Princeton Model United Nations Conference 2017

SPECPOL
Chair: Gabriela Pitten
LETTER FROM THE CHAIR
Dear delegates,

Welcome to PMUNC 2017! My name is Gabriela Pitten and I am honored to be your chair. A little background on me: I grew up in the south of Brazil in a city called Porto Alegre and I went to an international school there where I was first introduced to Model UN. This will be my seventh year doing MUN and my third year staffing PMUNC. At Princeton I major in the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, with certificates in French Language and Culture and in the History and Practice of Diplomacy. I’m very involved with Model UN on campus as the captain of our travel team, but when I can pry myself away from it, I’m also a tour guide for the admissions office, a Residential College Advisor, and I teach English at a Hispanic cultural center in Trenton. I also love to cook, bike, and binge watch TV shows (House of Cards, anyone?).

I’m hoping to count on all of you to make this year’s SPECPOL the best one yet! Both the issue of Israeli-Palestinian relations and establishing peace in Yemen present a challenging balance of geopolitical and interests. The Israel-Palestine issue has been a topic of debate for many years, but despite several UN interventions it has yet to be solved. While both sides have conducted atrocious actions, the recent settlements in Palestinian territory is the most pressing concern in recent years. However, it is also expected that delegates consider long-term solutions, which would need to weigh territorial, religious, and political tensions in the region.

While the conflict in Yemen may, at first glance, seem less global, the future direction of the civil war will likely rest on the influence of outside actors such as the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. As has been a pattern in modern Middle Eastern conflicts, when civil strife breaks out, it invites extremist groups to take advantage of the situation. Therefore, this issue also speaks to the broader regional concerns regarding the spread of the Islamic State and the radicalization of local actors. To add to the complexity of this issue, the humanitarian crisis must urgently be addressed or this conflict will place tens of thousands of civilian lives in jeopardy. How can the United Nations successfully intervene in a war torn country? How can you establish preventative methods to keep history from repeating itself elsewhere?

While researching these complex topics, I highly encourage delegates to take full advantage of this background guide and of the resources provided within it to develop a complete grasp of the issue. Remember that MUN is about creating cohesive, effective, and original solutions and conveying these effectively to your peers, so work hard on your research, writing, and speaking skills. If you need any help or if you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me at gpitten@princeton.edu! I’ve been in your shoes and I’m here to help!
See you all soon!
Gabriela Pitten
COMMITTEE DESCRIPTION

The United Nations Fourth Committee, otherwise known as SPECPOL, has changed extensively over the years. While initially created to address decolonization questions, due to the growing number of independent nations, its role became superfluous. As such, it merged with the Special Political Committee in 1993 and began branching out into a diverse set of areas, which include peacekeeping, international politics, refugees, public information (with its subsidiary, the Committee on Information), human rights violations, and even outer space. It also began taking on some of the security roles of DISEC, so that DISEC could focus more specifically on disarmament and nuclear proliferation. The Israel-Palestine conflict in particular has been a cornerstone of SPECPOL’s work, particularly in addressing the human rights concerns of refugees in the area. Whenever newer conflicts arise, such as the one in Yemen, it is also the role of SPECPOL to address the immediate and long-term security, humanitarian, and political ramifications.

Delegates should remember that, as a UN General Assembly Committee, SPECPOL has no binding power and cannot infringe on a country’s sovereignty by either forcing it to take certain actions or operating within its borders without its consent. That being said, the suggestions presented by this committee are taken seriously by member states and international organizations and should therefore not be taken lightly. Delegates are encouraged to look at past SPECPOL actions and resolutions to gain a full picture of its jurisdiction in international politics. Redundant resolutions will ultimately be ineffective, so make sure you are bringing some new ideas to the table and challenging yourself by approaching old solutions in a new way.
TOPIC A: ESTABLISHING LASTING PEACE IN YEMEN

Introduction

The war in Yemen and the humanitarian crisis that sprung from it has gone largely unnoticed by the global population. However, this crisis has, according to the United Nations, left 4,773 civilians dead, 8,272 injured, and 17 million people food insecure. To make the matter worse, malnutrition and poor sanitation has led to the worst cholera outbreak in the world and the two years of civil war has crippled the capacity of their health services to even attempt to address this. Due to the unstable nature of the crisis, it is very difficult and dangerous for aid workers to reach the affected people in Yemen and, consequently, thousands of people are dying. The astounding collection of calamities has led to what some are calling the “worst humanitarian crisis in the world.”

Meanwhile the world seems to turn against Yemen as the powerful coalition of Arab states led by Saudi Arabia, with the support of the United States and other western countries, is ordering a constant stream of airstrikes which have resulted in countless civilian casualties. It is the role of the international community to restore peace and stability in the poorest country in the Middle East and not to allow the suffering of civilians to occur in the shadows.

The responsibility of this committee will be to address this issue from a political and humanitarian perspective, balancing the interests of states, civilians, international organizations, and violent groups in order to stabilize the situation. While the dias does not expect a perfect solution to the issue, particularly since there is none, delegates will be evaluated on their ability to accurately

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represent their positions, their efforts to act diplomatically and their creativity in proposing measures to be taken.

**History of the topic**

The Ansar Allah (Partisans of God) movement — widely known today as the Houthis— was initially a theological one, which preached peace and sought the acceptance of Shia people in Yemen. However, when they faced backlash from the government for their protests, the group took a harder line as it fought against the government. From 2004 to 2005, hundreds of people died as the Houthi movement — so named in honor of their insurgent leader Hussein al-Houthi — clashes repeatedly with the Yemeni government. Despite issuing a pardon to the group in 2005 in exchange for the leader’s renouncement of the campaign, the Saleh government intermittently faces off against the rebels until an official ceasefire was agreed upon in 2010.

The conflict reignites in 2011 after a shaky transition of power from Saleh, who had been Yemen’s president since 1990, to his deputy Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. Many thought that this transition would symbolize an era of stability in Yemen, which has long been the poorest country in the Middle East. However, this transition was anything but stable, as President Hadi struggled to deal with a conglomeration of issues ranging from terrorist attacks to food insecurity. Despite being significantly less aggressive in relation to the Houthis, President Hadi’s efforts to redesign the constitution, in particular, were criticized by the Houthis. Hadi proposed to divide up the country

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into six regions, which would have weakened the strength of the Houthi regional influence in the Saada province. According to the Yemen specialist of the International Crisis Group, in their attempt to gain regional autonomy, “the Houthis [were] capitalizing on widespread frustration with the government” and this led their movement to gain traction at the time.

The conflict escalated to what was considered a civil war in 2014, when the Houthis invaded the capital and surrounded the presidential palace. The Battle of Sana’a marked the beginning of the coup d’etat which would come to overthrow the Hadi government. The invasion was ostensibly a response to the government’s removal of fuel subsidies, but was in fact a strategic move to overthrow the government of Yemen. By September 21st, 2014, the Houthis had captured the government headquarters in Sana’a.


When this took place, many Yemeni people initially offered up their support for the violent actions, which is symbolic of the level of frustration of those who felt like they lacked representation in the Hadi government. The Houthis then established a council to serve in the then-vacant role of President. Mr. Hadi faced continued pressure from both the Houthis, who had placed him and other high-ranking government officials in house arrest, and armed groups which supported the previous presidency. Mr. Saleh himself allegedly gave support to the Houthi rebels during this tumultuous time, which is striking considering their vicious rivalry during his presidency.

This eventually led President Hadi to flee Yemen and seek asylum in Saudi Arabia. The involvement of Saudi Arabia, who feared that the actions of the Houthis were backed by the government of Iran, led to an intensification of the conflict. Saudi Arabia established a coalition which included Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Sudan. This coalition began fiercely attacking the Houthi rebels in the name of reestablishing Mr. Hadi’s government and eradicating Iranian influence in the area. Notably, both the Iranian government and the Houthi rebels have repeatedly denied an alliance and vehemently refute the accusation that Iran provides supplies and weaponry to the Houthis.

However, these attacks and the subsequent failure of any semblance of a Yemeni state, crippled civilian infrastructure and resulted in staggering unemployment rates, devastating food shortages, the collapse of public health, sanitation, and economic sectors, and a subsequent climb in the number of cholera cases. Yemeni people now primarily rely on the aid provided by international organizations, but the complete lack of a central authority and the continued fighting has made it

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difficult for them to reach those that are in the most dire circumstances. While the devastation increases exponentially, no side seems to have attained any significant military advantage.

**Current situation**

There have been several diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict. The United Nations, for instance, went through three rounds of peace talks, which, despite much pressure from both the Houthis and the Saudis to uncover a solution, collapsed.\(^\text{10}\) Mr. Hadi’s main interest is in seeing Security Council resolution 2216 come to fruition. This resolution requires that the Houthis completely withdraw from the areas they took over in the coup, hand over their weapons, and pass over control of the state to the government of Yemen.\(^\text{11}\) While this resolution does propose an end to the conflict, the hard line it presents to the Houthis makes it exceptionally difficult to implement fully and therefore has not been effective.

One of the aspects of the conflict that is often overlooked is the fact that the atrocious violations of humanitarian law do not stem from one side. Both the Houthi rebels and the Yemeni government have blatantly harmed civilians and destroyed the economic, social and political wellbeing of Yemen. The coalition led by Saudi Arabia and supported by the United States, Britain and France has been accused of perpetrating war crimes. For instance, in a report that analyzed attacks from the coalition, only 2 out of 10 could be considered to have a legitimate military objective.\(^\text{12}\)

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To make matters worse, terrorist groups have taken advantage of the instability to exert their dominance in Yemen. Both Al Qaeda and the Islamic State have grown in influence throughout the country. In 2016, a suicide car bomb attack killed approximately 60 people, mostly Yemeni military recruits, and wounded many more. The Islamic State took responsibility for what they referred to as a “martyrdom operation.”

This continued instability has resulted in nearly annihilating the public sector in Yemen. Healthcare, education, employment, security, sanitation, and much more are struggling to meet the needs of a population that is increasingly unemployed, sick, and hungry. As the director of Yemen’s International Rescue Committee put it, “There is nowhere in the country you can say, ‘This place is better than another’. Every family is suffering from something whether it’s cholera or lack of food,

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having child soldiers in the family or having someone go join the rebels or the military. There's been a whole collapse of the social life."\[^{14}\]

Country policy

Understanding the policies of your countries is essential to your success in committee. In the case of Yemen, there are many complex relationships to consider when writing your working papers and forming your blocks. Below is a list of the main players. While this list only includes a limited set of countries, all delegations in this committee are in some way related to the issue, either through alliances or through humanitarian objectives.

Yemen

Yemen is a strategically important country in the Middle East since it is located on the Bab al-Mandab strait. This narrow passage of water is where all maritime trade between Europe and Asia passes through, which amounts to 700 billion dollars a year, as well as approximately 4.7 million barrels of crude oil. With the conflict in Yemen, various ships have been attacked and the security of this passage is threatened, creating an economic incentive for most countries in the world to seek a stable government in Yemen.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia’s main interest in the conflict is to prevent the influence of Iran in the region (this antagonism can be traced back to religious differences between the majority Shia Iranians and the majority Sunni Saudis). Saudi Arabia accuses Iran of backing the Houthi rebels (which they

consider to be terrorists) and lead a coalition of Middle Eastern countries against them. They have been supporting the government in Yemen, but have been accused of atrocious human rights violations in the process.

The Coalition → The Saudi led coalition includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Sudan. All of these countries provide support to Saudi Arabia and, by extension, to the government forces in Yemen.

Iran

Iran has been accused of backing the Houthis financially and militarily, although they firmly deny these allegations. Nevertheless, experts from the United Nations said that they found 2,064 seized weapons in Yemen that could have been manufactured in Iran. That being said, there is not enough evidence to confirm that Iran is systematically providing weapons to the Houthis.

United States

As long term allies of Saudi Arabia, the United States has supplied weapons and intelligence that contributed to their actions in Yemen. However, the Obama administration withdrew support from Saudi Arabia after they bombed a funeral procession and killed 150 civilians. Since the Trump administration took over, however, the United States has signed a 110 billion dollar deal providing military support to Saudi Arabia.

\[15 \text{ http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-un-idUSKBN15D0SB} \]
\[16 \text{ https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jun/19/america-helping-saudi-arabia-bomb-yemen-consequences} \]
United Kingdom

Much like the United States, but not quite to the same extent, The United Kingdom has been supplying Saudi Arabia with weapons to be used in the conflict in Yemen.

Malaysia and France

These countries, although they haven’t provided military support, they do offer Saudi Arabia logistical and intelligence guidance, which has been criticized.

Keywords

• Shia Islam: This is one of the two branches of Islam. The majority of countries in the Middle East are led by Sunni governments, including Yemen. However, the Houthis defend a strong minority of Shia Muslims in Yemen. This leads countries like Saudi Arabia to fear that they might operate in conjunction with Iran, a Shia led country. This ancient schism is the root of many conflicts in the Middle East and must therefore be studied in order to fully understand the issue at hand.

• Ali Abdullah Saleh: Saleh was the first president of Yemen in 1978 (when he only lead the north of Yemen) and then governed the whole country from 1990 to 2011. He was staunchly against the Houthi rebels, but there are reports that after he stepped down and handed over power to President Hadi, that he began supporting the rebels secretly.

• Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi: This is the second and last president of Yemen. He took over power from Saleh in 2011 but his government faced many difficulties right from the start. His attempts to rewrite the constitution eventually led to a coup d’etat that forced him to take refuge in Saudi Arabia.
• September 21 Revolution: When the Houthi rebels took over the capital city of Sana’a in 2014. This marked the beginning of a civil war in Yemen.

• Resolution 2216: This resolution passed in the Security Council with the abstention of the Russian Federation. It asks for the Houthis to lay down their weapons and surrender the government.

Questions

• How do religious differences play a role in the crisis and in potential solutions to it?

• To what extent can the international community interfere in what is, at its core, a civil conflict?

• What aspects of previous resolutions aimed at addressing the issue failed to hit the mark? How could one improve upon them?

• Consider the balance of power in the Middle East. How can that influence the issue as a whole?

• How do Yemen’s territorial and geographical characteristics impact the development of this conflict?

The situation in Yemen is currently in a state of utter disarray and it is now in the hands of this committee to address the multitude of issues they are currently faced with. Out of a population of 27.4 million people, 20.7 million are in dire need of humanitarian assistance, 17.1 are considered food insecure, 14.8 lack access to basic healthcare, and only 5.9 million were able to be reached in 2017. These statistics paint a disastrous picture and therefore the dias calls on

all SPECPOL delegates to work actively, diligently and cooperatively to attain a solution. A successful resolution will not only seek an end to the conflict, but also discuss: a) how political stability will be reestablished; b) how international organization seeking to provide aid will reach those in need; c) how the international community will respond; d) how the humanitarian crisis will be addressed.

**TOPIC B: ISRAEL-PALESTINE RELATIONS**

**Introduction**

The area of Palestine (particularly the capital Jerusalem) is considered a holy site for both Jewish and Muslim people and has been viciously fought over by both religious groups since the end of World War I. However, the Arab-Israeli conflict was driven primarily by an interest in territorial gains that contradict each other, since the region holds a strategic place geographically: connecting the Mediterranean to much of the Arabian Peninsula and bridging the road from Egypt to Syria.\(^{18}\) The complex nature of this issue has led many to believe that peace between the two is inconceivable and unachievable. Nevertheless, the situation as it is today, where Palestine is not a part of Israel and yet not fully independent and where frequent clashes disrupt the peace, is not sustainable in the long term. Recently, in particular, there have been increasing concerns on the part of the international community over the legality of Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory. The matter of Israel-Palestine relations has long been addressed by the Security Council, however, this time SPECPOL, which counts upon the participation of a wider range of countries and has

\(^{18}\) [https://www.britannica.com/place/Palestine](https://www.britannica.com/place/Palestine)
traditionally dealt with matters of peacebuilding and international politics, was assigned the privilege of addressing both the conflict at large and the specific question of Israeli settlements.\textsuperscript{19}

**History of the Topic**

Since the 1500s, Palestine was under the control of the Ottomans and consisted of a mostly Muslim population, with Christians and Jews considered minorities. While the government was Muslim, these minorities enjoyed full freedom and acceptance. In fact, the Ottomans, like many Arab powers, accepted thousands of Jewish refugees who fled persecution in other parts of the world.\textsuperscript{20} In short, the land was cohesive, different religious groups coexisted in harmony, and little conflict existed.

At the onset of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the concept of Zionism was growing in popularity across Europe. Developed by an Austrian Jew, Theodor Herzl, Zionism rested on the idea that Judaism is

\textsuperscript{19} Note: this assignment has not taken place in actuality, but will considered to have been in the context of this committee.

\textsuperscript{20} \url{http://www.palestine-studies.org/resources/special-focus/ottoman-palestine}
more but a religion, but a nationality—one that deserves to be protected through the creation of a Jewish state.\textsuperscript{21} But with the rise of Zionism and the growing violence toward Jewish people in Europe entering the 1900s, harmless initial immigration to Palestine evolved into a desire to establish a homeland—by the time Hitler came to power, the Jewish population in Palestine had increased eight fold.\textsuperscript{22}

In response to this movement, the British government decided to show support for the Zionist movement by agreeing, in what was known as the Balfour Declaration to help create a Jewish state in Palestine after World War I ended.

“His Majesty’s Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.”\textsuperscript{23}

However, the British had also promised Palestine to Arabs who had helped them win a decisive victory over the Ottomans. So when the allied powers met in Versailles in 1919, the British opted instead to establish a mandate system in Palestine, which although accepting to Jewish immigrants, left both the Arabs and the Jewish unsatisfied. The Arab countries felt like they had been cheated out of what they were owed and the Jews felt like they had been excluded from the self-government that had been promised to them.

It was only in the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust that the British handed over the question of Palestine to the United Nations. Partly in the interest of making up for the atrocities

\textsuperscript{21} \url{https://www.vox.com/cards/israel-palestine/zionism}
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid
\textsuperscript{23} \url{http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/the-balfour-declaration}
committed against them during the Holocaust, the United Nations developed a Partition Plan (Resolution 181), which divided Palestine into two separate states, one Jewish and one Arab, with Jerusalem being administrated by the United Nations. While the plan offered precise geographical boundaries and created two states that had approximately the same size, the Palestinians, who were forced out of their lands and lost much of their autonomy, were dissatisfied with the decision. The Arab states surrounding Israel rejected the Partition Plan and launched the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.

Forces from Egypt, Transjordan (present-day Jordan), Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon all launched attacks against Israel in an attempt to impede the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. However, Israel managed to attain even more land than had been appointed to them by the United Nations, notably securing the Yehuda mountains which formed a path to Jerusalem. In the aftermath, the 1949 Armistice agreements between Israel and the Arab states (except Iraq since it did not share land with Israel) established new borders which allowed Israel gain more land, an Egyptian-controlled Gaza Strip, and a Jordanian-controlled West Bank. Jordan and Israel also divided Jerusalem in two parts, maintaining the religious sites in East Jerusalem, which was controlled by Jordan.

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24 https://www.britannica.com/event/Arab-Israeli-wars
26 http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/in_depth/world/2001/israel_and_palestinians/key_maps/5.stm
Tensions reignited in 1956 as the Pan-Arab nationalist, Gamal Abder Nassar, became the President of Egypt. President Nassar nationalized the Suez Canal which was the main connection between Europe and Asia and therefore an essential strategic trade route for many nations. France and Britain, two major naval powers at the time struck a deal with Israel: if Israel agreed to invade Egypt, France and Britain would swoop in as mediators and take control of the Suez Canal.27

While the Israelis managed to gain a swift victory in its invasion, the Suez Crisis is widely considered to have been an Egyptian victory,

27 https://www.britannica.com/event/Arab-Israeli-wars
since a UN intervention resulted in a loss of Britain and French influence in the region and in Egypt’s continued control of the canal.\(^{28}\)

The most notorious battle between the Arabs and the Israelis was known as the Six Day War and it resulted in massive territorial gains for Israel. Several border skirmishes eventually built up to a full on war that lasted from the 5\(^{th}\) to the 10\(^{th}\) of June, 1967. When the dust settled, Israel had taken over Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip, expelled Syrian forces from Golan Heights, pushed Jordan out of the West Bank, and established full control over Jerusalem.\(^{29}\) However, according to international law, it is inadmissible to obtain territory by war and, therefore, legally did not belong to Israel. In response to the war, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 242 which required that Israel return the land which it had conquered and recognize the sovereignty and territorial integrity of every State in the region.\(^{30}\) Israel was slow to respond to these demands, but this established a time of relative peace in Arab-Israeli relations.

However, the conflict reignited in 1973 with the Yom Kippur War, when Egypt and Syria launched a coordinated attack on Israel in order to recover the territory they had lost through previous conflicts with Israel. This was launched on Yom Kippur, which is a Jewish religious holiday and therefore took the Israeli military by surprise. Israel took many days to recover from the shock and mount an adequate response, which led to heavy losses in terms of manpower and equipment. A ceasefire was ultimately negotiated with the support of the United Nations, who later passed Resolution 339, reiterating the boundaries set by Resolution 242 and urging the nations involved to

\(^{28}\) [https://www.britannica.com/event/Suez-Crisis](https://www.britannica.com/event/Suez-Crisis)


seek a “just and durable peace in the Middle East.”

By 1982, Israel had returned the entirety of the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt and had fully adhered to the terms of the 1979 peace treaty.

Up until this time, the conflict had primarily been considered an Arab-Israeli one, rather than an Israel-Palestine one. However, the recognition of the People’s Liberation Organization (PLO) as an observer state in 1974 offered the Palestinian state a measure of recognition in the international landscape. The PLO had been considered a violent group targeting Israeli citizens since its initial formation ten years earlier. Despite controversies surrounding this decision, for the first time, the Palestinian people had official representatives and therefore a global voice which could address their position in the conflict against Israel.

As a response to the control exerted by the Israelis in the Gaza strip and the West bank, the Palestinians launched the First Intifada in 1987, ten years after the end of the Six Days War. An intifada is the word for “shaking off” in Arabic and during the uprising, the Palestinian were attempting to “shake off” Israeli control. This revolt led to the Oslo Accords, which established the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements. This agreement required all Israeli forces to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and allow the Palestinians to govern themselves.

One unexpected result of the First Intifada was the creation of a group called Hamas. They were created by the Muslim Brotherhood and some more extremist factions of the PLO and they believe that the entirety of Palestine should belong to the Palestinians and that they ought to wage a holy war against Israel in order to reestablish their homeland. Both the United States and the

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31 Ibid.
32 [http://www.history.com/topics/yom-kippur-war](http://www.history.com/topics/yom-kippur-war)
34 [http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/intifada-begins-on-gaza-strip](http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/intifada-begins-on-gaza-strip)
35 Ibid.
36 [https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hamas](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hamas)
European Union have labeled Hamas a terrorist group, but many Palestinians believe that their actions are preferable to the milder actions of the PLO. Today, the PLO governs the West Bank, but Hamas has de facto control over the Gaza Strip.37

The Second Intifada lasted from 2000 to 2005 and began as a Palestinian response to a visit the Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon made to a Muslim Sanctuary in Jerusalem. Some believe that the Second Intifada was in response to the breakdown of dialogue at Camp David in 2000, although the PLO fervently denies that claim. The Second Intifada came to an end in 2005 after the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit, which established a ceasefire: The Palestinians agreed to halt all violence against Israelis and Israel agree to cease their military efforts against Palestine.

However, despite this ceasefire, the violent initiatives of Hamas hindered the peace process. In recent years, they have targeted Israeli civilians and launched many rockets at Israel. In 2014, the conflict escalated significantly as Israel launched Operation Protective Edge in the Gaza strip in response to Hamas kidnapping and murdering three Israeli teenagers. This led to the death of thousands of Palestinian civilians and the destruction of thousands of residential and infrastructure buildings, leading Israel to face a lot of criticism internationally for what many considered to be a disproportionally violent response.38 After weeks of fighting, Egypt helped negotiate a ceasefire between both sides and while there is still much tension and disagreement, the ceasefire remains in effect to this day.39

Today, there still remains two main conflicts. The first exists within the idea that maintaining an ethnically preferential state, especially one that is nonnative, is certainly

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37 https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/hamas
unstable. The second lies with the oppressive control in the West Bank and Gaza, where military occupation and seizure of privately owned land control much of life.

**Current situation**

The most pressing issue that remains are Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory. What started as a few Israelis toeing over the border line and building homes, escalated to a point where nearly 10% of the Israeli population lives either in West Jerusalem or the West Bank. When the settlements first began they were small encampments in Palestinian territory, but today they are often the size of cities and are filled with middle class Israeli homes. To make matters worse, the Israeli government fails to discourage, and at some points even encourages, the migration of their citizens to the West Bank. These settlements undermine the possibility of any peace accord or a two-state solution, given that Israeli citizens in those areas offer a pretext through which the Israeli military can exert their presence in Palestinian territory. While the international community, including their long term ally – the United States, has actively condemned Israel for these settlements, they continue to expand and, in doing so, threaten the possibility of Palestinian autonomy.

**Keywords**

- *Zionism*: “an international movement originally for the establishment of a Jewish national or religious community in Palestine and later for the support of modern Israel”

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41 https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Zionism
• **Balfour Declaration:** this declaration was a public support for the Zionist movement from the British government and a promise that they would establish a Jewish state in Palestine at the end of World War I.

• **Partition Plan:** at the end of World War II, this plan was developed by the United Nations through Resolution 181. It created two states (one Arab and one Israeli) in Palestine.

• **1948 Arab-Israeli war:** This war was the first of many Arab-Israeli wars and was initiated by Arab states in the region as a response to the Partition Plan. It resulted in more land for Israel and granted Jordan and Egypt control of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, respectively.

• **Gamal Abder Nassar:** President of Egypt that nationalized the Suez Canal. This led to the reigniting of tensions between Egypt and Israel in the late 1950s.

• **Six Day War:** Short war in June of 1967 which resulted in massive territorial gains for the Israeli government and a lot of resentment from the Arab nations.

• **Yom Kippur War:** In response to the gains attained by Israel in the Six Day War, Egypt and Syria launched an attack on Israel on one of their religious holidays, catching them off guard.

• **Resolutions 242 and 339:** A result of the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War respectively, these resolutions required that Israel return land illegally obtained during their conflict with the Arab countries and respect the sovereignty of surrounding states. This effectively cut off Israeli expansion.

• **Intifada:** Term that means “shaking off” in Arabic and refers, in this context, to uprisings of the Palestinian people against Israel with the goal of gaining their autonomy.

**Questions**

As can be surmised from the lengthy historical background section, the conflict between Israel and Palestine is a complex and fascinating saga. The two most common solutions proposed are the one- and two-state solutions. The first would either create a unified democratic state that would integrate Muslims, Christians, and Jews, which would effectively end the idea of a Jewish state, or bring the entirety of Palestine under Jewish control, which many consider to be a violation of Palestinian rights. The second solution is the most widely accepted one and it creates two separate states for Israel and Palestine (Remember! Palestine is not recognized as a country by the international community), which would be independently governed. Unfortunately, despite dozens
of attempts at negotiations between the two sides, they cannot agree on terms under which they could create two separate states.\footnote{https://www.vox.com/cards/israel-palestine/two-state-one-state}

While many have deemed the matter ‘unsolvable’, it is clear that the circumstances are not stable in the region and, therefore, something is bound to shake up the status quo eventually. Therefore, it is now in the hands of this committee to propose solutions that are realistic and effective in order to resolve disputes in the region.