

# Israel Palestine Conflict

The Israel Palestine conflict is one of the oldest and persisting conflicts in the world. Now and then, the situation escalates to deadly heights causing deaths and destruction in the region. How did the Israel-Palestine conflict start? What is the history of Palestine and Israel? This important topic for international relations as well as world history segments of the [IAS exam](#) is explained in this article.

## Israel Palestine Conflict History

To understand the present-day ongoing bloody conflict between Israel and Palestine, it is necessary to understand the background of the place and the people associated with it. Although the present conflict has its roots in the 20th century, a brief background of the region with respect to ancient history will help one understand the religious and historical significance of the place, especially to the chief stakeholders in the conflict.



Image source: <https://www.britannica.com/>

- Israel today is a small country in West Asia, about the size of one of India's northeastern states, Meghalaya or Manipur.
- Israel is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea to its west, Egypt to the south, Jordan and Syria to its east and Lebanon to the north.
- Israel has many sites that are of religious significance to Jews, Christians and Muslims alike and has a complex history.
- Today, the population of Israel is mostly Jewish, though there are minorities of Christians and Muslims.

### Ancient History

- Most of what is known about the ancient history of Israel is sourced from the Hebrew Bible.
- Israel can be traced back to the biblical figure Abraham, who is deemed the father of Judaism (through his son Isaac) and a patriarch of Islam (through his son Ishmael).
- The descendants of Abraham were thought to be enslaved by Egyptians for hundreds of years before they settled in Canaan (approximately in modern-day Israel).
- Around 1000 BCE, King David ruled the region. His son, Solomon, built the First Temple (Solomon's Temple) in ancient Jerusalem around 957 BCE.
- In about 931 BCE, the region was divided into two kingdoms, namely, Israel in the north and Judah in the south.
- Around 722 BCE, the kingdom of Israel was invaded and destroyed by the Assyrians.
- In the sixth century BCE, Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians, who took control of Judah. The First Temple was destroyed and the Jews were expelled to Babylon.
- In 538 BCE, the Babylonians were conquered by the Achaemenid Empire whose emperor Cyrus allowed the Jews to go back to Judah, where they rebuilt Solomon's Temple (Second Temple).
- In 70 CE, the Romans destroyed the Second Temple and this marked the beginning of the Jewish exile from their holy land.
- In the second century CE, the Romans took control of the region and the province of Judea was named Syria Palaestina.
- For the next many centuries, the region of Israel was conquered and ruled by many groups such as the Persians, Romans, Greeks, Arabs, Fatimids, Seljuk Turks, Crusaders, Egyptians, Mamluks and others.

### Modern History

- From 1517 to 1917, the Ottoman Empire ruled over much of West Asia including the region of Israel.
- In the 19th century, the population in the region of Israel/Palestine was almost 87% Muslim, 10% Christian and 3% Jewish. From all accounts, the communities lived in peace with each other. In the city of Jerusalem, the population of the three communities was roughly equal.
- In the 19th century, an Austro-Hungarian Jewish journalist, Theodor Herzl, propagated the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine for the Jews. This idea came to be known as Zionism, which found

many followers among the Jews in Europe, where Jews were facing discrimination and even pogroms.

- In 1917, the British government announced the **Balfour Declaration**, hoping to gain Jewish support for World War I, which promised: “the establishment in Palestine a national home for the Jewish People”.
  - This was problematic because in 1916, the British had secretly made a deal with the French according to which after the war, the Arab territories would be divided and Palestine would be in control of the British.
  - Moreover, the British had also promised the ruler of Mecca, Sharief Hussain, in 1915 that Hussain would rule over the region including Palestine if he led an Arab revolt against the Ottomans, which he did in fact.
- The Arabs in Palestine vehemently opposed the declaration fearing that a Jewish homeland in the region would mean subjugation for the Palestinians.

### Mandatory Palestine

- The British, after the **First World War**, established a colony in Palestine maintaining that they would rule the area until the Palestinians were ready to govern themselves. This was called Mandatory Palestine as it was according to the League of Nations mandate.
- Even before this time, there was a massive influx of Jews from Europe into Palestine in the hope of creating their homeland after being expelled from it for centuries.
- Meanwhile, in the 1920s and 1930s, the Jewish population in Palestine increased by hundreds of thousands, facilitated by the British (who were honouring the Balfour Declaration).
- During this time, tensions between the growing Jewish communities and the Arabs were increasing.
- In 1936, the Palestinian Arabs revolted against the British as a result of the Palestinian Arabs viewing themselves increasingly as a nation.
- This revolt was suppressed by the British with help from Jewish militias.
- After the revolt, however, the British issued a white paper that limited Jewish immigration into Palestine and called for the establishment of a joint Jewish-Arab state in Palestine within ten years.
- During the course of **World War II**, many Jews escaping Europe from the Holocaust were brought to Palestine illegally (because of the immigration limit) by Jewish organisations.
- Tensions escalated and the British handed over the problem to the newly established United Nations.
- In 1947, the UN voted to establish separate Palestinian and Jewish states in the region dividing Palestine. This plan was rejected by the Arabs.

### Formation of the state of Israel

- In May 1948, Israel was declared an independent state with David Ben Gurion as the Prime Minister.
- Following this declaration, in 1948, the Arab-Israeli War broke out with five Arab states, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt invading Israel.
- A ceasefire was announced in 1949 and as part of the agreement, the West Bank was given to Jordan and the Gaza Strip became part of Egypt. Israel, having won the war, though, now controlled

more area than they would have under the UN plan. East Jerusalem was under the control of Jordan. Over 700000 Palestinians fled the region and became refugees in neighbouring Arab countries. The Palestinians call this war the Nabka, or catastrophe, as they became stateless.

- Tensions escalated again in 1956 when Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt nationalised the Suez Canal. This led to the [Suez Crisis](#). Israel attacked the Sinai Peninsula and retook the canal with British and French support.

### Further wars

- In 1967, the 6-Day War started in which Israel won control of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula. Israel captured East Jerusalem also.
- The [Yom Kippur War](#) broke out in 1973 when Syria and Egypt launched airstrikes against Israel. The fighting stopped after two weeks by a UN resolution.
- In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon and ejected the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO).
  - The PLO was formed in 1964 to fight for the “liberation of Palestine” through armed struggle.
- Meanwhile, Israel was creating Jewish settlements in areas that were considered Palestinian territory including in East Jerusalem.

### First Palestinian Intifada

- In 1987, there was an uprising of Palestinians against the Israeli occupation of Gaza and the West Bank.
- Hundreds of people were killed and this is called the First Palestinian Intifada (Arabic word meaning ‘shaking off’).
- The Intifada came to an end with the [Oslo Peace Accords](#) signed in 1993 and a second accord signed in 1995 between the then Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat, the leader of the PLO.
- After this, the Palestinian Authority formed and took control over some territories in Israel.

### Second Palestinian Intifada

- The Israeli army withdrew from parts of the West Bank in 1997. However, the Accords could not bring permanent peace to the region and the Second Palestinian Intifada was launched in 2000.
- The trigger of the violence was a visit to the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem by Israeli politician Ariel Sharon.
- There was widespread rioting and violence which lasted for years.
- A ceasefire was finally announced and Israel planned to withdraw all troops and Jewish settlements from the Gaza Strip by 2005 end.

### Second Lebanon War

- This conflict started in July 2006 between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon, Golan Heights and Northern Israel.
- It ended after a couple of months through a UN-brokered ceasefire.
- Hezbollah is a Lebanese Shia Islamist political party and militant group.

## Hamas Wars

- Hamas, a Sunni Islamist militant group won the elections in Palestine in 2006.
- In 2007, Hamas defeated Fatah (political group that controlled the PLO) in 2007 in fighting that started in 2006.
- Hamas (which many consider a terrorist group) has been fighting with Israel with particularly significant battles in 2008, 2012 and 2014.

## Current Situation

- Hamas rules over Gaza.
- Gaza's borders are tightly controlled by Israel and Egypt.
- The West Bank is still occupied by Israel.
- Most Palestinian refugees and their descendants live in Gaza, the West Bank, East Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.
- Tensions run high between Israel and Palestinians living in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.
- According to Israel, allowing Palestinians to return to their homes would overwhelmingly threaten its existence as a Jewish state. (Israel is the only Jewish state in the world).
- The whole of Jerusalem is claimed by Israel as its capital. Palestinians claim East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state.
- Though Israel does not recognise Palestine as a state, over 135 UN member countries do.
  - In 1988, India became one of the first countries to recognize the Palestinian State.

## Israel Palestine Conflict Latest Developments

The renewed violence in the region started on May 6, 2021 when Palestinians protested against an anticipated decision of the Israeli Supreme Court over the eviction of six Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah in occupied East Jerusalem. The next day, Israeli Police stormed the Al Aqsa mosque. A few days later, Hamas and other Palestinian groups started firing rockets from Gaza into Israel to which Israel retaliated.

Read more about this in an RSTV discussion in the link: [RSTV: Israel-Palestine Conflict](#).

## Significance of Jerusalem

Jerusalem is an ancient city and claimed by both Israel and Palestine as their own. Israel claims the whole undivided city as its rightful capital while Palestinians refute this, stating their right of freedom and self-determination. The city is also considered a holy one having many places of religious importance to the three Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

- Jerusalem was divided into two – western and eastern parts after Israel declared its independence in 1948.
- West Jerusalem became Israel's capital while East Jerusalem became part of Jordan.

- In the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel captured East Jerusalem, among others.
- Shortly after the Israeli takeover, East Jerusalem was absorbed into West Jerusalem, together with several neighbouring West Bank villages.
- The same year, the UN passed a resolution asking Israel to retract from occupied places.
- In 1980, the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) passed the Jerusalem Law that declared that “Jerusalem, complete and united, is the capital of Israel”.
- Much of the international community considers Israel’s occupation of East Jerusalem as illegal.
- While both Israel and Palestine declared Jerusalem their capital, the Palestinians usually refer to East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine.
- In 2017, the then US President Donald Trump recognised the whole of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Jerusalem is significant for both Jews and Muslims, as well as, Christians.

- The Old City of Jerusalem is in East Jerusalem. It has four quarters – Muslim, Jewish, Christian and Armenian.
- The city is significant for the Jews chiefly since it was the capital of the ancient Kingdom of Israel established by the biblical King David.
  - Also, the First Temple was believed to have been built by King Solomon there, although there is no archaeological evidence of this.
  - The Old City also contains the Western Wall, which was originally built as part of the Second Temple. This place is sacred for Jews.
- For Muslims, Jerusalem is the third holiest city after Mecca and Medina.
  - The third holiest site for Muslims, the Al-Aqsa Mosque, is in the Old City.
  - Muslims believe that Prophet Mohammad was transported to this place from Mecca during the ‘Night Journey’.
- For Christians also, the city is significant as in it is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.
  - It contains the two holiest sites in Christianity, the place where Jesus Christ was crucified and the place of his empty tomb.
- Temple Mount, known as Haram al Sharif in Arabic, is a site holy to both Jewish and Muslim people. It is in the Old City.
  - The present site includes the Western Wall, the Al Aqsa Mosque, the Dome of the Rock, and the Dome of the Chain.
  - Currently, Israel controls the security in the Temple Mount area with control over who has access to the site, whereas the religious aspects are dealt with by the Jordanian Waqf. Only Muslims are allowed to pray at the Dome and the Al Aqsa Mosque (sites which are revered by Jews as well for various reasons), while Jews can pray at the Western Wall.
- Jerusalem is central to the peace talks between both groups as the holy sites are in the same land.