Israeli Palestinian Conflict Essay, Research Paper

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The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict is a dangerous and volatile situation

that has attracted American attention for some decades. The conflict is a

sensitive subject that produce strong emotions in people. This conflict deals

with Jewish nationalism, distribution of resources, and politics.

About a hundred years ago, Jews underwent a drastic change in their view

of themselves. At first a few, and then more, began to call themselves Zionists.

Zionism is a term that in its broadest and early sense meant simply the “return”

of Jews to their ancestral homeland. That homeland was called Zion (or Israel)

and its heart was Jerusalem, known as the “City of Zion.” Early Zionists were

simply pious, nonpolitical, religious Jews who thought they could best practice

their faith in the Land of Zion. Some went primarily to pray, to study their

religious books, and to await the arrival of the Messiah. Politics played a

influential role in their thinking. By the beginning of the 20th century,

however, Zionism came to have a political meaning: that Jews were not just a

religious or ethnic group but were a nation of people who should have their own

state. Today Zionism is the term for Jewish nationalism.

Not all Jews agree upon what Zionism is, but to a point there is

agreement, it is upon three things: there should be a Jewish state; it should be

permanent, independent, and secure; and Jews who are threatened anywhere in the

world should be able to go there to be safe. All other issues–the boundaries of

the state, the nature of government, relations with the Palestinians, relations

with American Jews, religious law–are in dispute.

It is important to understand the Palestinian views . Keep in mind two

points. First, people respond to the circumstances in which they live. If one is

rich, one sees problems one way; if one is unemployed, one sees it a second

way; if one owns a small shop, one sees it a third way. One must understand the

circumstances in which Palestinians live if we are to understand their positions

and actions. Second, there are about five million Palestinians. Like Americans,

they disagree on political issues. They also change their minds as new

circumstances develop. It is wrong to think Palestinians have a common view

that remains unchanged. Their view changed considerably over the years. They

view that the Israelis are taking the land rightfully theirs, and are being ?

bullied? by Israelis. They are the ones who had their land taken away from them

and are left with no where to live.

In 1948, there were approximately 860,000 Palestinians inside today’s

Israel. About 700,000 were driven out or fled during the fighting that followed

the declaration of Israeli statehood. The Palestinian population of Jerusalem

went from 75,000 to 3,500; of Jaffa from 70,000 to 3,600; of Haifa from 71,000

to 2,900; of Lydda-Ramle from 35,000 to 2,000; of Tiberias from 5,300 to zero.

All refugees lost their property (about 800,000 acres were taken for Israeli

use.). The 160,000 Palestinians still in Israel in 1949 when the fighting

stopped lost another 250,000 acres. The Palestinians in Israel were left without

resources or strong leaders.

When the Likud Party took power in 1977, it intensified colonization,

pouring some $1 billion into settlement building over the next seven years.

Today, land taken from the Palestinians and earmarked for military purposes or

Jewish settlements amounts to more than 52% of the most fertile areas of the

West Bank and 40% of the Gaza Strip. Only a very small percentage of this land

was sold willingly by Palestinians. Most of it was confiscated, and is held to

be for Jews only-not just Jews from Israel, but Jews from anywhere in the world.

Many newly-arrived immigrants from the United States and Russia are given

heavily financed housing in the settlements built on seized Palestinian land. By

1990, according to Israeli estimates, 83% of the water from the West Bank will

be diverted to Jewish settlements and Israel. The indigenous Palestinians will

get only 17% of their own water. This taking of natural resources from the

Palestinians, are the reasons for the rise in conflict.

To a large extent Jews and Palestinians are geographically concentrated.

Most Jews live in Israel and most Palestinians live in the West Bank, Gaza, and

East Jerusalem. There are exceptions of course. Many Jews live in the new ring

of suburbs around East Jerusalem and in the new settlements in the West Bank and

Gaza. And many Arabs live inside of Israel, particularly in Galilee, including

Nazareth, and in the Negev Desert in the South.

The first comprehensive peace talks between Israel and delegations

representing the Palestinians and neighboring Arab states began in October 1991.

After Likud lost the parliamentary election of June 1992, Labor party leader

Yitzhak Rabin formed a new government. Rabin took a more conciliatory line

toward the Palestinians and imposed strict limits on new Jewish settlements in

the occupied territories. In 1993, after decades of violent conflict between

Palestinians and Israelis, leaders from each side agreed to the signing of an

historic peace treaty. Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasir Arafat and

Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin met in the United States on September 13 to

witness the signing of the treaty, which paved the way for limited Palestinian

self-rule in Israeli-occupied territories. The Gaza-Jericho Agreement was signed

in Cairo on May 4, 1994, and applies to the Gaza Strip and to a defined area of

about 65 square kilometers including Jericho and its environs. The Gaza-Jericho

agreement addresses four main issues — security arrangements, civil affairs,

legal matters, and economic relations. The document includes agreement to a

withdrawal of Israeli military forces from Gaza and Jericho, a transfer of

authority from the Israeli Civil Administration to a Palestinian Authority, the

structure and composition of the Palestinian Authority is a Palestinian police

force, and relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. After

intensive diplomatic efforts by the United States, Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu of Israel and Yasser Arafat agreed on September 29, 1996 to go to

Washington the following week to seek ways out of a war that has put the entire

Israeli-Palestinian peace in jeopardy.

Despite the historical tensions of the Middle East, recent issues have

arisen to intensify the conflict. Angry Palestinians protested Israel’s decision

to open an archeological site, the issue becoming one more in a growing number

of Middle East tensions. The Muslim crowd feared the excavation of an ancient

tunnel, right beside the foundations of Jerusalem’s al Aqsa Mosque compound,

would undermine what is the third-holiest shrine in Islam after Mecca and Medina.

The tunnel excavation dispute is only the latest indication of rising tension

between Arabs and Israelis. And the latest death count is 76 ( as of October 1,

1996).

In conclusion, this is an issue that deals with politics, uneven

distribution of resources, and nationalism, and will take a great effort to come

to an agreement. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a ?battle? that has a long

history that will continue till a mutual understanding and agreement is settled.

Until the Israelis and the Palestinians can settle there differences and

cooperate with each other, the ?battle? will continue on.

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