

# Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: A Critique and Search for a Permanent Resolution for Peaceful Co-Existence

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## Abstract

The struggle between Israelis and Palestinians for land, security and survival has created an explosive situation that has defied resolution for over half century. The critical aspect of this unending feud are its attendant destruction of life and property, poverty, famine, pestilence, disease, unrest and ultimately death for both the actual terrorists and innocents souls who are just victims of this crisis. As a result of this situation, the region has become a focus of international politics between super-powers of the West and the East, while fundamentalists on all sides have turned the conflict into manipulations to suit their own interests. Despite the fact that both United States and Russia have resolved in recent times to create a lasting solution to the problem by establishing a state for the Palestinians, yet each time a state of hope arises for the final resolution, a disagreement pulps up for renewed violence. The recent 2014 escalation which engaged the Hamas militias against the Israelis claimed several lives and casualties on both sides but weighing more heavily to the disadvantage of Palestinians. This work therefore is an attempt to review this age-long conflict in its historical antecedent context and tracing the course of the conflicts to its present state of turmoil between the warring neighbours. The work further delves into the roles played by the “powers that be” in quelling or rather provoking the conflict over the years. The work concludes with alternative suggestions of how the conflict may be resolved pointing out that there may yet be a red light in the tunnel for a final seizure of the crisis, given the ceasefires spirit between the warring parties in recent time. The methodology adopted for the work is content analysis, thereby utilizing a media network of the Cable News Network, Aljazeera, British Broadcasting Corporation, Newspapers and Magazines. Recourse was further made to the internet, extant periodicals from Nigerian Institute of International Affairs and interviews.

**Keywords:** Israeli, Palestinian, Conflict, Militia.

## Theoretical Framework of Analysis

Two major theoretical frameworks apply to this work – Power-Politics and Conflict Theories. It must be noted that the two theories are overlapping as the struggle for power may at-times engender conflict. Power Politics constitutes an aspect of the Power Theory which simply means politics of force or ‘real politics.’ Essentially, it refers to the conduct of international relations by the use of force or the threat of force without consideration for the right of justice. It explains a situation in which, irrespective of the right and/or wrong of a case, one side obtains what it wants and the other accepts what it must. This crudely defines the role of Israeli bombardment of Gaza recently and thereafter claiming that their counter-attack was satisfactory to them.

A prominent school of thought that subscribes to the idea of Power Politics is the Realist School which posits that power is at the root of international politics. For Hans Morgenthau, a foremost advocate, “regardless of aims and goals, the immediate objective of all states’ action is to obtain or increase power.” As he puts it, “all politics is a struggle for power, while the desire to dominate is a constituting element of all human associations.” The incessant quest for power among nation-states must of necessity lead to a conflict of interests which at times degenerates into open armed conflicts.<sup>1</sup>

The Middle East terrorist group Hamas, for example, justifies suicide bombings against Israeli civilians on the grounds that the “heroic martyrdom operations....represents the sole weapon” available to the struggle for Palestinian people. The statement goes on to argue that “denying the Palestinian people the right of self-defense and describing this as terrorism (which should have been linked with the occupation of Palestinian lands by Israeli), violates all laws and norms which granted the people the right of self-defense” and that “considering the Palestinian resistance as a terrorist act and an outlaw legitimizes occupation because it delegitimized resistance”.

Critics of the Power-Politics theory condemn it as ‘single factor’ theory and that the concept does not explain all forms of state of interaction which are germane in international politics. These critics pointed to other factors/techniques as persuasion, manipulation, propaganda, as well as use of economic instruments like rewards, grants, and other forms of assistance which can bring considerable order in the international system rather than just the use of force. In relation to this work, it can be inferred that these factors may be complimentary to the use of force as aftermaths of the real event. The other theory related to this analysis is that of conflict, which is related to crisis and warfare also. As Brecher (1996) has noted, conflict, crisis and war are inextricably interrelated both in the conceptual and empirical context. The underlying and most fundamental characteristics

<sup>1</sup> Paul, W. *The Strategic Implications of Terrorism on the Western of the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence*. [www.cianot.org/wps/wip05](http://www.cianot.org/wps/wip05).

of all are: mistrust, tension, hatred, turmoil and hostility. In the case of war, violence is so distinct, which makes it quite different from conflict and crisis.<sup>1</sup>

Conflict has been justified by some scholars on the grounds that it has become a permanent feature of the international society. According to Ralf Dahrendorf “whenever there is cooperation, there is conflict.” In any social relations, conflict is assumed to be permanent; this has made the human society an anarchical one, since conflict occurs even in the midst of cooperation among individuals or groups.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, conflict may be seen as a technique for organizing a community and for accelerating the pace of social change. It helps to sharpen the issues involved in the controversy and to enable the people to distinguish more easily between the different points of view.<sup>3</sup> As Umoh puts it:

*The use of conflict can be justified, not only because it works, but also because it provides the most fertile ground for creative thinking. It not only provides compromises, it also yields new ideas which might not have been conceived without the stimulus of conflict.*<sup>4</sup>

Justification by both parties in this case is however subject to the limits of international law and the rights of the innocent souls and international peace which remains at stake in as much as the conflict continues.

### Introduction

The pattern of the attacks resulting into the internecine conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians has attained a regularized pattern over the years as it can be labelled or deemed as a retaliatory process, whenever the feuds starts from either of the party. In essence, the trouble-shooting commences with an attack to the opposite side through an action or multiple actions which now engenders a retaliatory action by the receiving party. The above scenario which has been described captures the essence and background of the recent 2014 Palestinian-Israeli imbroglio which lasted for over a month without any certainty for its actual resolution the process of peace for genuine or selfish interests. While pondering into possible paths for resolutions in the past, the work attempts to proffer solutions to the array of problematics presented by both factions. The work finally concludes that if the major world powers do not take decisive measures to curtail the excesses of each antagonistic tendency, the region may continue to be a restless zone of the world. More so, the onus is upon the Palestinians and Israelis themselves to reassess their grievances and contain their differences in order to achieve a lasting peace.

The occasion was the kidnapping of three Israeli teenagers in the West Bank on 12 June, 2014. The Israeli teenagers named, Naftali Frenkel, Gilad Shaar and Eyal Yifrh were later found murdered in the West Bank after thorough combing by a search party, following accusations that the act was perpetuated by the Hamas.<sup>5</sup> To complete the circle for another round of conflict by the receiving side, the Israelis swung into action to counteract the heinous act by arresting over 200 Hamas members and the clampdown of other organizations affiliated with Hamas.

To Hamas, the Palestinian militia or terrorists as some are wont to term them, the clampdown seemed politically motivated to eradicate its presence in the West Bank. Available evidence, however, later showed that the kidnapping of the Israeli teenagers was not authorized by Hamas political leadership but seemed to be the work of members of a powerful Hebron Clan with a history of carrying out vogue attacks in opposition to the Hamas leadership.<sup>6</sup> Rocket fire and air strikes increased after the abduction and killing of the three Israelis, despite the denial by Hamas that it was not responsible for the abduction. The counter-scenario by Israeli was soon demonstrated through a suspected revenge killing of a Palestinian teenager, Mohammed Abu Khadir, (16years) in the early hours of July 2, 2014. Although, Israeli officials denied involvement, reports revealed later he was beaten and burnt to death. Before the fateful event, the Palestinian boy, Abu Khadir was seen being forced into a car in the Shufat district of occupied East Jerusalem. His charred body was later found in a forest on the edge of West Jerusalem. The revenge was just at the beginning stages as escalation brought in heavy bombardment by both sides after these events. The questions that arise are: when would these pockets of reprisal attacks stop and when would the world community decisively step out to deal judiciously with the two neighbouring societies without politicizing the issues at stake? When will the mayhem between Palestinians and Israelis end? Can the major powers curtail the excesses of one against the other? Whither the road to a lasting solution to conflict between the Palestinians and Israelis? Why should Israelis continue to treat their Palestinian neighbours as inferiors and kill them in their thousands while they secure their own citizens and record quite

<sup>1</sup> Michael, B. (1996). *International Political Science Review*. Article published in Vol. 17, No.2.

<sup>2</sup> Ralf, D. (1959). *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*. Stanford: University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Solomon, A & Ferdinand, O. (2005). *A Systematic Approach to International Relations*. Concept Publication.

<sup>4</sup> Bassey, E. U. (1996). *International Relations*. Uyo: Modern Business Press.

<sup>5</sup> Gunning, J. (2014). *What Drives Hamas to Take Over Israel*. BBC News Commentary. 18<sup>th</sup> July.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

lesser casualties on each escalation? What are the big powers doing to ensure that a state is created for the Palestinians such that these conflicts could be treated on equal basis of state to state encounters?

Before 1948, the major cause of the protracted conflict had been the contest over the rightful ownership of the land of Palestine. While the Jews regarded themselves as God's chosen people; Palestine was taken as their Promised Land. The Arabs protested against what they believed to be an affront to their fundamental right of self-determination in Palestine, a territory which they had inhabited by conquest several centuries ago. The Arabs had earlier conquered Jerusalem in 637AD while Caliph Omar (639-644AD) made Jerusalem the capital of the Arab realm of Palestine.

Another historical dimension to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was the increase in the tempo of anti-Jewish feeling in both Eastern and Central Europe in early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This development produced series of migrations of European Jews to other parts of the world – i.e. Western Europe and to the United States of America. It is important to observe at this point, that between 1936 and 1939, the Nazi Anti-Jewish feeling enforced by Adolf Hitler led to the killing of over 6million Jews. After such an experience and pogrom, most survivors of the horrific purging resolved to head for their Promised Land – Palestine – their promised land from where they have been uprooted several times. This time, the Israelis planned to have a permanent homeland from which no other race could discriminate, oppress nor make them defenceless anymore. Before the Nazi pogrom of Jews, they have previously faced persecutions from the Assyrians who destroyed the Israelis in 720BC. In 70AD, the Roman Emperor, Hadrian 117-138AD made Jerusalem into nine Roman colonies.

Having gone through all these persecution in times past, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the World Zionist Movement, aided by British and American diplomatic support encouraged the Jews to return to Palestine in large numbers. As from 1917, the stream of Jewish immigration made Arab residents of the Palestinian territory humiliated and felt that they would soon become a minority in the land. This resulted into conflict between the Jews and Palestinians which continued till the 1948 declaration of Israel's independence.

This argument is now, however, countered on the grounds that the have-nots are entitled to peace, after the crumbling of the Cold War in 1991. Or can the contending Islamists terrorists groups Islamic State (ISIS) now operating in Syria, Iraq and other Middle Eastern regions be deemed as the new opposition (East) representing the New West-East relations?

Traditionally, regarding the issue of Palestinian conflict, the major actors still remain those powers that has been at the root causes of the non-implementation of resolutions for a Palestinian state since May 14, 1948 when Israeli declared its independence. Indeed, associated with this declaration was the beginning of the prominence of the feud. The declaration of the Israeli state was not a negative step in itself, given the genocidal attempt by Adolf Hitler to wipe out the entire Jewish population during the Second World War.

Although, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict dates back to biblical times yet it was after the declaration of the Israeli state in 1948, that the first Arab-Israeli conflict came into the open as was vigorously fought to its logical conclusion by Israeli to prove and assert its recently declared statehood then. The resulting refugee problem in the aftermath of that war is what actually led to this continuing struggle between the Palestinians and Israeli till date.

As such, the issue of the neglect by the great powers to decisively take the bulls by the horns, ever since then is the major reason for the renewed agenda whenever each conflict arises. These powers are Great Britain, United Nations, the United States of America and Russia. Others are France, Germany, and other members of the European Union whose statements have been carefully guarded on the Palestinian conflict. These aforementioned are American/European countries, but the other major actors in the scenario are the Arab nations led by Egypt, the closest country to the two parties in the conflict and leader of the Arab league when the Israeli state was created in 1948. Turkey, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Qatar have had their own share of the problem now and much more in the distant past. At every state of the dispute, all these countries have been involved in the resolution process which at the onset started with a war by all the Arab nations in 1948. More than four militia Palestinian Arabs had been displaced by the four full scale wars of 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973. The plight of the Arab nations at such escalations is the refugee surge who are chiefly found in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. Perhaps to gain a proper insight into the continuing conflict in Gaza, and the involvement of the aforementioned actors, it is pertinent to take a historical excursion into the root causes of the imbroglio.

As observed by Palmer and Perkins, "few issues of modern times have taxed statesmanship so heavily; few have offered a greater challenge to an international organization."<sup>1</sup> The Palestine question was first brought before the United Nations by Great Britain on April 2, 1947, in a letter requesting the Secretary General to call a special session of the General Assembly to create and instruct a special committee to prepare recommendations

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<sup>1</sup> Norman, D. P. & Howard, C. P. (2007). *International Relations: The World Community in Transition*. New Delhi: AITBS Publishers & Distributors. See Also, The United States and the United Nations Report by the President of the Congress for the Year 1947, Dept. of State Pub. 3024. International Organization and Conference Series III, I (February, 1948), pp. 42, 44.

for the future government of Palestine.<sup>1</sup> Britain had announced her intention to terminate the mandate that she had assumed at the close of World War I. Accordingly, the first special session convened on April 28, 1948 and after lengthy debates in the first committee, the Assembly appointed a committee of eleven members, not including any of the permanent members of the Security Council.<sup>2</sup> That led to the birth of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) which was given the “the widest powers to ascertain and record facts and to investigate any questions and issues relevant to the problem of Palestine.”<sup>3</sup> This committee was equally instructed to submit each proposals as it may consider appropriate for the solution of the problem of Palestine.

After the first deliberations of the UNSCOP, at Lake Success on May 26, 1947, the committee proceeded to spend six weeks in Palestine and concluded its report in Geneva on August 31, 1947. In its report to the General Assembly, eleven general principles were unanimously agreed upon by the committees, amongst others, (i) a majority plan for the partition of Palestine with Economic Union between the Israelis and the Arabs and (ii) a minority plan for a federal state. On November 29, 1947, in a tense plenary session, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted by the required two-thirds vote the plan for the partition of Palestine, with Economic Union and an international area for Jerusalem. After the session, an implementation commission was appointed to implement the recommendations.

For once, it seemed the emerging super-powers then after the Second World War (1945) US and Russia agreed on that political issue of resolving one of the “thorniest rivalry problem to confront human history”<sup>4</sup> Both supported the Partition plan and the United States was largely responsible for its adoption by the General Assembly. While Jewish tenders hailed the action as a great victory, Arab spokesmen warned that such a plan would never be accepted and the increasing tempo of violence in the Holy Land gave weight to their warnings.<sup>5</sup> In the interim, the Implementation Committee continued its work but soon reported to the Security Council that it could only discharge its duties on the termination of the old mandate of the League of Nations except they were assisted by armed forces. However, before these arrangements could be concluded, events took a sharp turn around when in early March 19, 1948, the then American representative in the Security Council, Warren R. Austin, without previous warning to the British or any other government, formally proposed that the Security Council Special Commission on Palestine to suspend its effort to implement the partition plan.<sup>6</sup> He argued further that a temporary Trusteeship for Palestine be established and that a special session of the General Assembly be called to answer the new options.

Despite the arguments of the then Secretary General of the UN, Trygve Lie that a Trusteeship for Palestine might be more difficult to implement peacefully than the partition plan, the UNSCOP was instructed to terminate its activities. In its place, the office of the United Nations Mediator for Palestine was established, while Count Folke Bernadotte was appointed to head the office.<sup>7</sup> He was to be assisted by Dr. Ralph Bunche, an American. While it could be ascertained that both Counte Bernadotte and Bunche made reasonable progress in their assignment, the declaration of the state of Israel at midnight on May 14, 1948 when British mandate expired made matters worse as more violence erupted.

On September 16, 1948, after Counte Bernadotte had finished his last and most definite plan for a settlement in Palestine, two days after, he was murdered. Bunche succeeded him, however, their joint effort met with little success as the Arab nations had concluded plans for the first Arab-Israeli war. Due to these violent rivalries between the Jews and the Arabs, the United Nations on November 29, 1948 through its Resolution 18(11) decided that the only way of bringing peace to Palestine was to continue the partition plan and divide the territory into two. The Israeli state already had taken, the Mediterranean Coastal area of Palestine, while the rest was awarded to the Arabs which became Jordan. The Arabs regarded the 1947 plan as a calculated attempt to deprive them of their land and inheritance.

Thus, while it may be stated that the United States abrogation by Warren R. Austen of the plan for partition was an initial cause for the derailment of the state for both parties, it can equally be asserted that the refusal of the Arab states to recognize the state of Israel in their midst had been a major cause of the crisis in the Middle East. The negligent role played by both United States and Great Britain in asserting their weight and decision on the implementation of a state for Palestine still remains to be justified since the Israelis declared their independence in 1948.

Perhaps, digging a little more in-depth into history, one may ascertain that Great Britain in the inter-war years when it administered the same Palestinian territory reneged in its agreement to establish a Palestinian state.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> See Report by the President of the Congress for the Year 1947 (above).

<sup>3</sup> Norman, D. P. & Howard, C. P. (2007). *International Relations*.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Count Folke Bernadotte was murdered in the course of his work.

<sup>7</sup> Fadeye, J. D. (anon). *Essays on Modern World History*. Oyo: FCE Publishers.



This is because at the end of the First World War (1914-1918) Britain was saddled with the responsibility of administering both Iraq and Palestine (then comprising Modern Jordan and Israel) as mandated territories. The territories of Syria and Lebanon (formerly called Syria) were placed under a French mandate, both of whom were granted independence in 1946.<sup>1</sup> British mandate in Iraq ended in 1932 while Jordan became independent in 1946. The issue of Palestinians continued to be problematic in its resolution for grant of independence as had been done to transform (later to become Jordan). The Palestinian Arabs quite demanded for their own sate as far back as 1932, however, Britain refused to grant that independence request on the grounds that Palestine had mixed races and that she had responsibility to cater for both races.<sup>2</sup> While that was a tenable reason, yet given the colonial administrative styles in other African countries under the British or the French, mixed races did not stop them from merging the several ethnic nationalities in the Niger area which became a country later called Nigeria.

More importantly British reluctance has been traced back to its promise to the Zionists movement and aspirations which led to the Balfour Declaration of 1917. In 1917, the British issued the Balfour Declaration which guaranteed that a national home for the Jews would be established in Palestine. By 1920, when Palestine became a mandate territory as earlier discussed, large scale Jewish immigration began and over time, these immigrants started farms and industries and generally prospered.

Thus, while the Arabs made up the larger part of the population in Palestine, they became alarmed by the continuous developments of Jewish encroachment on a land that was virtually theirs earlier. They viewed the Jews as intruders and feared possible economic and political domination.<sup>3</sup> As refugees fled from Nazi Germany in the 1930s and Jewish immigration increased, the Arabs turned to demonstrations and guerrilla warfare. These guerrilla warfare of bands of fighters has transformed today into the militant organizations called Hamas and Fatah groups. While these inhabitant organizations have strove to strike a balance for the realization of the Palestinian state in recent times, it was actually the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) who championed the Palestinian cause after the four successive wars of 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973 failed to suppress the Israeli state. The PLO was for several years led by Yasser Arafat whose struggle was eventually recognized by the UNO who gave Palestinian an observer status before Arafat's death.

Having highlighted the failure of the tactical effort by Britain and US to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian problem, it may be worth the while, delving a little further into the role played by Russia towards resolution of the conflicts. The Soviet role on the Arab-Israeli conflict after the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948, assumed an opposition role counteracting of the action of United States imperialism and military hegemony in the Middle East. From the Soviet perspective, support to the Arab cause was a strong support against imperialism which is known to be the hallmark of the British and even United States in its latter years.<sup>4</sup> Thus, it can be said that Soviet diplomacy especially at the height of the cold war era aimed at maintaining a stronger foothold in conservative, moderate and even in radical Arab states. Power play between the US and the Soviet Union in the Middle East was seen as a zero-sum game, in which the Soviet gain would mean an American loss and vice-versa. As such, the US ensured that Israel operated and bargained from a position of strength in any move towards peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>5</sup>

The intractable nature of the Palestinian question and the consequential wars between 1948 and 1973 saw the United States and the Soviet Union providing diplomatic, financial and military assistance to Israeli and the Palestinian Arabs. Rather than mutually committing themselves towards bringing the two disputing "states" into an understanding of resolving the ending tension, they preferred complicating the process by the commitment to contain each other ideologically and strategically.<sup>6</sup> To Israel, this uncritical Soviet pro-Arab bias was a clear security threat to the existence and survival of the Jews. While the Soviet Union was in talking terms with the Arabs, it failed to give attention to Israel for its refusal to abide by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 242.<sup>7</sup>

In the 1970s, the Soviet attitude toward Israel did not change significantly. In a strong support of the Arab cause, the Soviet Union argued and supported the right of the PLO to participate. However, that was in the period of the Cold War when international disputes were argued by some historians in the Marxist – Capitalist lens. At this stage, certain historians argued that the Jews or Israelis can be said to have acquired an advanced western technical and financial advancement, while the Arabs in Palestine and indeed other Arabs in the Middle East are predominantly under-developed with low levels of technology.<sup>8</sup> They further argued that in consequence

<sup>1</sup> Walker, T. W. et al. (1990). *History & Life*. USA: Scott & Foresman Publishers, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Aja, A. A. (1999). *Policy and Strategic Studies*. Abakaliki: Willy Rose Publishing Co.

<sup>4</sup> Lambert, U. E. (1981). *African in World Politics*. Onitsha: African Educational Publishers, 1981.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> UN Resolution 242. Israel's Withdrawal from Occupied Territory.

<sup>7</sup> See Official Record of the UN General Assembly Plenary Meeting, 1978/79 NIAA.

<sup>8</sup> Aja, A. A. (1999). *Policy and Strategic Studies*. Abakaliki: Willy Rose Publishing Co.

of this sharp disparity between the two races in Palestine, conflict could not be over-ruled. They therefore maintain that the genesis of the Middle East crisis can be explained in terms of the inherent contradictions between the (haves) and the (have-nots) as represented by the two races and that with different/ends of technological attainment and economic development, conflict was inevitable in all peace initiative in the Middle East.

After the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1973 which still saw Israel gain more of Arab territories, Soviet Union supported the Arab states to get the UN Resolution 338 adopted which like the earlier Resolution 224 in part called for unconditional withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Arab territories.<sup>1</sup> The 1979 Camp David Accords which saw Egypt and Israeli mending their differences and which led to the subsequent award of Peace Nobel Prize for Anwar Sadat and PLO leader, Yasser Arafat was condemned by the Soviet Union and a majority of African states. This is because it was conducted outside the UN Peace initiative and equally prejudiced the PLO from participating in any peace process by other Arab states who were of course, independent. This unilateral action by Egypt led to its being ostracized by other Arab states for sole-handily negotiating on an issue that concerned the whole of Arab world. Following the Perestroika and Glasnost by Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union in 1985 onwards until the crashing of the Union, and the Cold War eventually in the 90s, the new thinking in Moscow was redefined as not to run too contrary to either the US perspective on the matter or even the European community.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the reconciliation between the two camps, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century onwards, the atmosphere for resolution gradually improved, but not without intermittent pot shots of aggravation by either sides. By 2007, the cycle of occasional hope repeatedly quenched by violence continued positive moments followed the death of long time Palestinian President, Yasser Arafat who was replaced by popularly elected leader, Mahmoud Abbas who strongly denounced terrorist tactics at the resolution and strove to constrain Palestinian militants. Israel responded with a number of conciliatory actions. Raising hopes further, Abbas and Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon of Israel then met in the first Israeli-Palestinian Summit since 2000 and agreed to cease all violence against one another. At this point, Israel withdrew its forces from Gaza leaving it entirely in Palestinian hands.<sup>3</sup>

By early 2006, Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon was felled by a debilitating stroke in early 2006, bringing down again a lot of the hopes raised at attaining a peaceful resolution of the conflict and the establishment of the Palestinian state. Although, Ehud Olmert who succeeded him shared Sharon's view, yet he did not have his stature as a war hero, nor Sharon's ability to overcome domestic opposition to accommodation with the Palestinians.<sup>4</sup> For their part, the Palestinians added their own blow to hope in 2006 by electing a parliament dominated by members of a radical group with terrorists' links, making one of the group's members, the Palestinian Prime Minister. A few months after that, Palestinian militants attacked an Israeli border post, killing two soldiers and capturing one. This action led Israel to call its forces back to Gaza. That was soon followed by a major clash and associated regional conflicts. Members of the Hezbollah, another militant group launched guerrilla attacks against Israel from positions in Lebanon while Israel retaliated with full scale military assault on much of Lebanon.

In recent times, with the emergence of positive actions from the Barrack Obama-led United States administration, it was seeming, a state of Palestinian would soon emerge with much of political pacification on both sides by US Foreign Secretary, John Kerry leading the way. Polls showed that most Palestinians and Israelis wanted peace in the region, but they were also divided on the very difficult issues between them. Just a few of these are the status of Jerusalem, which both claim as their rightful capital, Palestinians claim of "right of return" to Israel to reclaim their land, the future of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, and the legitimacy of the security fence that Israel is building in part on lands claimed by the Palestinians.<sup>5</sup>

### **Problematics of the Crisis in Recent Times**

Given all these calculations, some of these claims seem achievable, but at best may not be possible in the circumstances obtainable by the two groups. For example, the right of return to areas where Israelis are firmly established now seem unrealizable, the future and legitimate security mechanisms of Israel as a country standing in the wilderness surrounded by Arab nations may also be a difficult compromise. Also, the provocative declaration by Yasser Arafat before his death that they would like to see Palestinian state with Jerusalem as capital may only be realized with a strong appeal to Israel. Even at that, that would be an obscure thought to a greater percentage of Israelis.

<sup>1</sup> Rourke, J. T. (2009). *International Politics on the World Stage*. New York: McGraw Hill Publications.

<sup>2</sup> Adegbulu, F. (1998). *Any Hope for Peaceful Israeli-Palestine Relations? A Short Historical Discourse*. NIIA: Nigerian Forum, July-August.

<sup>3</sup> Orla, G. (2014). BBC Correspondent Report from Egypt, 22<sup>nd</sup> July.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Another problem/critical impediment to the Peace efforts in the Middle East is the meddlesomeness of Arab countries in the affairs of the two contenders. For example, the role played by Egypt could at times be questionable, whose midway stance of forging peace with Israel led to its being ostracized by the other Arab countries in the past. But as Orla Guerin has noted, while it is acceptable Egypt has played a key role as a mediator, it currently appears to be bidding its time, especially in the current crisis between Israel and Gaza. Analysts believe Egypt is in no hurry to broker a permanent ceasefire that might benefit Hamas as happened under the ousted Egyptian Islamist President Mohammed Morsi in November 2012. Egypt sees Hamas as an offshoot of Mr. Morsi's Muslim brotherhood as a direct threat. Having crushed the brotherhood over the past year, Egypt wants to see Hamas suffer the same fate with Morsi.<sup>1</sup> In that sense, Egypt could be seen as taking the same pages (stance) with Israel.

Another major problem with the resolution is the internal rivalry/disagreement within Palestinian groups, especially the major ones – the Hamas and Fatah groups. After the negotiations process initiated by the United Nations and the US government, pointers were that soon a Palestinian state would soon emerge. Hamas and Fatah had continuously agreed to establish a National Unity Government and they had been in a tortured on-off negotiations since Hamas 2006 election victory.

As Gunning Jerome has noted, the National Unity Government ran into trouble before the recent kidnapping of the three Israeli teenagers which sparked off the current conflicts. This is because it led to Israeli announcement of earlier expansion to Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank forcing Fatah to choose between peace with Israel and Peace with Hamas. It could therefore be reasoned that the kidnapping exacerbated the tension, as Fatah felt more loyal to the Israeli than to the arch-rival whose recent firing of rockets seemed to work against the peace plan. The ensuing street protests, which Ismail Haniya, Hamas Prime Minister in Gaza since 2007 described pointedly as the beginning of the “third intifada” was partly directed against the Palestinian Authority Security forces.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the recent bombings against the Israeli settlements were no more than political calculation by Hamas to undermine the gains already made by Fatah and in part to paint Hamas as the true champion of Palestinian unity, failed or short-lived attempts along the way. Recent polls suggested that Palestinians believed that the experiment would succeed this time around. However, Fatah seemed to be gaining an upper hand in the struggle leading to self-rule in Palestine. Hamas needed desperately a way out of its increasing isolation. It had lost Syrian and much of Iranian support in 2011, when it sided with the uprising against Syrian President, Bashar Assad.<sup>3</sup>

With the development, Hamas popularity decreased as did its ability to pay Gaza's state employees. The National Unity government which effectively gave control to Fatah was a desperate move to end this isolation. Meanwhile, Fatah saw the National Unity Government as a ploy to regain its total control of Gaza through elections given its rising profile with both Palestinians and even the Israelis in terms of the pursuit for peace.

With unemployment already over 40%, the reconstruction all but halted and exports down to 3% of pre-blockade levels before 2013, the closure of the tunnels led to a severe worsening of the situation.<sup>4</sup> The current bombings from the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) killing thousands of innocent Palestinians and destruction of strategic holdings increased the hardship of the Palestinians. With fuel shortages leading to regular power cuts affecting hospitals, failing water and sewage systems, more than 5,000 Palestinians were displaced and with bombing on some of the United Nations refugees' camps by the IDF, the situation holds no hope for even those not caught up with the bombings in the heat of the crisis.

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<sup>1</sup> Gunning, J. (2004). *What Drives Hamas to take Over Israel?* BBC News Commentary, 18<sup>th</sup> July.

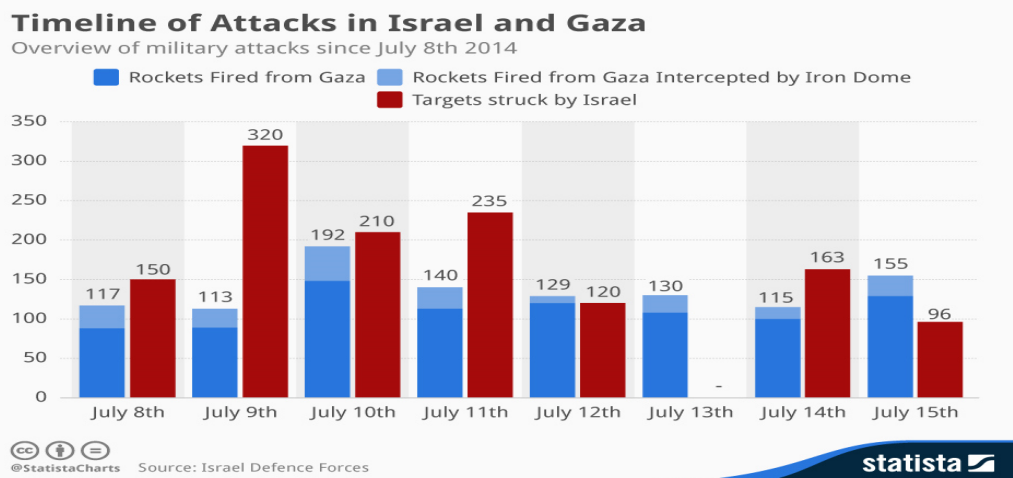
<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> CNN Reports, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2014.

## The Diagram

### Timeline of Attacks in the First 10 Days of Recent Conflicts of the 2014 between Israel and Palestine



Source: The Statistics Portal (<http://www.statista.com/chart/2463/timeline-of-attacks-in-israel-and-gaza/>)

As the humanitarian crisis in Gaza deteriorated rocket attacks from Gaza increased in response to the hardship, while Israeli Defence Forces has returned every single assault with a higher intensity and destructive dimensions, it is obvious that there is no clear-cut agreement between the two major Palestinian groups – the Al-Fatah and Hamas.” This is clearly reflected by a poll conducted by one of Palestinian’s most respected polling centres – the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research which found in June 2014 that 32% of Palestinians would vote for Hamas in Legislative elections while over 40% supported Ismail Haniya for President. More broadly too, a majority believed that “Hamas way” to end the occupation was better than “Fatah’s way.”<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, both militant groups indicated their readiness to consider a political path of the current impasse. With Hamas consent, the National Unity government upheld the three conditions the international community had set for engagement with Hamas. The conditions are (i) the recognition of Israel by all groups in Palestinian (ii) Abidance by previous diplomatic agreements/resolutions – UN Resolution 242 and 338 which called for unconditional withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Arab territories of Gaza strip and West Bank (of the Jordan River), and (iii) Renunciation of violence by both parties.<sup>2</sup>

Hamas military way and the militants amongst its political leadership had serious misgivings about the National Unity Government and dissenting voices were evident because it was led by Fatah. The recent attack therefore, has proved that both parties were not yet ready for peace. This is because Israel could accept full cooperation only when the two groups are united. The second underlying development was the increased hardship Gaza had experienced since the bombardment and closure of the tunnel to Egypt through which a lot of imports are guaranteed for the survival of Palestinians in Gaza.

As expected, there were over 9 cease-fire/truce proclamations by both parties which unfortunately could not bring about the time-honoured end to the conflicts. Hamas leader, Khaled Meshaal claimed he was not informed by Israel whenever such ceasefires were negotiated with Egyptian Saeb Etakar who had assumed recently office as the Chief Negotiating Officer.

However, Israeli President, Shimon Peres and Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu who kept talking tough on the likely deployment of 40,000 reservists seem not too ready for a permanent truce. Hamas ceasefire terms and conditionality seemed too far-reaching for Israel to accept. The demands focused largely on ending Gaza’s blockade, from opening border crossing and an air and seaport under international supervision to the reestablishment of industrial zones and the re-expansion of the marine shipping zone to 10km (6 miles).<sup>3</sup> These are demands Israel was unlikely to accept without a cast-iron guarantee that the opening of borders will not allow Hamas to rearm. A negotiation of granting these demands may not be equally acceptable to Hamas indicating once again a deadlock between the parties.

### The Way Forward

There is no doubt that a permanent resolution of the Middle East conflict can only be attained on the basis of compromise. As already noted, if negotiations continue to end in deadlock, the tendency is for the process of

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Gunning, J. (2004). Report.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



peace to continue to elude this region where the ancient dispute has been traced back to Abraham and his two sons – Isaac who founded the Jewish nation and Ishmael, the symbolic father of all Palestinians and Arabs at large.

For one, any reasonable and lasting solution to this conflict must be guided by the efforts of the bigger powers whose interests has been clearly guided as witnessed by their interventionist actions since the recent escalations. The United States, Great Britain, Russia and France and even Germany must throw their might and support to the ceasefire follow-up efforts. No doubt, US Secretary of State has been relentless in his efforts to achieve a Palestinian state, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius has been involved in ceasefires bids in Egypt with Sael Erakat, the Chief Negotiating Officer. UK Foreign Secretary, Philip Hammond has maintained a high profile of assistance through the Department for International Development (DFID) where over £4m pounds had been sent to the UN Relief and Works Agency in Gaza. Even as Turkish leader, Recep Erdogan condemned Egypt's approach as not sincere to the Palestinian issue, yet it is obvious that Egypt midwife role in the matter has been yielding results.

It is obvious that all the efforts of these great powers would matter a long way in reconciliation. More importantly, it must be asserted that the onus lies on the United States to throw its might in ensuring that the Israeli forces are curtailed. Given the fact that the human casualties ran into over 10,000 from the Gaza side, the Israelis did not record above 100 soldiers' dead. It must be asserted that the Israeli Defence Forces while maintaining their concerns of defence and terrorists assault from the Palestinians take their reactions to the extreme as confirmed by United Nations figure of over 70% civilian casualty in Gaza. No doubt, Israel strength has been pro-West and because the American government has a strong Jewish American population who has over the years supported military and defensive Zionist aspirations. This is no reason why the weak should be trampled upon as if human lives on the part of the Palestinians do not count.

Ban Ki Moon, the United Nations Secretary should work with Barak Obama with little gains made during the ceasefires, due to non-agreement of the peace proposals, it must be noted that the future of Israeli defence and security attitude is not likely to change or make a sharp break from the past. The strong relations of Israel with the West – US, France will most likely remain not minding the fact that both Bill Clinton and Barak Obama have shown serious interests in actualizing the independence and establishment of the Palestinian state more than past conservatives as John Kennedy, Ronald Reagan or even George Bush.<sup>1</sup> The Nixon-Ford Administration also endeavoured to bring peace through Dr. Henry Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy between Cairo and Tel Aviv leading to the first and second disengagement agreements of 1974 and 1975.

Another reality is that Israel should not overrate its quality military strength just because it has over the years enjoyed the support of the West in times past. With demonstrations in London, Paris and even in parts of Germany in this last assault on the Palestinians against their destructions on human lives especially at the United Nations camp in Gaza, it is high time they reconsider their positions. Having achieved their aims of destroying the Gaza tunnels with minimal casualties, Israelis should equally find ways of responding to the consequent problems of their latest attacks such as – ensuring how Palestinians get access to seaports, import goods and food items (not necessarily the ammunitions so claimed by Israelis to come from the tunnels) and other necessities of life.

Israel must improve on its diplomatic image abroad especially with its African, Asian and its other non-Arab neighbours such as Iraq, Turkey and Ethiopia. Ethiopia's proximity to Egypt makes it an ideal component of Israeli's peripheral strategy. This is only a truism that a single tree, no matter its size and strength cannot make a forest.

Finally, can a lasting peace in the Middle East be achieved without the cooperation of the other Arab nations surrounding Israel? The role played by Egypt in the past and present has led to serious curtail in the destruction of more lives in the Gaza. It is obvious that without the ceasefire negotiated by Egypt, more lives and properties would have been lost.<sup>2</sup> It cannot be said that other Arab nations do not recognize the existence of Israel today, rather the Islamic cooperation amongst them would never make them have the impression of oppression from Israel as in the past, present and the future. Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Jordan, Syria (tough in wars), Lebanon and the host of other Middle Eastern countries should resolve on how to ensure that Palestine becomes a state of its own. This can only be instructive, if they end all intra and inter Arab destabilizing actions against one another. The Arab nations should understand that a major Israeli defensive strategy is to work against Arab solidarity.<sup>3</sup> It is only with a combination of these propositions and forces could a lasting solution be guaranteed between the Israelis and the Palestinians as distinct from the entire Middle Eastern region.

<sup>1</sup> Aljazeera News Network, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Aja, A. A. (1999). *Policy and Strategic Studies*. Abakaliki: Willy Rose Publishing Co.

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