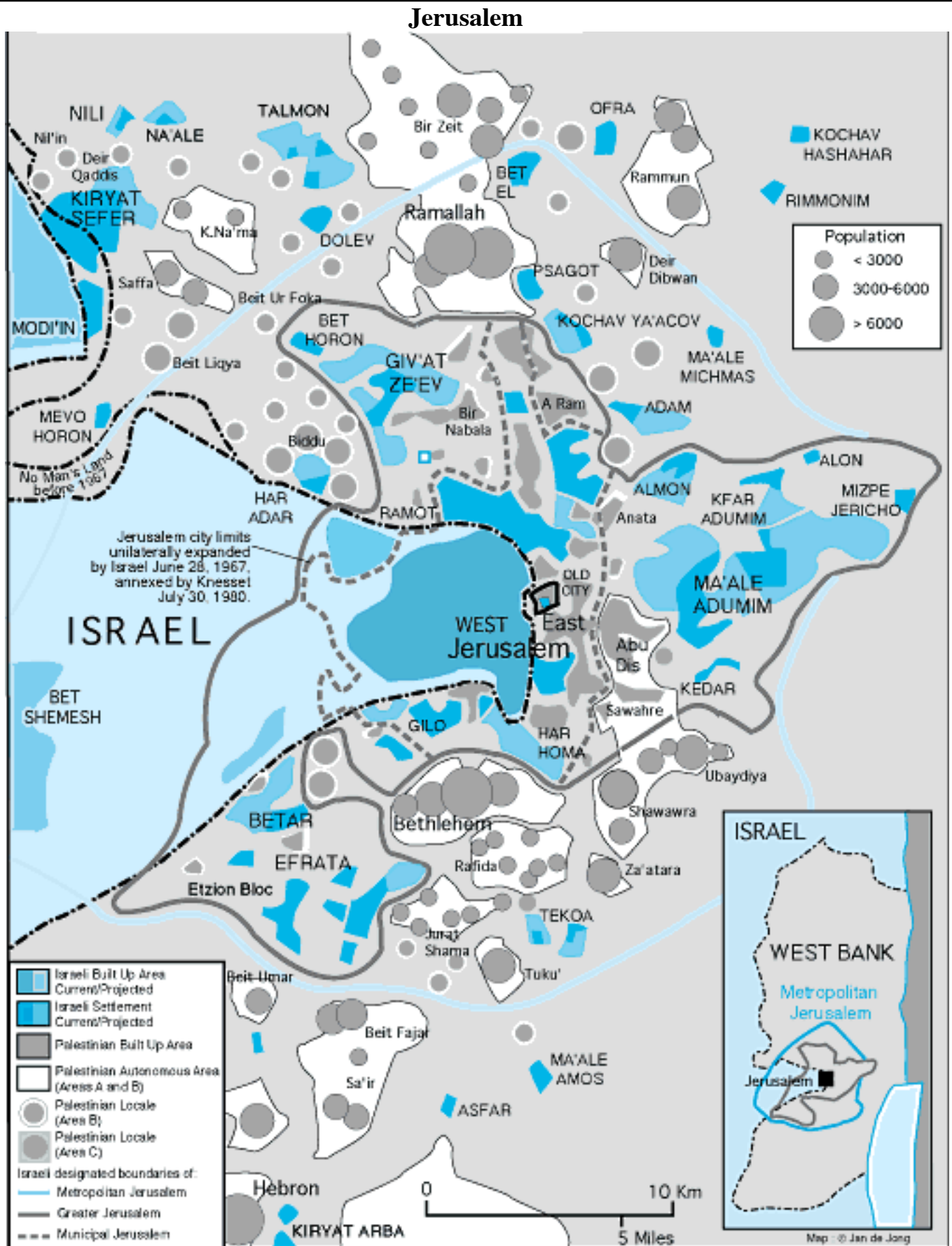
Israeli Position:

Israel is prepared to transfer almost all the disputed territories to the Palestinian Arabs, but wants to retain the major settlement blocs, which are mostly Jerusalem suburbs, in which a few hundred thousand Israelis live.

Israel also wants to maintain a security presence along the Jordan Valley. (More on that in the discussion of the security issue.)



Judea and Samaria during the Oslo period. Courtesy of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs <<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Facts+About+Israel/Israel+in+Maps/Judea+and+Samaria.htm>>.



Jerusalem circa 1997. Courtesy of the Jewish Virtual Library < <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/jer-97map.html>>

Background

Jerusalem was the capital of the Biblical Israelite kingdoms and the site of Solomon's Temple, ultimately destroyed by the Romans. (King David's first capital was in Hebron, but he transferred the capital to Jerusalem when he conquered that city.)

Jerusalem also has religious significance to Christians. Among other things, it is the site of the Last Supper.

Jerusalem, which Arabs call al-Quds, is the third holiest city for Muslims, after Mecca and Medina. The Al Aksa Mosque was built on the ruins of the Temple on the Temple Mount.

(Note: In Judaism, the second holiest city is Hebron, David's first capital and the burial site for the Patriarchs.)

The United Nations Partition Plan called for Jerusalem to be placed under international trusteeship. This was accepted by the Zionists but rejected by the Arabs and became moot with the 1948 war.

At the end of the war, the newer portions of Jerusalem were in Israeli hands while Jordan controlled the older portions, sometimes called East Jerusalem, including the Old City and the Temple Mount. All the Jews living in the portion occupied by Jordan, including the Jewish Quarter in the Old City, were expelled.

The armistice agreements called for Jews to have access to their holy sites, including the Western Wall, but Jordan did not adhere to those provisions and gave Jews no access. It also effectively destroyed the Jewish Quarter, including dozens of ancient synagogues.

During the 1967 War, the Jordanian-occupied portions of Jerusalem were captured by Israel and the city was reunited. Israel allowed the wakf, the Muslim religious authorities, to continue to administer affairs on the Temple Mount, while rebuilding the Jewish Quarter and clearing out a plaza by the Western Wall and turning that area into a large, outdoor synagogue.

Israel annexed all of Jerusalem and expanded its boundaries, but its sovereignty over the previously Jordanian-occupied areas is generally not recognized by other countries.

Each religious group now administers its own religious sites, with the exception of the Temple Mount, which is administered solely by the Muslim Wakf. Each religious group has full access to its sites, with two main exceptions:

1. During times of tension, there are restrictions on access to the Temple Mount.
2. Jews are given very little access to the Temple Mount and are not permitted to pray on the Temple Mount.

As of 2008, the population of Jerusalem was 760,800, of whom 64 percent were Jewish and 35 percent Arab. Since Israel unified Jerusalem in 1967, the Jewish population grew by 149 percent and the Arab population grew by 291 percent. (Statistics from the JTA <<http://jta.org/news/article/2009/05/20/1005289/jerusalems-population-increased-by-18-in-2008>>.)

In the portion of Jerusalem previously occupied by Jordan, as of 2006 the population was 428,304, of whom 42 percent were Jewish, 53 percent Muslim and 3 percent Christian. No Jews were allowed to live in that part of the city when it was occupied by Jordan between 1948 and 1967. (Statistics from Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Jerusalem>. According to the Jewish Virtual Library <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vie/Jerusalem1.html>>, the Jewish population in those areas is larger than the Arab population.)

Arab Position:

All the portions of Jerusalem previously occupied by Jordan, including the Western Wall and Jewish Quarter of the Old City, must be transferred to the Palestinian Arabs. All Jews living in those areas must leave.

Israeli Position:

Jerusalem should remain a united city, shared by all under Israeli sovereignty, with free access by all religious groups to their sites continuing.

Refugees Background

During the 1948 War, somewhere between 500,000 and 800,000 Arabs left their homes in what became Israel, mostly either to avoid the war or at the behest of the surrounding Arab states. In the aftermath of the war, roughly 800,000 Jews were forced from their homes in Arab countries.

Most of the Jewish refugees were absorbed into Israel, with some moving to America, Britain or other countries.

Many of the Arab refugees moved to other parts of Palestine (the West Bank - occupied by Jordan, Jordan itself or Gaza), while others fled to other Arab states, including Egypt, Lebanon and Syria. Along with their descendants, there are currently between four and five million Palestinian Arabs considered displaced persons, with over a million living in refugee camps run by the UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees).

Except for Jordan, none of the other Arab countries has allowed the Arab refugees to become citizens and generally bar them from most professions.

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194, passed in 1948, among many other provisions: "Resolves that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible."

Arab Position:

The Palestinian Arabs insist on what they call a "right of return:" all the remaining Arab refugees and their descendants must be permitted to immigrate into Israel. They also insist Israel must admit total responsibility for the refugee problem.

Israeli Position:

The Israelis consider "right of return" code for the elimination of Israel by inundating Israel with millions of Arabs, most of whom never lived in what is now Israel, who would then become a majority. They insist the refugees should be absorbed into the new Palestinian Arab state or allowed to become citizens in the Arab countries where their families have now lived for generations.

Settlements Background

When Jordan and Egypt occupied the West Bank and Gaza in 1948, they forced all the Jewish residents to leave. After Israel took control of that territory in 1967, some Jews started moving back, originally primarily to areas where their families had lived before being forced to leave or to areas with a significance related to security.

When Israel left Gaza in 2005, it removed all the Jews living there, approximately 10,000. There are currently approximately 350,000 Jews living in the disputed territories, among between 1 1/2 and 2 1/2 million Arabs in the West Bank. (Gaza contains about 1 1/2 million Arabs and no Jews.)

Most of the Jews live in large settlement blocs, largely Jerusalem suburbs. According to Wikipedia, "The three largest settlements, Modi'in Illit, Maale Adumim and Betar Illit, are cities with over 30,000 residents each."

Arab Position:

All the territory occupied by Jordan and Egypt between 1948 and 1967 must be given to the Palestinian Arabs and all Jews removed.

Israeli Position:

The major settlement blocs must be incorporated into Israel in any peace agreement. In 2000 and 2008, the Israeli governments offered to transfer some territory on Israel's side of the armistice line to the Palestinian Arabs in exchange.

Security

Background

Security, both from terror and from future wars designed to destroy Israel, is the major Israeli concern. Israel insists on secure borders, that the Palestinian Arab state be demilitarized and not permitted to call in foreign troops, and security control along the eastern border with Jordan. The Palestinian Arabs reject all the Israeli demands.

Two States

Background

The Israelis call for two states for two peoples, a Palestinian state for the Palestinian Arabs and a Jewish state, Israel, for the Jewish people. The Palestinian Arabs insist on a Palestinian state, free of Jews, for the Palestinian Arabs, but refuse to recognize Israel as the Jewish state.

End of Conflict

Background

The Israelis insist that a peace agreement must acknowledge the end of the conflict, with the Palestinian Arabs forswearing coming back with additional demands in the future.

The unwillingness of Yassir Arafat to agree to an end to the conflict is said to be one of the main reasons he rejected Israel's offer in 2000. In 1974, the PLO adopted a "Phases Program," which called for the acceptance of an Arab state in the disputed territories as a step towards the total elimination of Israel. The plan has never been officially abandoned by the PLO. The charters of both the PLO and Fatah, each of which is led by Mahmoud Abbas, who also heads the Palestinian Authority, still call for the destruction of Israel.

Water

Background

There is a scarcity of fresh water in the area. Much of the water used by both Israel and the Palestinian Arabs comes from underground aquifers which are largely, but not completely, under the West Bank. Israel's major source of water, the Kinneret (also called the Sea of Galilee), has shrunk considerably because of overuse, while the aquifers under the West Bank have been damaged by the widespread and unauthorized drilling of wells in the territories administered by the Palestinian Authority.

Any agreement must address the sharing of resources and the development of additional water resources, possibly including desalinization and importing water from countries like Turkey which have a surplus.

Internal Palestinian Arab Politics

At the time of the 1967 War and for several years afterwards, it was understood that the Arabs in Gaza were represented by Egypt and the Arabs in the West Bank by Jordan, the countries which had occupied those areas between 1948 and 1967. The PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) had been formed in 1964 as a central body of the various Arab terror groups, the largest of which was Fatah, but was not then considered to represent the Palestinian Arabs.

This changed in 1974, in Rabat, with the Arab League unanimously designating the PLO as the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Under King Hussein, Jordan continued to claim the West Bank (which it had annexed after capturing it in 1948) until 1988.

Israel refused to recognize the PLO until 1993, when it held meetings which at first were secret, beginning the Oslo Process. The Oslo Agreements were technically between Israel and the PLO, although the division of responsibility between the PLO and the Palestinian Authority became somewhat fuzzy after the Palestinian Authority was created and took over administration of much of the disputed territories. Yasser Arafat remained the leader of the Palestinian Authority and the PLO as well as Fatah until his death in 2004. He was succeeded in each of those positions by Mahmoud Abbas.

In the early years of the Oslo Process, the Palestinian Authority was dominated by Fatah. After the death

of Arafat, the Palestinian Authority held elections in 2006. Mahmoud Abbas was elected the overall leader, but Hamas gained control of the Palestinian Authority's legislature and Abbas was forced to appoint Ismail Haniyeh from Hamas as the prime minister and a coalition government was formed.

The coalition broke down in 2007, with Hamas launching a bloody coup to completely take over Gaza, while Abbas fired Haniyeh as prime minister. Hamas considers that firing illegal. In practice, Gaza is ruled by Hamas while the West Bank is ruled by Fatah. Further complicating the situation, Abbas' term as president of the PA officially ended in January, 2009, although in the absence of elections he has continued to serve.

Many also question whether Abbas and Fatah would be able to continue to govern the Palestinian Authority areas in the West Bank were it not for the security role of Israel.

Israel has tried to negotiate with Abbas, but the value of any agreement with him is questionable when he has no control over Gaza. Hamas is unambiguous in its total rejection of any permanent peace with Israel. Some outsiders have proposed the negotiation of a "shelf agreement," where the ultimate terms were determined but where the agreement would not actually come into effect until some time in the future (ten years is a common suggestion) when the split between Fatah and Hamas would presumably be resolved.

References

A substantial collection of resources, including books, documents and web sites, may be found on the web at <http://www.math.uconn.edu/~stein>.

Of particular note on the web:

MideastWeb <http://www.mideastweb.org/> attempts to provide a wealth of resources, including documents such as the charters of the PLO, Fatah and Hamas. It contains a fairly brief history at <http://www.mideastweb.org/briefhistory-oslo.htm> which contains some discussion of core issues.

Wikipedia contains an article on the "Israeli-Palestinian" portion of the Arab-Israeli conflict, at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israeli_Palestinian_conflict, which includes a discussion of core issues. There is considerable useful information, but it is tainted by the nature of Wikipedia, including a concerted effort by partisans of the Palestinian Arabs to present a one-sided picture and a temporarily successful campaign to prevent supporters of Israel from correcting inaccuracies.

Most other sites on the web are provided by individuals and organizations that do not even attempt to be balanced.