



MULTILATERAL CONFLICTS OF PALESTINE – HISTORY, PRESENT AND TRENDS

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Palestine, a historical land inhabited by both Jews and Arabs, has been the source of disagreement for the two ethnic communities since their establishment in this territory. Over time, as a consequence of this antagonism, the Middle East region has hosted a multilateral conflict generated by a number of factors (historical, ethnic, national and religious), which is currently manifested in three subsequent disputes: Arab-Israeli, Israeli-Palestinian and religious.

The social dispute was initially generated by the inter-communal misunderstandings between Arabs and Jews, in the territory of the British mandate of Palestine and degenerated into a series of wars between Israel and the Arab states that led to an open armed conflict between Israel and Gaza. Also, the religious dispute, which permanently accompanied the other two, is related to the equally claiming by Jews and Muslims of both the entire territory of this historical land, as well as Jerusalem.

The paper is intended to be a clarification of what the historic Palestinian region represents and how it has transformed under the impact of the conflict generated against the background of the desire for statehood expressed by Jews and Arabs in the same space. In the following, some aspects will be shown presenting the historical sources of territoriality, statehood and conflict in the region, and current forms of Palestinian multilateral conflict, as well as the predominant side of the conflict in the contemporary period, focusing on developments in the first half of 2021, but also some trends that are expected in the evolution of the Palestinian issue.

Keywords: *Palestinian issue; Gaza; West Bank; Israel; two-state solution.*

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1. Palestine – Geographical Area with a Long History of Conflict

Some archaeologists' studies claim that in historical documentary sources (especially Abbasid inscriptions and coins) references have been made to this territory under the name "Filastin" since the Late Bronze Age (starting with 1300 BC)¹. Those who wrote in ancient times about the territory of Palestine referred to it as the biblical "Peleshet" (Land of the Philistines) or the territory of Israel². Later, in the 5th century BC, the "father of history" Herodotus referred to Palestine as the geographical area between Phoenicia and Egypt, which included both the land of the Philistines and Israel (Figure no. 1). We will continue to refer to this space in the paper when we use the phrase "historical Palestine".

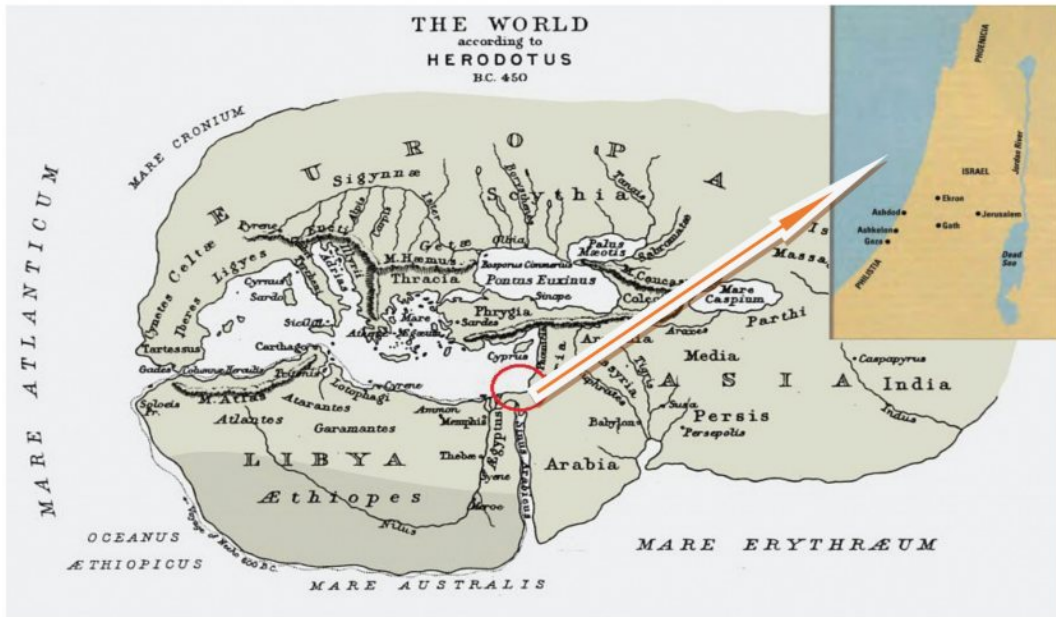


Figure no. 1: Palestine in the 5th century BC³

¹ Masalha DeNur, *Palestine: A Four Thousand Year History*, Zed Books Ltd., London, UK, 2018, p. 1.

² David Jacobson, "When Palestine Meant Israel", *Biblical Archaeology Review*, vol. 27, no. 03, May/June 2001, p. 45.

³ Sources: ***, "Human landscapes and maps", *Panorama of the world*, November 26, 2017, URL: <https://holylandmap.blogspot.com/2017/11/the-world-map-of-herodotus-in-shape-of.html>; David Jacobson, "When Palestine Meant Israel", *Biblical Archaeology Review*, vol. 27, no. 03, May/June 2001, URL: http://cojs.org/when_palestine_meant_israel-_david_jacobson-_bar_27-03-_may-jun_2001/, accessed on 22.06.2021.



Throughout history, Jews have claimed Palestine as the “Promised Land”, based on biblical narratives and asserting their uninterrupted presence in this territory⁴. On the other hand, the Arabs questioned the uninterrupted presence of the Jews and claimed Arab roots dating back more than a millennium ago⁵. There is another category of ethnic Arabs, who claimed (or still claim) to be ancestors of the Canaanites⁶, settled in the territory before the Israelites⁷. Moreover, in the context of the ethnic-religious conflict between Jews and Arabs, places and their names have gained great significance in efforts to legitimize the particular historical right over this territory.

Today, the area of historic Palestine is geographically the region of the Eastern Mediterranean, comprising parts of modern Israel and the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories of the Gaza Strip (along the Mediterranean coast) and the West Bank (west of the Jordan River)⁸, including East Jerusalem. Thus, the borders of historic Palestine have changed over time, in modernity (since the establishment of the British mandate), effectively encompassing the territories of the current states of Israel and Palestine (which, although largely recognized as a state by the international community, has an unfinished, fragmented statehood).

The creation of Palestine as a political entity originates in the penetration of Israeli tribes into its territory. Around 1250 BC, under the leadership of Moses, the Israelite tribes from Egypt settled in this area, along with the existing Canaanite tribes. Around the same time, the Philistine tribes⁹ began to populate the Mediterranean coasts of historic Palestine and an alliance of the city-states of

⁴ ***, “Genesis 15:18-21”, *The Bible*, URL: <https://www.bible.com/ro/bible/1713/GEN.15.18-21>, accessed on 22.06.2021.

⁵ A.N.: According to some theories, the Arabs had Bedouins as their ancestors a thousand years ago. To be seen: Werner Caskel, “The Bedouinisation of Arabia”, *American Anthropologist*, no. 56, 1954, p. 38; G.E. von Grunebaum, “The Nature of Arab Unity before Islam”, *Arabica*, no. 10, 1963, p. 12; Maxime Rodinson, *Islam et capitalisme*. Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1966, p. 15.

⁶ Author’s note: The Canaanites are the ancestors of the Palestinians who settled in Canaan in 3000 BC. Between 1200 and 975 BC, the “peoples of the sea” settled on the coast of Canaan, becoming known as the Philistines. To be seen: Alex Shalom, Stephen Roskamm Shalom, “The Palestinian question”, *Harper’s Magazine*, December 2001, p. 87.

⁷ A.N.: Israelis are the ethnic ancestors of modern Jews and Samaritans. To be seen: Peidong Shen, Tal Lavi et al, “Reconstruction of Patrilineages and Matrilineages of Samaritans and Other Israeli Populations From Y-Chromosome and Mitochondrial DNA Sequence Variation”, *Human Mutation*, Wiley-Liss Inc., no. 24, 2004, pp. 248-260.

⁸ ***, “Palestine”, *Britannica*, 25 June 2021, URL: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Palestine>, accessed on 22.06.2021.

⁹ A.N.: Philistines (In Latin *palaestina*) are ancient population, of Indo-European origin, established between the 13th and 11th centuries BC on the southeast coast of the Mediterranean Sea. The Latin name prevailed in Roman times over the whole area, becoming Palestine. To be seen: ***, “Filistina antică, Palestina”, *Israel și Palestina*, URL: <https://sites.google.com/site/israelsipalestinaorigini/filistina-antica-palestina>, accessed on 01.06.2021.



Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gaza, and Gath was formed, located between present-day Tel Aviv and the Gaza Strip.¹⁰ Then, in the 11th century BC, the Kingdom of Israel was formed to remove the danger posed by the strong pressures exerted by migrant peoples.

In the 10th century BC, King David of the Jewish tribe had united the two existing state entities at that time – Judah and Israel – and conquered Jerusalem, which he transformed into the religious and political capital of the new state. But the political entity created in the territory of historic Palestine did not last long, so that after King Solomon's death, in 926 BC, it was again divided into Israel and Judah¹¹. Subsequently, the two state entities evolved in parallel, the relations between them being marked by long wars.

For about two centuries (539-332 BC), after the entire Palestine became part of the Persian Empire, beginning with 332 BC, it came under the rule of Alexander the Great and included in the Macedonian Empire created by him. Subsequently, a series of other dominations followed –Roman, from 66 BC until 313 AD, when it is replaced by the Byzantine domination –, early Muslim (637-1098), Catholic crusader (1099-1291)¹², Mamluk (1291-1517)¹³, Ottoman (1517-1918)¹⁴, British (Great Britain and League of Nations created the Palestinian Mandate¹⁵ as a state entity that functioned between 1920-1948). Thus, in political terms, part of or the entire historical region of Palestine was for the most part a province within a large empire (only rarely and for short periods it formed an independent political unit).

In the 1880s, the Palestinian Jewish community amounted to 3% of the total population and did not aspire to build a modern Jewish state in Palestine, this was an idea issued later by the British in the 1917 Balfour Declaration, in which they promised to support “the establishment in Palestine of a nation-state for the Jewish people”¹⁶. Moreover, earlier in 1915, Britain had promised Hussein, the Sharif of Mecca, that it would support the creation of an independent Arab empire under his

¹⁰ Aren M. Maeir, “The Philistines and Their Cities”, *Bible Odyssey*, URL: <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/places/related-articles/philistines-and-their-cities>, accessed on 02.06.2021.

¹¹ ***, *Marea istorie ilustrată a lumii*, vol. I, Litera Internațional Publishing House, Bucharest, 2008.

¹² Malcolm Barber, “The Challenge of State Building in the Twelfth Century: The Crusader States in Palestine and Syria”, *Reading Medieval Studies*, XXXVI, University of Reading, 2010, pp. 7-22.

¹³ ***, “Mamluks”, *Jewish Virtual Library*, URL: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/mamluks>, accessed on 28.06.2021.

¹⁴ ***, “Return to Timeline of Jewish History: Table of Contents”, *Jewish Virtual Library*, URL: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/timeline-of-ottoman-empire-dominance-1500-1920>, accessed on 28.06.2021.

¹⁵ ***, *C. 529. M. 314. 1922. VI., Communiqué au Conseil et aux Membres de la Société, Mandate for Palestine*, League of Nations, Genève, 12 August 1922.

¹⁶ ***, “The Nakba did not start or end in 1948”, *Al Jazeera*, 23 May 2017, URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/5/23/the-nakba-did-not-start-or-end-in-1948>, accessed on 14.06.2021.



rule in Palestine, in exchange for organizing an Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire, Germany's ally in the war¹⁷. So the territory had been promised by the British to both sides.

Meanwhile, based on the British promise to Jews and their hostile historical context in other parts of the world, but also encouraged by the Zionist movement¹⁸, Jewish immigration to Palestine was massive. In 1923, when the international community (the League of Nations, at the time) appointed the Great Britain, concomitantly with the mandate of administrative control over Palestine, the task of establishing a Jewish state, the ethnic-religious dispute between Jews and Arabs was triggered in this territory.

Then, in 1947, through the steps initiated by the Great Britain, the UN proposed "a two-state solution"¹⁹, a plan to divide Palestine into two territories: one allocated to an independent Jewish state, the other to an independent Arab state, and the city of Jerusalem being designated international territory with respect to both states to be created.

2. Modern Palestine²⁰, Three Disputes – One Territory

Following the issuance of the UN proposal for a two-state solution, two types of *Arab-Israeli tensions* erupted in the area: *regional*, between Zionist Jews who

¹⁷ A.N.: The promise was contained in a letter dated 24 October 1915, by Sir Henry McMahon, the British High Commissioner to Egypt, to Sharif of Mecca, in what later became known as the McMahon-Hussein correspondence. The Sharif in Mecca assumed that the promise included Palestine. Details in: Pauline Kollontai, Sue Yore, Sebastian Kim (eds.), *The Role of Religion in Peacebuilding. Crossing the Boundaries of Prejudice and Distrust*, Jessica Kinsley Publishers, London and Philadelphia, 2018, p. 251.

¹⁸ A.N.: Zionism, a Jewish nationalist movement that aimed to create and support a Jewish nation-state in Palestine, considered by them as the ancient homeland of the Jews. See: ***, "Zionism", The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, URL: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Zionism>, accessed on 16.06.2021.

¹⁹ ***, *A/RES/181(II), Resolution adopted on the report of the ad hoc committee on the Palestinian question*, UN General Assembly, 29 November 1947.

²⁰ A.N.: As it has already been mentioned in the text, when we refer to modern Palestine we refer strictly to the part of the historical space of Palestine that is still in dispute between Jews and Arabs. Thus, by eliminating the territories of historic Palestine, which currently belong to other states (Syria, Jordan, etc.), and are not the subject of the analyzed theme in this paper, we refer to Palestine as a territorial area comprising both the state of Israel and its current occupied territories, respectively the West Bank (with Eastern Israel) and Gaza, in order to make it easier to connect with the territory of historic Palestine and see the transformations undergone by both the disputed territories in different historical epochs, and how statehood developed in the region. In fact, the current occupied territories may or may not become a state in the true sense of the word, and if they become a whole state, they may not extend exactly to the territorial footprint they occupy today, as their borders are in motion, not being established through Israeli-Palestinian mutual negotiations.



wanted to establish a state of their own in this Middle Eastern area, and predominant Arab states in the region; *intercommunal*, between Jews and Palestinian Arabs in the common space of the British Mandate of Palestine. As a result, after the British left in 1948, when Israel declared itself an independent state taking advantage of the favorable moment, the first side of this conflict was immediately exacerbated by the outbreak of the first Arab-Israeli war between Israel and five of the Arab nations in the region (Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Egypt and Lebanon), which supported the Arab-Palestinian community in establishing its own state in the region. Thus, in a year of fighting (1948-1949), until the conclusion of an armistice, Israel had conquered almost all of Palestine, Jordan took advantage and occupied the West Bank and Egypt occupied the Gaza Strip. Moreover, Jerusalem was now divided between Israeli forces in the west and Jordanian forces in the east. This was followed by the 1967 “Seven Days War”, in which Israel occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank, as well as most of the territory of the Syrian Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip, and the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula. In figure no. 2 is shown the evolution of the borders of historic Palestine during this period (during the British mandate, according to the plan of division between the two states and after the Israeli conquests following the 1967 war).

The two Arab-Israeli wars have led to the departure, starting with 1948, of some 700,000 Palestinian Arabs from the territory that became the state of Israel, to neighboring states (especially in the West Bank, Libya, Syria, Egypt)²¹, and, since 1967, 280,000-360,000 Palestinian Arabs from the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights²². At the same time, against the background of the same wars, there was the exodus of about 860,000 Jews from Arab countries, of which more than 600,000 arrived in Israel, the rest opting for Europe or America²³.

In 1973, a third war broke out between Egyptian and Syrian forces against Israel, on the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur, hoping to regain territory lost in the 1967 war. Muslim forces were militarily supported by Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Cuba, Morocco and Libya²⁴. The armed conflict ended with the signing, on September 4, 1975, in Geneva, of an Egyptian-Israeli agreement that provided

²¹ Colin Chapman, Kate Benson, *Whose Promised Land: The Continuing Conflict Over Israel and Palestine*, Lion Hudson, Oxford, England, 2015, p. 151.

²² Antonio Carnovale, *The Middle East: Everything That You Always Wanted to Know and No One Would Tell You*, Universe LLC, Bloomington, USA, 2013, p. 126.

²³ Carole Basri, “The Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries: An Examination of Legal Rights - A Case Study of the Human Rights Violations of Iraqi Jews”, in *Fordham International Law Journal*, vol. 26, Issue 3, 2002, p. 659.

²⁴ Stan Alexandru Bogdan, “Războiul de Yom Kippur – Armageddonul din 1973”, *Historia*, URL: <https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/general/articol/razboiul-de-yom-kippur-armageddonul-din-anul-1973>, accessed on 17.06.2021.

for the withdrawal of Israeli troops back from the area a few kilometers away²⁵. However, Israel still controlled 2/3 of the Sinai Peninsula. Later, in 1978, at Camp David, a treaty was signed by the presidents of Egypt and Israel, concluded with the mediation of the American President, Jimmy Carter, which provided for the normalization of relations between the two states after the return of the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt²⁶. Following the signing of these agreements, Egypt was excluded from the Arab League for a 10-year period.

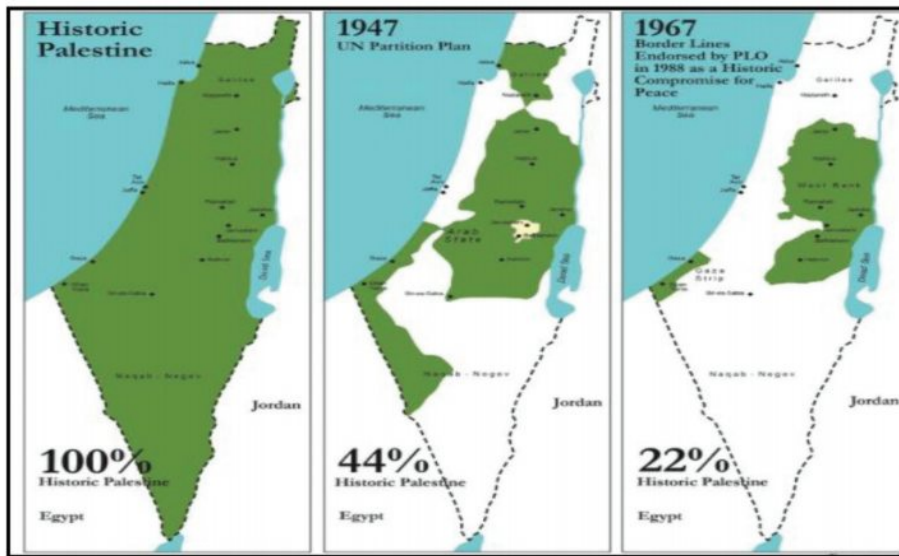


Figure no. 2: Borders' evolution of the historical territory of Palestine²⁷

Thus, the immediate result of Israel's self-declaration as a state was the unfolding of the three major Arab-Israeli wars (1948-1949, 1967, 1973) previously presented, but also of other lesser conflicts (1956-Suez Crisis, 1982-First Lebanese War, 2006-Second Lebanese War), all representing open conflicts involving military forces from outside Palestine. But in the long run, the political dispute between the Arab states and Israel has resulted in some of them not recognizing Israel's legitimacy and sovereignty, considering that the lands occupied by Israel by military force belonged to the Palestinian Arabs. However, there were Arab states that used

²⁵ ***, *Interim Agreement between Israel and Egypt*, 4 September, 1975.

²⁶ ***, *The Camp David Accords The Framework for Peace in the Middle East*, 17 September 1978, URL: <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/camp-david-accords-egypt-1978.pdf>, accessed on 20.06.2021.

²⁷ ***, "Mapping Apartheid: 6 Digital Initiatives Reclaiming The Palestinian Map", Scene Arabia, 16 March 2020, URL: <https://scenearabia.com/Life/Mapping-Apartheid-6-Digital-Initiatives-Reclaiming-the-Palestinian-Map?M=True>, accessed on 02.06.2021.



this diplomatic leverage in favor of their political rise. For example, immediately after the first Arab-Israeli war, Iran recognized Israel in 1950, a recognition later withdrawn as a result of the frictions between the two states, amplified by the struggle for regional supremacy. Subsequently, Egypt (1978) and Jordan (1994) signed peace agreements with Israel and established diplomatic relations with Israel, actions determined by national interests: Egypt regained the Sinai Peninsula from Israel, and Jordan ceded as a result of economic and trade incentives granted by Israel and the USA. Oman and Qatar recognized Israel in 1996, but later withdrew their declaration of solidarity with other members of the Arab League who, in 2002, at the suggestion of Saudi Arabia, through the Arab Peace Initiative, promised Israel full diplomatic ties with the Muslim world in exchange for the establishment of a Palestinian state situated between the borders existent in 1967, with the capital in East Jerusalem²⁸, a promise that was reiterated at the 2007 and 2017 Arab League Summits.

A key factor in the evolution of the Palestinian situation has been the continued involvement of the USA in the Middle East. The most recent involvement dates back to the tenure of US President Donald Trump (2017-2020), when several decisions were made in clear support of his strategic ally Israel, to the detriment of Palestinians. These included²⁹: the recognition, in 2017, of Jerusalem as the capital of the state of Israel and the relocation of the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem; the legal acceptance, in 2019, of Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories (West Bank) and the recognition of the Golan Heights as part of Israel, to the detriment of Syria; declaring in 2020 the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions – BDS (founded to challenge Israeli policies and support Palestinian independence) movement as anti-Semitic; and announcing a two-state solution plan, with the option of Israel to annex the West Bank. These US decisions, obviously in support of the Jewish state, led the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) to suspend administrative and security coordination with Israel in May 2020, including the issuance of travel permits. Fighting between Israel and Palestinian armed groups has also continued, especially in the Gaza Strip. However, following US-mediated negotiations, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain resumed relations with the Jewish state in 2020, based on the Abraham Accords, and the Palestinian National Authority in the occupied West Bank, in response, recalled the ambassadors of the two Arab states³⁰

²⁸ *** , *Beirut Declaration on Saudi Peace Initiative*, The Arab Peace Initiative, 28 March 2002.

²⁹ Mirela Atanasiu, “Dinamica conflictualității Orientului Mijlociu și Africii de Nord în pandemie”, in *Dinamica mediului de securitate 2020. Securitatea, între pandemie și competiție*, “Carol I” National Defence University Publishing, 2021, pp. 95-122.

³⁰ *** , “Arab normalisation with Israel in 500 words”, *Al Jazeera*, 23 November 2020, URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/23/the-normalisation-of-ties-between-israel-and-arab-countries>, accessed on 12.03.2021.



and relinquished the presidency of the Arab League meetings when the organization refused to sanction these two states' decision to resume ties with Israel.

The PNA's reaction, despite the explicit condition imposed by the two that the Jewish state "refrain from any annexation of the West Bank territories"³¹, is due to the less firm wording, compared, for example, with that advocated by the Saudi foreign minister, in December 2020, that "Saudi Arabia remains open to fully normalize ties with Israel, if Palestinian statehood is provided"³², which clearly shows that the Saudis adhere to the political line established by the Arab Peace Initiative, leaving no room for political interpretations or compromises. In fact, at the end of 2020, among the Arab states of the Middle East that were presented as not recognizing Israel were only Syria, Yemen, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Lebanon, Qatar and Saudi Arabia³³. Therefore, the oscillations in the political positions of the 20 Arab League states that signed the Arab Peace Initiative are obvious – there are states that strongly support the acceptance of the Palestinian state by Israel and states that gave up supporting the Palestinian cause when the possibility arose of its own national interest.

The second manifestation of the conflict in Palestine is the *Palestinian-Israeli Arab dispute* that erupted with the emergence of a Palestinian identity of Arabs in the territory of historic Palestine. This identity began to assert itself even in Israel, especially in the territories occupied by it after the Arab-Israeli war of 1967 (East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip). The Palestinian-Israeli conflict stemmed from the inability to determine sovereignty over Palestinian territories that include East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

In 1974, the international community (the UN, the Arab League and the Organization for Islamic Cooperation) recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian Arab people in these territories, and the *1978 Camp David Accords* recognized their ethnic identity, specifying in the documents that the term "Palestinians" or "Palestinian people" actually refers to "Palestinian Arabs"³⁴. Subsequently, the PLO proclaimed the independence of the state of Palestine in 1988 (currently, the state of Palestine is

³¹ Kenneth Stein, *Israel and Arab-Israeli Conflict Timeline – 1800s to the Present*, Centre for Israel Education, 26 January 2021, URL: <https://israeled.org/israel-and-arab-israeli-conflict-timeline-1800s-to-the-present/>, accessed on 14.03.2021.

³² Lauren Holtmeier, "Saudi Arabia open to full ties with Israel, on condition of Palestine state: Saudi FM", *Al Arabiya*, 5 December 2020, URL: <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2020/12/05/Saudi-Arabia-open-to-full-ties-with-Israel-on-condition-of-Palestine-state-Saudi-FM>, accessed on 25.06.2021.

³³ ***, "Israel International Relations: International Recognition of Israel", *Jewish Virtual Library*, URL: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/international-recognition-of-israel>, accessed on 25.06.2021.

³⁴ ***, *The Camp David Accords The Framework for Peace in the Middle East*, doc. cit., p. 14.



recognized by 139 states of the international community³⁵).

Following the conclusion of the *Oslo Accords* (Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements) between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in Washington in 1993, after months of secret negotiations³⁶, the Palestinian National Authority was established as a governing body for the period 1993-1999 and the two state entities recognized each other's right to exist³⁷. Under the accords, control of civil and security affairs in parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip was transferred to the PNA. Subsequently, in 1994, the process of building the Palestinian state began in the Middle East peace process. All these Palestinian initiatives to move towards a form of statehood in this territory have aroused Israel's dissatisfaction, and the situation has turned into a long-running violent conflict.

This conflict, although with an accentuated political dimension, being first of all a dispute between two nations in order to legitimize their state prevalence in a common territory, also has an external humanitarian dimension. There are currently four million stateless Palestinian refugees in the world, many of them in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, Egypt, Libya, other parts of the Arab world or the Gulf, as well as in Europe, North America, Australia, etc.³⁸ This situation persists, although the Commission for the Conciliation of Palestine has been established since 1949 to support the parties in reaching a political solution on the rights of Palestinian refugees (first generation or their descendants) to return and to be returned their property left in Palestine.

There is also an internal humanitarian dimension to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, manifested by Palestinians being denied civil, political and economic rights and subject to systematic discrimination and denial of basic freedom and dignity, as was often shown in reports issued by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights³⁹.

The military dimension of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was mainly concentrated in the Intifadas, which consisted of Palestinians protests and riots in

³⁵ ***, "Diplomatic Relations", Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations, New York, URL: <https://palestineun.org/about-palestine/diplomatic-relations/>, accessed on 25.06.2021.

³⁶ ***, *The Oslo Accords*, 13 September 1993.

³⁷ ***, *Israel-PLO Mutual Recognition, Letters and Speeches*, 10 September 1993.

³⁸ Cindi Katz, Neil Smith, "An interview with Edward Said", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 21, 2003, p. 637, URL: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1068/d2106i>, accessed on 18.06.2021.

³⁹ Examples of such reports: ***, *A/71/355, Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan, Report of the Secretary-General*, UN General Assembly, 24 August 2016; ***, *A/71/364, Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem*, Report of the Secretary-General, UN General Assembly, 30 August 2016.



particular in the occupied territories, but also throughout Israel: the first (December 1987-1993), was triggered as a result of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza; the second (September 2000-2005), was triggered by the tightening of living conditions for Palestinians in the occupied territories (deportations, demolition of houses, collective punishment, state of siege, suppression of political institutions)⁴⁰. To these Intifadas, the Israeli army responded in force. Regarding the first Intifada, Human Rights Watch said that in the first 31 months, Israeli security forces killed more than 670 Palestinians and wounded many thousands more⁴¹.

The revolutionary struggle waged by the Palestinians materialized mainly in the activity of two Palestinian movements that dominate the Israeli occupied territories: *Fatah* – former Palestinian National Liberation Movement –, nationalist social-democratic political party, part of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Authority President is a member, and *Hamas* – a radical Islamic movement backed by Iran. Each of them fights with the available military means against the occupation of Israel, but, from a political point of view, they are also rivals. The formal political separation between Hamas and Fatah dates back to June 2007, when Hamas militias took over the Gaza Strip after attacking Fatah-led Palestinian Authority security forces. This separation led to the establishment, by presidential decree, of an interim government in the West Bank, and Hamas retained its own government in Gaza⁴². Currently, each has a monopoly on the force in its controlled area.

Sometimes a more acute form of political violence has been expressed in conflict. For example, the Federation of American Scientists states that in the 1970s several PLO-affiliated groups carried out international terrorist attacks, but later, under international pressure, Fatah/PLO stated that it would restrict attacks on Israel and the occupied territories. However, terrorist attacks were later reported by Fatah-affiliated groups against targets inside and outside Israel.⁴³ As for Hamas, according to one of its aims stated in its Organizational Charter – the destruction of Israel⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Mark Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict*, Indiana University Press, US, 1994, p. 677.

⁴¹ ***, “The Israeli Army and the Intifada Policies that Contribute to the Killings”, *Human Rights Watch Report*, August 1990, URL: <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/campaigns/israel/intifada-intro.htm>, accessed on 19.06.2021.

⁴² Margret Johannsen (coordinator), “The Reconciliation of Hamas and Fatah Smoothing the Way to the Middle East Conference by Contributing to Peace and Security in the Region”, *Policy brief for the Middle East Conference on a WMD/DVS free zone*, no. 3, December 2011, p. 1.

⁴³ ***, *Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)*, Federation of American Scientists, URL: <https://fas.org/irp/world/para/plo.htm>, accessed on 19.06.2021.

⁴⁴ ***, *The Charter of Allah: The Platform of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas)*, translated and annotated by Raphael Israeli, Harry Truman Research Institute, The Hebrew University,



(a state recognized by much of the international community) –, it was considered a broad-based terrorist organization (Hamas is still designated as a terrorist organization by Israel, USA, EU, Japan and Canada), but the fact that it used its social services to support the Arabs in Palestine gave it legitimacy from the local population. After 2017, when it issued a new principle document of the organization⁴⁵ from which the radical formulations were removed and on the background that it fought and is fighting for the establishment of a (Islamic) Palestinian state, Hamas also won the sympathy of a part of the international community, being seen by them as a revolutionary organization and a future political option for the Palestinian government.

In terms of *religious dispute*, Palestine has been the scene of violent clashes between Mosaic and Muslim practitioners for 100 years. The motivation of the Jews is that, for them, Palestine is the “Promised Land”, Israel being the only country in the world where they form the majority of the population, and for fundamentalist Muslims the whole of historical Palestine must be under Islamic rule. Jerusalem is also home to holy places for Christians, Muslims and Jews alike, being claimed as the capital by both Israelis and Palestinians, and for Christians it is the “Holy City”, the birthplace of Jesus Christ. In fact, Jerusalem has 1,200 synagogues and over 150 churches derived from the 17 Christian denominations⁴⁶ and 73 mosques⁴⁷. The parties justify their requirements by providing, as historical evidence of their right of pre-emption over the historical territory of Palestine, interpretations of the Bible, the Talmud and/or the Qur’an. Therefore, the fact that the Israeli Parliament declared “the whole of Jerusalem as the indivisible capital of Israel”⁴⁸ had a double consequence that aroused discontent in the region. On the one hand, a capital, no matter where it is located, reconfirms the existence of a state, Israel’s decision contradicting the policy of Arab states that denies legitimacy as a state of Israel and, on the other hand, establishing the capital in Jerusalem hierarchize the Mosaic religion over other religions. Israel’s decision, although

Jerusalem, Israel, URL: <https://fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/880818.htm>, accessed on 19.06.2021.

⁴⁵ ***, *Hamas: General Principles and Policies*, Jewish Virtual Library, 2017, URL: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/hamas-2017-document-of-general-principles-and-policies>, accessed on 19.06.2021.

⁴⁶ ***, “What Is The Holy City Of Christianity?”, *The World Atlas*, URL: <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-is-the-holy-city-of-christianity.html>, accessed on 19.06.2021.

⁴⁷ ***, *Behind the Headlines: Facts and Figures - Islam in Israel*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Israel, 9 June 2016, URL: <https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Issues/Pages/Facts-and-Figures-Islam-in-Israel.aspx>, accessed on 19.06.2021.

⁴⁸ ***, “Cui îi aparține Orașul Sfânt? Șase întrebări despre statutul Ierusalimului”, *Deutsche Welle*, 06.12.2017, URL: <https://www.dw.com/ro/cui-%C3%AEi-apar%C8%9Bine-ora%C8%99ul-sf%C3%A2nt-%C8%99ase-%C3%AEntreb%C4%83ri-despre-statutul-ierusalimului/a-41678762>, accessed on 19.06.2021.



unapproved by the international community, has triggered new ethno-religious tensions in the modern era between Muslims (Arabs or other ethnic groups), Jews (Israelis or Palestinians) and Christians, regardless of whether they are from Israel or its occupied territories.

Against this background of religious tensions, community violence is taking place in the occupied territories between ethnic Arab Palestinians and Christians, on the one hand, and Jews, on the other, some of them carried out violently, with the help of firearms or improvised explosive devices. Also, although there are these religious factors relevant to Islam, Christianity and Judaism, which dictate the role of religion as the main factor in the conflict in the region, this side of the conflict has faded in recent times, and the focus moved on the conflict within Israel, carried out in the occupied territories inhabited by Palestinians. Moreover, whether considered “Arab” or “Islamic”, the unresolved issue of Palestine plays an important role in the development of the currents of Arab nationalism and political Islam, both related to the emergence of extremist movements such as Hamas which, under religious impetus, become a model of insecurity in the region.

3. The Palestinian Issue in the First Half of 2021 and Evolutionary Trends

Israel still occupies the West Bank, although it got out of the Gaza Strip in 2005, therefore the UN still considers it part of the occupied territory, as Israel retains full military control over it, managing its borders and airspace, restricting what is allowed in inside and outside and periodically engaging in the territory with armed forces. Israel also claims the whole of Jerusalem as its capital city, while the Palestinians claim East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state. The Fatah government in the West Bank is the only internationally recognized representative of the state of Palestine, so it refers to the Gaza Strip as part of the Palestinian state and does not recognize the Hamas government. However, the two, Fatah and Hamas, have reached an agreement to allow a joint Palestinian presidential election to be held, allowing the leadership of the Palestinian state composed of the two occupied territories by a single president.

The Gaza Strip has a population of about 2.1 million people, including about 1.4 million Palestinian refugees and a steadily declining socio-economic situation⁴⁹. The main problem that needs to be urgently solved is the humanitarian issue, stemming from the fact that in Gaza about 80% of the population depends on international aid and about one million people rely on daily food aid⁵⁰. In fact, in 2020, the average

⁴⁹ ***, “Gaza Strip”, *United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East*, 2021, URL: <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/gaza-strip>, accessed on 20.06.2021.

⁵⁰ ***, “Israel-Palestinian conflict: Life in the Gaza Strip”, *BBC News*, 20 May 2021, URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-20415675>, accessed on 21.06.2021.



unemployment rate got near 50%, one of the highest in the world, and the trend has gotten worse in 2021. Socio-economic problems are also related to access to clean water and electricity, as the clean water is available to a small margin of the population and electricity is delivered only a few hours a day, which negatively affects all other essential services, especially health and sanitation, but also the production and agricultural sectors in Gaza. Moreover, the blockade imposed by Israel, on land, air and sea, following Hamas's takeover of the Gaza Strip in 2007, continues to have a devastating effect due to the fact that population movements to and from the Gaza Strip, as well as access to markets, remain severely restricted. This situation persists, although at the level of the international community (especially the UN), it has been found that the blockade and its restrictions are contrary to international humanitarian law, due to the difficulties caused to the civilian population.

In the West Bank, between 2.1 and 3 million Palestinian Arabs are under both limited self-government and Israeli military leadership, along with about 430,000 Israeli Jews living in 132 settlements (and 124 smaller "outposts") built under the occupation of Israel⁵¹. But of these, 900,000 Palestinians in an Israeli-controlled area (including East Jerusalem) that spans more than 60 percent of its territory have limited access to water, health care, education and other critical services. According to the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Bureau (ECHO), as a result of violence, intimidation and non-construction permits, the Palestinian population is increasingly forced to evacuate and has their homes and infrastructure demolished, which has intensified despite the pandemic, Palestinians being separated from their land and families, as well as from schools, hospitals, jobs and places of worship⁵².

The beginning of 2021 finds the occupied territories in a tense environment, with intermittent violent escalations, marked by rocket launches and air strikes. For example, on January 18-19, three missiles were launched from Gaza into southern Israel, followed by Israeli airstrikes⁵³. Also, on at least 84 occasions, Israeli forces opened fire on Palestinians near the fence built by Israel and off the coast of the Gaza Strip, an increase of about 14% in conflict action compared to the monthly average of these incidents recorded in 2020⁵⁴. Such actions persisted in the coming months, however, with violence remaining relatively low. Moreover, some UN

⁵¹ ***, "Explainer: Israel, annexation and the West Bank", *BBC News*, 25 June 2020, URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-52756427>, accessed on 18.06.2021.

⁵² ***, "Palestine", European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, European Commission, 17/11/2020, p. 1, URL: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/palestine_2020-11-18.pdf, accessed on 18.06.2021.

⁵³ ***, "Gaza Strip: Snapshot - January 2021", *OCHA*, 2021, URL: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/gaza_snapshot_january_2021.pdf, accessed on 20.06.2021.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.



officials were optimistic, arguing that the Israeli and Palestinian elections to be held in 2021 could pave the way for the restoration of a legitimate political horizon in the Middle East⁵⁵. But in late April 2021, amid evictions and confiscations of some Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem, tensions rallied in Jerusalem over protests and civil demonstrations by Palestinians in both the West Bank and Gaza.

Another factor that sparked popular discontent in the West Bank was the restriction by Israeli security forces of access and limitation of Palestinian movement to the Al-Aqsa Mosque⁵⁶ in Jerusalem's old city in the last days of Ramadan. Thus, civil demonstrations erupted that culminated in the May 7 clashes, at the mosque, between Palestinians armed with stones and incendiary bottles and Israeli forces using tear gas, grenades and rubber bullets, resulting in 25 Palestinians killed and 6,309 wounded throughout the West Bank, of which at least one Palestinian was killed in East Jerusalem and 1,011 wounded⁵⁷.

From Gaza on May 10, Palestinian armed groups began firing missiles at populated areas of Israel after Hamas issued an ultimatum to Israeli forces to withdraw from the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and they did not comply. Al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, launched missiles at Jerusalem⁵⁸, with the Israeli army retaliating with missiles and artillery, targeting populated areas of the Gaza Strip⁵⁹. On this occasion, the Israeli armed forces said they had killed a top commander of the Islamic Jihad armed group, Hussam Abu Harbeed⁶⁰. According to Gaza authorities, at least 219 Palestinians were killed in the military clashes that took place between May 10 and 20, of which at least 63 children and 35 women and another 1,570 people were injured⁶¹. The situation is all the worse as the health system in Gaza, already overwhelmed by many years of blockade and the COVID-

⁵⁵ *** , *SC/14453, Upcoming Israeli, Palestinian Elections Could Pave Way to Restoring Legitimate Political Horizon in Middle East, Top Official Tells Security Council*, United Nations, 26 February 2021, URL: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14453.doc.htm>, accessed on 23.06.2021.

⁵⁶ A.N.: Al Aqsa is one of the most revered places of Islam, but also the holiest place in Judaism. Details: *** , "Al-Aqsa mosque: Dozens hurt in Jerusalem clashes", *BBC News*, 8 May 2021, URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-57034237>, accessed on 23.06.2021.

⁵⁷ *** , "Escalation in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and Israel", *Situation Report No. 1*, United Nations Population Fund, 13 April - 20 May 2021, p. 2.

⁵⁸ Adnan Abu Amer, "How the Gaza war affected Palestinian politics", *Al Jazeera*, 7 June 2021, URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/6/7/gaza-war-leaves-its-mark-on-the-palestinian-political-system>, accessed on 20.06.2021.

⁵⁹ *** , "Q&A: 2021 Hostilities between Israel and Palestinian Armed Groups", *Human Rights Watch*, 28 May 2021, URL: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/05/28/qa-2021-hostilities-between-israel-and-palestinian-armed-groups>, accessed on 22.06.2021.

⁶⁰ Virginia Pietromarchi, Usaid Siddiqui, "Israel kills Islamic Jihad commander, Gaza death toll above 200", *Al Jazeera*, 17 May 2021, URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/17/israel-launches-heavier-raids-in-second-week-of-gaza-bombing>, accessed on 23.06.2021.

⁶¹ *** , "Escalation in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and Israel", *op. cit.*



19 pandemic, is overworked.

Israeli attacks have caused widespread destruction and damage to civilian buildings (government buildings, residential complexes, headquarters of international humanitarian organizations, medical facilities, media offices and roads linking civilians to essential services, such as hospitals), which can be non-discriminatory attacks and disproportionate to civilians and civilian objects, respectively war crimes⁶². In fact, between April 13 and May 17 alone, the World Health Organization reported at least 91 attacks on medical units in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (70 in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and 21 in the Gaza Strip)⁶³. In fact, the overall situation of Palestinians in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza has deteriorated significantly as a result of escalating violence in May 2021. At the same time, missiles fired by Hamas, the Islamic Jihad group and other armed Palestinian groups have killed 10 Israeli citizens and residents, including two children, and forced thousands of Israelis to take refuge in shelters⁶⁴. However, most of the missiles fired by Palestinian armed groups were blocked by the Israeli air defence system.

Following the launch of reciprocal airstrikes, Israel, through its UN representative, sent a letter to the Security Council invoking Israel's right and duty to defend its people and sovereignty and calling on the international community to uphold its "fundamental right to self-defence"⁶⁵. On the other hand, Palestine argued that "the principle of self-defence cannot be applied by Israel to itself in the occupied territory of the state of Palestine"⁶⁶. Following this correspondence, on 27 May the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution to ensure compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law, which mandated the Human Rights Council to establish, as a matter of urgency, a permanent, independent and international commission of inquiry to investigate, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and in Israel, all the alleged violations and abuses registered, starting with April 13, 2021, in order to be able to identify the causes of the recurring tensions

⁶² ***, "Statement by Michelle Bachelet UN High Commissioner for Human Rights", *Special Session of the Human Rights Council on the deteriorating human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem*, Geneva, 27 May 2021.

⁶³ ***, "Escalation in Occupied Palestinian Territory", Issue 2, *World Health Organization*, 17 May 2021, p. 1.

⁶⁴ ***, *SC/14521, Senseless Cycle of Bloodshed, Destruction between Israel, Palestinians in Gaza Must Stop Now, Secretary-General Tells Security Council*, UNSC, 16 May 2021, URL: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14521.doc.htm>, accessed on 22.06.2021.

⁶⁵ ***, *21 May 2021 – Letter on Article 51 – Self-Defense*, Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations, New York, 2021, URL: <https://palestineun.org/21-may-2021-letter-on-article-51-self-defense/>, accessed on 24.06.2021.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.



but also of the instability and prolongation of the conflict⁶⁷.

Tensions continued in June, albeit on a lower note, despite the ceasefire agreement reached on May 21, 2021 and the meeting of Egyptian mediators with Israeli and Hamas officials to try to support the Israeli-Hamas armistice. In fact, after a calmer period, in which Israel's domestic political forces were more concerned with the removal of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from power in mid-June, after the change of government, Israel resumed airstrikes in force on the Gaza Strip, in response to incendiary balloons sent across the border by Palestinian armed groups.

The trends identified regarding the Palestinian issue in mid-2021 are: the stagnation of the political effort made by the parties towards establishing the statehood of Palestine; the possible increased dynamics of the mutual military effort between Hamas and Israel; gaining a Hamas image capital over Fatah, which can give it an advantage in the presidential election with an uncertain future.

Political stalemate in the process of obtaining Palestinian statehood emerged at the time of Mahmoud Abbas' decision to postpone elections in the Palestinian territories, based on the finding that the organization of elections in East Jerusalem is not facilitated by Israel. But the change of US administration, taken over by Joe Biden, the arrival of Isaac Herzog as the President of Israel and the replacement of former Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, suspected of corruption, with Naftali Bennet, are factors that can bring advantages to Palestinian negotiations with Israel. However, there is still a risk that the decisions of the newly empowered politicians, whether they are taken at random or partisan, on the current background of maintaining the conflict between Hamas and Israel at an oscillating intensity, will present the danger of new violent escalations, destroying the ceasefire agreement, already weakened by recent actions. In fact, the Arab mass-media claims that Bennet is a supporter of Jewish settlements and the annexation of most of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and opposes a two-state solution⁶⁸. In the American studies, President Biden is seen as a supporter of the two-state solution as the only viable solution to the conflict and seeking to reset relations with the Palestinian leadership in Ramallah⁶⁹, and Herzog is presented by news agencies that he "opts

⁶⁷ ***, A/HRC/47/57, *Agenda item 7. Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967*, Human Rights Council Forty seventh session, 21 June–9 July 2021, p. 3.

⁶⁸ Anchal Vohra, "Will Israel's Bennett be worse than Bibi for Palestinians?", *Al Jazeera*, 17 June 2021, URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/17/will-bennett-be-worse-than-bibi>, accessed on 20.06.2021.

⁶⁹ Hesham Youssef, "10 Things to Know: Biden's Approach to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", *United States Institute of Peace*, 10 June, 2021, URL: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/06/10-things-know-bidens-approach-israeli-palestinian-conflict>, accessed on 20.06.2021.



for maintaining dialogue with the Palestinian leaders”⁷⁰. We consider that, although the Middle East Quartet, made up of the European Union, the Russian Federation, the USA and the United Nations, is focused on returning to negotiations with a two-state solution to the Palestinian problem, the opposition of an Israel that remains inflexible and unsanctioned for the violations of international law in relation to the Palestinians, as well as the lack of political unity between the two Palestinian governments in the West Bank and Gaza are major obstacles in this direction.

As for Hamas’ image gain, it was based on two concrete issues. In the West Bank, President Mahmoud Abbas has extended for months the state of emergency declared for the COVID-19 pandemic, restricting the right of movement of Palestinians, the last period being set until the beginning of July 2021⁷¹, although the overall medical situation had improved significantly compared to Gaza, where Hamas eased restrictions as SARS-CoV-2 cases declined in number and intensity. Also, Abbas’s reaction to the Israeli armed forces’ demonstrations by Palestinians, which was limited to speech, was seen as weak and inappropriate by public opinion, where the population took to the streets in solidarity with Palestinians in Jerusalem and Gaza. Moreover, in this context, the discontent people demanded an end to the Palestinian National Authority’s “security cooperation” with Israel, some of them singing pro-Hamas anthems during demonstrations, and PNA security forces also intervened and attacked the protesters, arresting some activists⁷². The violent intervention of the Palestinian Authority’s security forces is another aspect for which Hamas, already seen in support of the raids on Israel by the demonstrative population, has gained popularity, meaning more chances to take over the presidency of the Palestinian territories, whether a consensus will be reached on the organization of the presidential elections.

Conclusions

Of the one part, in the history of Palestine, the involvement of Western colonizers, Zionists and neighboring Arab countries has played an instrumental role in shaping the course of the Palestinian problem. Of the other part, the Palestinian problem sets the regional dynamic as one of the main factors shaping Middle East policy, due to its threefold conflict: the Arab-Israeli problem, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the religious conflict. Israel is at the heart of the multidimensional

⁷⁰ Gulsen Topcu, *Israeli president pledges to maintain dialogue with Palestinian counterpart*, Anadolu Agency, 12.07.2021, URL: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israeli-president-pledges-to-maintain-dialogue-with-palestinian-counterpart/2301487>, accessed on 20.06.2021.

⁷¹ ***, “Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Report 77”, *World Health Organization*, 17 June 2021.

⁷² Adnan Abu Amer, *art. cit.*



conflict in Palestine, manifested in the three existing conflicts. The Palestinians are backed by Israel, supported by the Arab world, which, in turn, is supported by the Muslim world. Israel has been supported by the USA since its inception as a state. The USA have regional interests mainly related to securing their energy sources and counteracting the influence of Iran and Russia, which have been successfully promoted by Israel, which is why most of the time American policy has tilted in favor of this state even when fundamental human rights have been violated; this has led to a stalemate in the process of implementing the two-state solution or at least in advancing Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

The side of the Palestinian problem manifested by the Palestinian-Israeli conflict within the occupied territories is the most acute at the moment, with the religious and Arab-Israeli conflict taking a back seat as a level of intensity. This transgression took place in stages marked by different historical periods, starting with the inter-communal (religiously based) conflict between Jews and Arabs during the British Mandate, then the emphasis shifted to the ethnic dimension of the Palestinians' right to statehood (when the Israel state was created and the outbreak of the inter-state conflict marked by the three main Arab-Israeli wars), and then the emphasis shifted to the political dimension marked by the desire to delimit territoriality between Israelis and Palestinian Arabs.

With regard to the occupied territories, there are currently some major issues here: the political divide in the Palestinian arena between Hamas and Fatah; security tensions between Hamas and Israel; how to establish Palestine (as an independent state or as an autonomous political entity vis-à-vis Israel), how to regulate the situation of Jerusalem and the Jews living in Gaza and the West Bank (including East Jerusalem).

The escalation of the conflict in May 2021 was directly linked to the exaggerated response by Israeli security forces to protests in East Jerusalem at the al-Aqsa Mosque, which then spread throughout the occupied Palestinian territory and also in Israel.

The consequences of the indiscriminate destruction by the Israeli air force of Palestinian infrastructure, especially water, sanitation and electricity, as well as medical infrastructure, will cause considerable and long-term social effects on the population of Gaza, deepening the already existing humanitarian crisis and appearing at risk of increasing the effects of the pandemic. Moreover, the unilateral actions of the actors involved continue to erode the perspective of a viable and contiguous Palestinian state, moving the parties away from constructive dialogue and compromise.

After decades of failed peace negotiations and initiatives, a first step toward pacifying the region is to grant equal rights to Arab Jews and Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, as well as equal access to Jerusalem for representatives of all religions that have holy places here. In this regard, USA must make a change



in the type of policy pursued in the Palestinian issue and shift the focus from supporting, with priority, its strategic partner, Israel, to an approach based on equal rights between the two sides. A plus for such an approach, based on the actual implementation of respect for the rights of ethnic Jews and Arabs in Palestine, is compatible with the revival of the two-state solution, while remaining open to other political alternatives.

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