

# **A Brief History of Palestine**

By Kirk Bailey

Palestine was a common name used until 1948 to describe the geographic region between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. In its history, the Assyrian, Babylonian, Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman empires have controlled Palestine at one time or another.

After World War I, Palestine was administered by the United Kingdom under a Mandate received in 1922 from the League of Nations. The modern history of Palestine begins with the termination of the British Mandate, the Partition of Palestine and the creation of Israel, and the ensuing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

## **The Partition of Palestine**

In 1947, the United Nations (U.N.) proposed a Partition Plan for Palestine titled “United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181 (II) Future Government of Palestine.” The resolution noted Britain’s planned termination of the British Mandate for Palestine and recommended the partition of Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab, with the Jerusalem-Bethlehem area protected and administered by the United Nations.

The resolution included a highly detailed description of the recommended boundaries for each proposed state. The resolution also contained plans for an economic union between the proposed states and for the protection of religious and minority rights. The resolution called for the withdrawal of British forces and termination of the Mandate by August 1948 and establishment of the new independent states by October 1948.

## **First Arab-Israeli War (1948)**

Jewish leadership accepted the Partition Plan but Arab leaders rejected it. The Arab League threatened to take military measures to prevent the partition of Palestine and to ensure the national rights of the Palestinian Arab population. One day before the British Mandate expired, Israel declared its independence within the borders of the Jewish State set out in the Partition Plan. The Arab countries declared war on the newly formed State of Israel beginning the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.

After the war, which Palestinians call the Catastrophe, the 1949 Armistice Agreements established the separation lines between the combatants: Israel controlled some areas designated for the Arab state under the Partition Plan, Transjordan controlled the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and Egypt controlled the Gaza Strip.

## **The Six Day War**

The Six Day War was fought between June 5–10, 1967, with Israel emerging victorious and effectively seizing control of the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria. The U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 242, the “land for peace” formula, which called for Israeli withdrawal “from territories occupied” in 1967 and “the termination of all claims or states of belligerency.” Resolution 242 recognized the right of “every state in the area to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force.”

## **The 1973 War**

In October 1973, war broke out again between Israel and Egypt in the Sinai and the Syria in the Golan Heights. A ceasefire was achieved (U.N. resolution 339) and U.N. peacekeepers deployed on both the fronts, only withdrawing from the Egyptian front after Israel and Egypt concluded a peace treaty in 1979. U.N. peacekeepers remain deployed in the Golan Heights.

## **Rise of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)**

In 1974, the Arab League recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and relinquished its role as representative of the West Bank. The PLO gained observer status at the U.N. General Assembly the same year.

In 1988, the Palestinian National Council of the PLO approved a Palestinian Declaration of Independence in Algiers, Tunisia. The declaration proclaims a "State of Palestine on our Palestinian territory with its capital Jerusalem," although it does not specify exact borders, and asserts U.N. Resolution 181 supports the rights of Palestinians and Palestine. The declaration was accompanied by a PLO call for multilateral negotiations on the basis of U.N. Resolution 242.

## **The Intifada (1987 to 1993)**

Conditions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including Jerusalem, after more than 20 years of military occupation, repression and confiscation of land, contributed to a Palestinian uprising called the intifada in December 1987. Between 1987 and 1993, over 1,000 Palestinians were killed and thousands injured, detained, imprisoned in Israel or deported from the Palestinian territories.

## **The peace process**

In 1993, the Oslo Accords, the first direct, face-to-face agreement between Israel and the PLO, were signed and intended to provide a framework for the future relations between the two parties. The Accords created the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) with responsibility for the administration of the territory under its control. The Accords also called for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from parts of the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

Implementation of the Oslo Accords suffered a serious setback with the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, Israeli Prime Minister and signer of the Oslo Accords, in November 1995. Since 1995, several peace summits and proposals, including the Camp David Summit (2000), Taba Summit (2001), the Road Map for Peace (2002), and the Arab Peace Initiative (2002 and 2007), have attempted to broker a solution, with no success.

## **The drive for recognition of Palestinian statehood**

In a speech on September 16, 2011, Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian National Authority, declared his intention to proceed with the request for recognition of statehood from both the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council. On September 23, 2011, President Abbas delivered the official application for recognition of a Palestinian State to the United Nations Secretary General. [Numerous issues remain to be settled by Israelis and Palestinians](#), however, before an independent state of Palestine emerges. Negotiations are ongoing.

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