



From Peace Talks to Violence: A Study of the Israel-Palestine Conflict Before 2013

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Abstract: *The Israel-Palestine conflict has remained one of the most persistent and complex geopolitical issues in the modern era, marked by repeated cycles of peace talks followed by violence. This paper explores the evolution of the peace process and the reasons behind its repeated failures prior to 2013. It examines key events such as the Oslo Accords, the Second Intifada, the Camp David Summit, the Gaza War (2008-2009), and the rise of Hamas to highlight the interplay of leadership, international influence, and public sentiment that shaped the trajectory of the conflict. The analysis identifies critical challenges, including the inability to resolve core issues such as the status of Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees, and the borders of a future Palestinian state. The failure of leadership on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides, coupled with external pressures and divisions, significantly hindered the peace process. The paper concludes by offering lessons for future peace efforts, emphasizing the need for unified leadership, early resolution of core issues, inclusive negotiations, and effective international mediation. It argues that these lessons, if applied, could pave the way for more sustainable and effective peace initiatives in the region.*

The Israel-Palestine conflict has deep historical roots that trace back to the early 20th century, shaped by territorial, religious, and nationalistic tensions. Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, Britain took control of Palestine under a League of Nations mandate. During this period, Jewish immigration increased, particularly as a result of rising anti-Semitism in Europe, creating tension with the Arab population that had lived in the region for centuries. The Balfour Declaration of 1917, in which Britain

expressed support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine, further fuelled tensions between Jews and Arabs.¹

The conflict reached a critical juncture after World War II when the United Nations proposed a partition plan in 1947 to create separate Jewish and Arab states. While the Jews accepted the plan, the Arab states rejected it, leading to the 1948 Arab-Israeli War following Israel's declaration of independence. The war resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, a situation that remains at the heart of

the conflict.²

The subsequent decades saw multiple wars, the 1967 Six-Day War being particularly significant, as Israel captured the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, territories that remain a focal point of contention. In the 1990s, after years of violence, peace talks resumed, culminating in the Oslo Accords of 1993. These accords established the Palestinian Authority and promised a path to a two-state solution, yet key issues such as the status of Jerusalem, borders, and refugees remained unresolved.³

Despite these efforts, peace talks have repeatedly broken down, giving rise to further cycles of violence, including the Second Intifada (2000-2005) and repeated military conflicts, particularly in Gaza.⁴

Early Efforts for Peace (1948-1967) The origins of the Israel-Palestine conflict as a political struggle between Jews and Arabs over the same land are deeply tied to the UN Partition Plan of 1947. In response to the growing tensions between Jewish and Arab populations in Palestine, the United Nations proposed a plan to partition the British Mandate of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states, with Jerusalem as an international city. The plan, which was approved by the UN General Assembly on November 29, 1947, recommended the establishment of a Jewish state on 56% of the land and an Arab state on 43%, while Jerusalem was to be placed

under international administration due to its religious significance.⁵

On May 14, 1948, in accordance with the partition plan, the State of Israel declared its independence, and immediately afterward, the armies of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria invaded the new Jewish state. The ensuing war lasted until March 1949, with Israel ultimately emerging victorious. By the end of the war, Israel had expanded its territory beyond the borders outlined in the UN Partition Plan, occupying 78% of historic Palestine. Approximately 750,000 Palestinian Arabs were displaced or fled during the conflict, leading to a refugee crisis that remains a central issue in the conflict today.⁶

Impact of the 1967 Six-Day War: The period following the 1948 war saw continued tensions between Israel and its Arab neighbours, but it wasn't until the Six-Day War of 1967 that the territorial dynamics of the conflict were dramatically altered. In June 1967, Israel launched a pre-emptive strike against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria in response to mounting threats, including the closure of the Straits of Tiran by Egypt and the massing of Arab forces along Israel's borders. The war lasted six days, during which Israel achieved a decisive victory, capturing several strategic territories: the West Bank (from Jordan), the Gaza Strip (from Egypt), the Sinai Peninsula (from Egypt), and the Golan Heights (from Syria).⁷

The Rise of Palestinian Nationalism: In the wake of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the 1967 Six-Day War, Palestinian nationalism began to evolve as a significant force in the political landscape of the Middle East. The disillusionment among Palestinians with the Arab states' inability to secure a resolution to the conflict led to the rise of a more independent Palestinian movement. The establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964, under the leadership of Ahmad Shukeiri, marked a key turning point in Palestinian political mobilization.⁸

In terms of peace efforts, while Israel's security concerns grew in response to Palestinian militancy and the rise of the PLO, peace talks during this period were largely focused on broader Arab-Israeli relations, rather than addressing the core issues of Palestinian national rights. This dynamic would set the stage for future negotiations and conflicts.⁹

The Oslo Accords and the Promise of Peace (1993-2000) The Oslo Accords represented a landmark attempt to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict and were the first direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The process began in 1991 with the Madrid Conference, but it was through secret meetings in Oslo, Norway, in 1993 that the breakthrough occurred. The negotiations led to a mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO, a dramatic

shift in the dynamics of the conflict. The Oslo Accords were signed by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat on September 13, 1993, with U.S. President Bill Clinton presiding over the ceremony.¹⁰ The Accords established the framework for Palestinian self-rule in parts of the West Bank and Gaza, and paved the way for the creation of the "Palestinian Authority (PA)", which would govern Palestinian territories in cooperation with Israel. The Oslo process was framed around the idea that both sides could achieve peace through negotiation rather than violence. As part of the agreement, the PLO renounced terrorism and recognized Israel's right to exist, while Israel agreed to withdraw its military forces from parts of the West Bank and Gaza and allow the establishment of the Palestinian Authority.¹¹

The Second Intifada (2000-2005): The Oslo Accords, despite their initial successes, ultimately failed to bring lasting peace, and in 2000, the Second Intifada (also known as the Al-Aqsa Intifada) broke out. The immediate cause of the violence was Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, a highly sensitive site for both Jews and Muslims, which provoked widespread Palestinian protests. However, underlying the violence was deep dissatisfaction with the peace process and the continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories.¹²

The Second Intifada marked a

sharp escalation in violence, with Palestinian militants launching suicide bombings and Israel responding with military operations in the West Bank and Gaza. Thousands of people were killed, and both sides became increasingly entrenched in their positions. The failure of the peace process to address core issues such as the status of Jerusalem, borders, refugees, and settlements led to a breakdown in trust between Israel and the Palestinian leadership, with both sides blaming the other for the failure of the negotiations. For the Palestinians, the Oslo process had promised an end to the occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian state, but they saw little progress in achieving these goals. For Israel, the rising violence, particularly the suicide bombings, cast doubt on the PLO's ability to control militancy and ensure security for Israeli civilians. As a result, the peace process effectively stalled, and the Second Intifada led to a hardening of positions on both sides, with significant political and social consequences for both Israelis and Palestinians.¹³

Post-Intifada and the Road to Further Violence (2001-2007) The Role of the US and International Actors: During the early 2000s, the United States under President George W. Bush played a central role in attempting to mediate the Israel-Palestine conflict. The Bush administration initially supported Israel's security concerns, especially during the Second Intifada, but

also recognized the need for a peace process. In 2002, the Bush administration shifted its focus with the announcement of the "Road Map for Peace," a plan co-sponsored by the US, the European Union (EU), Russia, and the United Nations (the Quartet). This plan was intended to lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel through a series of phased steps, including the cessation of violence, reforms within the Palestinian Authority, and the halting of Israeli settlement activity.¹⁴

International actors, including the European Union, the United Nations, and Arab states, also sought to influence the peace process. However, these efforts were often disjointed, with Arab states, particularly Egypt and Saudi Arabia, expressing frustration at the lack of progress and the continuing Israeli occupation. While international actors urged both sides to negotiate, there was little consensus on how to address the core issues of the conflict, and many initiatives faltered in the face of violent escalation.¹⁵

Camp David Summit (2000):

The Camp David Summit of 2000 was a critical attempt to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict. U.S. President Bill Clinton invited Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat to negotiate a final status agreement, with the hope of achieving a comprehensive peace deal. The summit focused on key issues such

as the status of Jerusalem, borders, settlements, and Palestinian refugees.

Despite months of preliminary negotiations, the summit ended without a final agreement, largely due to deep disagreements over the status of Jerusalem and the right of return for Palestinian refugees. Barak's proposals involved a partial withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, but they did not include full sovereignty over East Jerusalem or a viable solution to the refugee issue. Arafat rejected the offer, arguing that it fell short of the Palestinians' aspirations for a sovereign state and a shared Jerusalem.¹⁶

The summit's failure underscored the difficulty of resolving the most contentious issues of the conflict and contributed to a sense of disillusionment on both sides. The collapse of the talks, combined with the outbreak of violence, severely damaged the prospects for peace in the short term.¹⁷

Disengagement from Gaza (2005): In 2005, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon unilaterally implemented the Gaza Disengagement Plan (also known as the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza), which involved the evacuation of all Israeli settlers from the Gaza Strip and the dismantling of settlements, as well as the withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) from the area. The plan was presented as an effort to improve Israel's security by reducing the number of Israeli citizens in Gaza and making it more difficult for militant

groups to target Israeli civilians.

However, the disengagement did not lead to peace or stability. While Israel gained control of Gaza's borders, airspace, and coastal waters, the Palestinian Authority (PA) found itself divided and weakened. The rise of Hamas, an Islamist militant group founded in the 1980s, gained momentum after the withdrawal. Hamas, which had gained popularity for its opposition to the Oslo Accords and its promises of resistance to Israeli occupation, began to fill the vacuum left by the PA in Gaza. In 2006, Hamas won a majority in the Palestinian legislative elections, which further complicated the peace process. The growing influence of Hamas in Gaza, combined with ongoing Israeli airstrikes and blockades, led to rising tensions.¹⁸

The disengagement from Gaza, though initially intended to improve security for Israel, instead resulted in further instability, especially as Hamas became a more significant force within Palestinian politics and a direct challenge to both Israel and the Palestinian Authority.¹⁹

The Gaza War and the Breakdown of Peace Talks (2007-2012) The victory of Hamas in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections and its subsequent takeover of Gaza in 2007 represented a turning point in Palestinian politics and deepened the divide between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority (PA). Hamas, an Islamist militant group

founded in the late 1980s, had always opposed the Oslo Accords and the idea of negotiations with Israel, advocating instead for armed resistance. In the 2006 elections, Hamas won a majority in the Palestinian Legislative Council, defeating Fatah, the secular nationalist party that had historically dominated Palestinian politics under Yasser Arafat and later his successor Mahmoud Abbas.²⁰

The division between Hamas and Fatah greatly weakened the Palestinian negotiating position, as Israel was now faced with two Palestinian entities with divergent political goals. This division also contributed to the failure of the peace process during this period.²¹

The 2008-2009 Gaza War (Operation Cast Lead): The 2008-2009 Gaza War, also known as 'Operation Cast Lead', was a major military conflict between Israel and Hamas that further destabilized the region and deepened hostilities between Israel and the Palestinians. The war began in December 2008 after Hamas, which had been firing rockets into southern Israel for months, broke a six-month ceasefire with Israel. In response, Israel launched a large-scale military operation aimed at stopping the rocket fire and weakening Hamas's military capabilities. The operation lasted for 22 days and caused extensive destruction in Gaza. According to the United Nations, over 1,400 Palestinians were killed, including many civilians, and 5,300 were wounded. On the Israeli

side, 13 people were killed, including 3 soldiers and 10 civilians, due to rocket fire from Gaza. The military operation targeted Hamas infrastructure, including smuggling tunnels, weapons caches, and Hamas leaders, but also resulted in significant civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure in Gaza.²²

The war also had a significant impact on international perceptions of the conflict. Many countries, particularly in the Arab world, condemned Israel's military actions, calling them disproportionate and a violation of international law. On the other hand, some Western nations, including the U.S., supported Israel's right to defend itself but expressed concern over civilian casualties. The war and its aftermath further complicated peace efforts, as it contributed to the radicalization of Palestinian factions, particularly Hamas, and led to an even deeper divide between the Palestinian leadership in the West Bank (Fatah) and in Gaza (Hamas).²³

The 2011 UN Bid for Palestinian Statehood: In 2011, the Palestinian Authority (PA), under Mahmoud Abbas, made a bold push for international recognition of Palestinian statehood by submitting an application for full membership to the United Nations. This move was seen as a direct challenge to the stalled peace process and Israel's stance on Palestinian statehood. The UN bid was seen as a way for the Palestinian leadership to achieve

international recognition for a Palestinian state, particularly after years of failed negotiations and the continuing expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank. In support of the bid, Abbas argued that the Palestinians had been denied their right to self-determination for too long, and that the UN was the only venue capable of providing justice for the Palestinian people. The Palestinian Authority argued that their request was in line with existing international law, particularly the principle of self-determination.²⁴

Israel and the United States vehemently opposed the bid, with Israel arguing that any recognition of a Palestinian state should come through negotiations, not unilateral actions. The United States pledged to veto any UN Security Council resolution recognizing a Palestinian state, citing concerns that such a move would bypass the peace process and exacerbate tensions. While the UN General Assembly later voted overwhelmingly to grant the Palestinian Authority non-member observer state status, the bid for full UN membership was blocked in the UN Security Council due to a U.S. veto. Although the UN bid did not immediately result in Palestinian statehood, it was a symbolic victory for the Palestinian leadership and underscored the frustration felt by Palestinians at the failure of negotiations and the lack of progress towards a two-state solution. The move also highlighted the ongoing international divide over

how to address the Israel-Palestine conflict, with much of the Arab world and many developing nations supporting Palestinian statehood, while the U.S. and Israel remained opposed to unilateral actions.²⁵

Conclusion

The Israel-Palestine conflict has been marked by numerous attempts at peace since the early 20th century, but efforts to reach a lasting resolu including the Oslo Accords, Camp David Summit, and subsequent efforts, was followed by breakdowns in negotiations and violent escalations. Core issues like the status of Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees, borders, and Israeli security were never resolved, contributing to recurring violence.

2. Leadership Failures: Leadership on both sides played a critical role in shaping the outcome of peace efforts. Palestinian divisions, especially after Hamas's rise to power in Gaza in 2007, and Israeli leadership's reliance on military solutions to security concerns hindered meaningful negotiations. The inability of leaders to take risks for peace, coupled with internal political pressure, contributed to the failure of negotiations.

3. External Influences: The role of international actors, particularly the U.S., EU, and Arab states, also shaped the trajectory of peace efforts. The U.S. was often seen as biased in favor of Israel, while the European Union and Arab states struggled to mediate effectively due to competing interests and

geopolitical dynamics. The lack of a unified international stance weakened efforts to enforce a two-state solution.

4. **Public Opinion:** Public sentiment on both sides, driven by violence and fear, played a major role in obstructing peace. Israelis, scarred by suicide bombings and rocket attacks, became increasingly reluctant to trust Palestinian intentions. On the Palestinian side, the perceived failure of negotiations and the ongoing occupation made Hamas's militant approach more appealing to many Palestinians, further polarizing public opinion and complicating efforts at reconciliation.

These findings demonstrate how the failure to address core issues and persistent violence fueled by political fragmentation, leadership failures, and external influences prevented the establishment of a durable peace before 2012.

Lessons Learned-

1. **The Importance of Unified Leadership:** One of the key lessons is the need for a unified Palestinian leadership. The division between Fatah and Hamas effectively paralysed the Palestinian negotiating position and allowed Israel to exploit the divide. A single, coherent Palestinian voice would be essential for credible peace talks.

2. **Addressing Core Issues Upfront:** Another critical lesson is the necessity of addressing the core issues-such as the status of Jerusalem, borders, and the rights of refugees-early in negotiations

These issues should not be postponed until later phases of the peace process, as their continued evasion has fueled mistrust and resentment.

3. **Managing Public Opinion:** Both Israeli and Palestinian leaderships must engage in public diplomacy to shift public sentiment. In Israel, addressing the root causes of insecurity and fostering trust in the peace process is crucial. For Palestinians, improving the economic and humanitarian situation and ensuring the Palestinian Authority can deliver on promises of a future state would help shift support away from extremist factions like Hamas.

4. **International Mediation:** The failure of the U.S.-dominated peace efforts suggests the importance of having neutral international mediators who can help facilitate dialogue and hold both sides accountable. Multilateral approaches, where international stakeholders are more balanced, may offer more viable solutions than unilateral U.S.-centric negotiations.

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