

The Arab-Israeli conflict

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Introduction

While on 14 May Israel commemorates the *Yom Ha'atzmaut* (Independence Day), Palestinians remember, every 15 May, the *Yawm an-Nakba*, (Day of the Catastrophe), honouring the victims of the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in 1948. The partition of Palestine, which was approved by the UN in 1947 but which was finally implemented in May 1948 resulted in the first Arab-Israeli war and is considered as the start of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Arab-Israeli conflict has captured the attention of International Relations, Political Science, Peace and Security studies and Political Economy scholars since that date. This long-lasting conflict has involved a wide range of Middle-Eastern and international actors. Rather than a conflict, we can characterise it as a matrix of conflicts. Under the label Arab-Israeli conflict we include territorial disputes between Israel and its neighbours, the occupation of Palestinian territories, the issue of refugees and the tensions among international powers that have used this conflict as a platform to increase their regional and international influence.

It is always difficult for social scientists to be objective, but this is an issue where academic literature is particularly biased in favour either of the Palestinian cause or Israel's right of existence. The Arab-Israeli conflict is a vast area of study. This module will focus on the effects of the Arab-Israeli conflict on Middle Eastern politics and particularly on the field of democratisation. It starts with an introductory section that aims to provide the basic knowledge of the phases and dimensions of this conflict, including an overview of the peace initiatives that have been launched to resolve this conflict. It then moves to the analysis of how nationalism became a dominant ideology in the Middle East, with a particular emphasis on the evolution of modern Zionism and Palestinian nationalism. The final section is devoted to the study of Israel's political system and the discussions on the nature and character of Israel as a Jewish state and the notion of ethnic democracy.

Objectives

1. To familiarise students with the phases and actors of the Arab-Israeli conflict.
2. To analyse the dynamics of the Middle East Peace Process and discuss the factors and actors that have spoiled the peace negotiations.
3. To introduce students to the debate on the emergence of contemporary nationalism in the Middle East and its crucial impact in the Arab-Israeli conflict as well as the central position of this conflict in the creation of Palestinian nationalism.
4. To explore the impact of the Arab-Israeli conflict in Israel's political system.

1. The Arab-Israeli conflict

The origins of this conflict are to be found in the first decades of the 20th century. Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War, Palestine became a British mandate. During the First World War the United Kingdom had raised expectations that this territory could become the national home for the Jewish people but also that an Arab State could be created in the Middle East. Jewish migration movements towards this territory, which started in the 19th century, became more significant with the rise of fascism and anti-Semitic movements in Europe and the situation in Palestine became tenser with the Arab population.

The end of the Second World War triggered a new wave of refugees and the United Kingdom decided to hand the problem to the United Nations. The UN set up a Special Committee for Palestine (UNSCOP) that came to the conclusion that both Jewish and Arab claims were of equal validity and their aspirations irreconcilable. Therefore, a Partition Plan was adopted, arguing that the only viable solution was the separation of the two communities into two states. On 29 November 1947, the General Assembly approved the Partition Plan. Hostilities between Arabs and Jews followed that decision and violence increased after the declaration of Israel's independence in May 1948.

Since then, several wars have been fought in this region and the tension between Israel and Palestinians has been at the core of the multiple conflicts that have shaken the Middle East. Some of these conflicts have involved several states, others have confronted states against non-state actors and hostilities inside some specific territories (Lebanon, as well as Palestine) are also directly connected to this broader context. The following pages analyse in chronological order the main episodes of this conflict.

1.1. 1948–1949: The First Arab-Israeli War

Following Israel's declaration of independence, five Arab states declared war to the newly created state, turning the on-going Zionist-Palestinian war into an Arab-Israeli interstate conflict. The Arab troops were defeated due to their poor performance and lack of coordination. Indeed, each Arab state was pursuing its own political and territorial claims. Armistice negotiations began in January 1949. The Israeli Armed Forces (IDF) emerged victorious from this war. In the short term, several Arab states also increased their territory: Jordan occupied the West Bank and Egypt took control of Gaza. Yet, in the mid-term the military defeat eroded their legitimacy and created the conditions that favoured several military coups such as the one that brought Gamal Abdel Nasser to power in Egypt. In contrast, the Palestinians were the absolute

Recommended readings

Shlaim, Avi (2001). *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Halliday, Fred (2005). *The Middle East in International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Khalidi, Rashid (2006). *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Schulze, Kirsten (2008). *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*. London: Longman.

Tessler, Mark (2009). *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Corn, Georges (2011). *Le Proche-Orient éclaté 1956–2010*. Paris: Folio Histoire.

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losers in this confrontation. This defeat (the *Nakba*) triggered massive forced displacement of Palestinians that lost their homes and became refugees in the West Bank, in Gaza or in other Arab countries. Only a small minority of Arabs stayed in Israel and became citizens of that state. For the first time, there were non-Jewish Israeli citizens.

1.2. 1956: The Suez War

This war took place following the Egyptian decision to seal the Straits of Tiran (1955) and to nationalise the Suez Canal (26 July 1956). This provided the *casus belli* for Israel, France and the UK. Paris and London considered that their vital interests had been damaged with the nationalisation of Suez and decided to help Israel in its pre-emptive incursion in the Sinai on 29 October. This war consisted of two separate military operations: one Anglo-French and one Israeli. The USSR and the USA agreed on the need to avoid a new colonial war and, on 2 November 1956, the UN general Assembly approved a US-sponsored resolution for an intermediate ceasefire and the withdrawal of all forces from Egyptian territory. As a result, France and the UK appeared as the losers of this war while both Israel and Egypt had gained something. Israel's military reputation had been further enhanced elevating its status to that of a regional super-power. Despite the military defeat for Egypt, Nasser emerged on the winning side as an ascendant political leader, whose influence went beyond Egypt and reached the entire Arab world. Finally, the US and the Soviet Union increased their presence in the Middle East, at the expense of the European powers.

1.3. 1967: The Six Days War

The increasing tension between Israel and its Arab neighbours was responded by Egypt with the sealing, once more, of the Straits of Tiran. Israel then launched a pre-emptive attack on 5 June 1967 that destroyed the Arab aviation. Syria, Jordan and Egypt counter-attacked the same day but without air cover for troops and tanks, the Arab forces were rapidly defeated. A ceasefire was concluded on 10 June and Israel emerged as the dominant power in the region. Jordan lost the control of the West Bank, Egypt of the Sinai and Gaza Strip and Syria of the Golan Heights. This war is often remembered as it generated a new wave of Palestinian refugees (the *Naksa*) that settled in other Arab countries and particularly in Jordan and Lebanon.

This conflict also had a profound impact on regional dynamics: with the humiliation of the Arab states, Pan-Arabism started to decline, favouring the rise of political Islam. It also favoured the expression of Palestinian nationalism and gave a boost to the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), created in January 1964.

1.4. 1973: The Yom Kippur War

On 6 October, Egypt and Syria attacked Israel by surprise, taking advantage of the fact that it was the Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement. Golda Meir (then Israeli prime Minister) sought the support of the international community, successfully presenting Israel as a victim. In the first days of the conflict Israel came close to defeat but massive military and financial aid from the United States changed this situation. Arab member states of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries responded by blocking the oil supply to the United States and other pro-Israeli countries such as the Netherlands. On 22 October, the United States and the Soviet Union imposed a ceasefire that was accepted by all sides. The fact that the Arabs for the first time had not been militarily defeated created the conditions that were much more conducive to negotiations than at any time since 1948.

1.5. The Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) and the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon (1982–2000)

In 1975, a political crisis between Palestinians and Christians led to the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war. Several regional actors, mainly Israel and Syria, intervened in this conflict. Israel launched a military operation, called the Peace for Galilee Operation, with the aim to eliminate all Palestinian presence and influence from Lebanon, creating a new political order in Lebanon by establishing a Maronite government, the expulsion of Syrian troops and the destruction of Palestinian nationalism in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The costs of this operation, also in terms of domestic and international image, forced Israel to withdraw from the Beirut area but continued to occupy Southern Lebanon until 2000. Yet, Israel succeeded in expelling the PLO from Lebanon and the organisation moved their headquarters to Tunis in 1982.

1.6. 1987–1993: The First *Intifada*

The frustration and anger of Palestinian population regarding Israeli's occupation lead to the outbreak of the first *Intifada* in 1987. It was a spontaneous uprising, often characterised as “a rebellion of the poor and the youth, the less advantaged sectors of the population”. The strategy was one of civil disobedience, restricting itself to stone-throwing and demonstrations. The disproportion between the Israeli forces and the Palestinian resistance damaged Israel's international reputation and successfully internationalised the acceptance of the Palestinian problem. The PLO leadership, who did not lead or control this movement, was afraid of losing the hegemony in the representation of the Palestinian cause due to the emergence of other Palestinian movements such as Hamas. As a consequence, the PLO became more inclined to participate in some sort of peace negotiations as this would confirm their role as sole representatives of the Palestinian people.

1.7. 2000–2004: The Second *Intifada*

The second *Intifada* erupted when the then candidate Ariel Sharon visited the Al Aqsa esplanade. In the days that followed this controversial visit, riots erupted first in the Old City of Jerusalem and then spread throughout the West Bank and Gaza. The second *Intifada* evidenced that the Peace Process was in stalemate, that Israel wanted to Yasser Arafat's leadership and that the Palestinian popular opinion was shifting away from supporting an ineffective and internationally isolated Palestinian National Authority (created after the Oslo Accords) and to supporting Hamas and violence against Israeli occupation. As a result, Israel targeted killings of Palestinian leaders, accelerated the construction of a wall of separation and decided to unilaterally withdraw from Gaza.

1.8. 2006–2011: Intra-Palestinian fights

The international community pushed Palestinians to celebrate elections as part of a road map to reach peace. Yet, Hamas obtained 44% of the votes in the Palestinian legislative elections of 2006, which translated into an absolute majority of seats. The international community and Israel called for Hamas' rejection of violence, the acceptance of Israel right to exist and the respect to previously signed accords. Hamas leadership could not accept those conditions and the response by Israel and most International powers was to redirect all the financial support to the Palestinian Presidency (controlled by Fatah). Conflicts between Fatah and Hamas members erupted across the West Bank and Gaza and this led to the creation of two de facto political entities: a Hamas-ruled Gaza and a Fatah-controlled West Bank. There were several attempts to mediate between the Palestinian fractions. The last attempt was led by the post-Mubarak Egyptian authorities, which succeeded in convincing the two parties to celebrate new Palestinian elections.

1.9. 2006: Lebanon's War

This conflict, also known as the July War, started when Hezbollah (a militant group representing the Shia community in Lebanon) launched several attacks in the North of Israel. The Israeli authorities responded harshly, bombing Shia-populated areas and destroying most of Lebanon's infrastructure. Nevertheless, they were unable to stop Hezbollah until the United Nations Security Council unanimously approved UN Resolution 1701 (11 August 2006). The resolution, which was approved by both Lebanese and Israeli governments the following days, called for disarmament of Hezbollah, for withdrawal of Israel's troops from Lebanon, and for the deployment of Lebanese soldiers and an enlarged United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in the south of the country. Contrary to its initial goals, the Israeli operations reinforced Hezbollah, who appeared less as a representative of Lebanese Shia and more as an Arab liberation and resistance group. This gave popularity to Hezbollah and their leader, Hassan Nasrallah, across the Arab world. Israel launched an internal investigation (the Winograd commission) which concluded that

this war was a seriously missed opportunity and identified serious failings and shortcomings in the decision-making process at both the political and military levels.

1.10. 2008–2009 Gaza’s War

On 18 December, Hamas broke up the ceasefire with Israel and several rockets reached Southern Israeli towns. On 27 December, Israel launched a big military operation called Cast Lead Operation. It lasted until 21 January. More than 1,500 persons died, the city of Gaza suffered great damage and it resulted in an enormous human crisis. The disproportion between the warring parties had a strong emotional and political impact in the Arab and Muslim world. For instance, it undermined the credibility of Mubarak’s Egypt, as Mubarak refused to open the border with Gaza. It also led to serious deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations.

2. The Middle East Peace Process and other peace initiatives

Although the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) formally started in Madrid in 1991, several initiatives were previously launched and, as it has happened with the MEPP, have only been able to achieve partial results. This process, supported by most international powers, has tried to create the conditions in which Israel, Palestinians and the Arab states of the region could agree on a solution consisting in two states living side-by-side in peace. Regional and bilateral negotiations have taken place in parallel. Some have given results (e.g. the peace between Israel and Egypt), others were quickly blocked. The following pages give an overview of the main attempts to resolve this long-lasting conflict. This will provide students with the necessary factual knowledge to move into the next session, which identifies the factors that might have hindered the peace process.

2.1. 1967–1972: The aftermath of the Six Days War

The 242 resolution of the UN called for a fair and lasting peace based on the withdrawal from occupied territories during that war and reaffirmed the necessity of a solution to the refugee issue. Since then, international mediations have referred to the 1967 borders as the bases for negotiations. The UN set a negotiation team (Jarring mission) to implement this declaration but, as it became evident that those efforts were fruitless, the US decided to launch its own initiative (the Rogers Plan), which also failed to reach its goals.

2.2. 1973: The aftermath of the Yom Kippur War

When this war came to an end, Henry Kissinger set up negotiations that led to the establishment of a conference on 21 December 1973. It was promoted by the UN Secretary General, the United States and the USSR. While Jordan, Egypt and Israel participated in this conference, Syria refused to attend. Despite the fact that no agreement was reached during the conference, it laid the bases for Egypt's détente with Israel and a Sinai Interim Agreement between the two countries was signed in Geneva on 4 September 1975 as part of the Geneva process. This agreement stated that the conflicts between Egypt and Israel should not be resolved by military force but by peaceful means. In contrast with this bilateral track, there was no progress in the resolution of the Palestinian problem.

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Pressman, J. (2003). "Vision in collision. What happened at Camp David and Taba?" *International Security* (vol. 28, n° 2, pp. 5–43).

Ross, Denis (2004). *The Missing Peace. The Inside Story of the Fight for Middle East Peace*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Ben Ami, Shlomo (2007). *Scars of War, Wounds of Peace: The Israeli-Arab Tragedy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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Allegra, Marco; Napolitano, Paolo (2011). "Two States or Not Two States? Leadership and Peace Making in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict". *Mediterranean Politics* (vol. 16, n° 2, pp. 161–278).

2.3. 1977–1979: The Egyptian-Israeli Peace Process and Camp David Accords

After several months of secret Israeli-Egyptian negotiations and the mediation of the United States, Egyptian President Sadat visited Jerusalem in 1977 to discuss peace. It was the first official, direct, public contact between an Arab state and Israel that implied certain recognition of Israeli sovereignty. In September 1978, when the Israeli-Egyptian negotiations reached a stalemate, Carter decided to convene a summit at Camp David in order to save the peace. Two agreements were concluded: first, an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty which both signed on 26 March 1979 in which Israel would give up the Sinai and second, a framework for peace in the Middle East that envisaged the resolution of the Palestinian problem and Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Palestinian track was rapidly paralysed. The Camp David agreements had a strong influence on regional dynamics as Egypt, which decided to pursue an Egypt-first strategy and got closer to the US, became isolated in the Arab context to the extent that the country was expelled from the Arab League. It also had an impact on conflict-resolution in the Middle East, consolidating the concept of peace for territories.

2.4. 1991: The Madrid Peace Conference

Following the first *Intifada*, the United States and the USSR convened a meeting in Madrid with the aim of creating a framework for negotiations between Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the Palestinians that would combine multilateral negotiations and bilateral tracks. Palestinians were integrated in the Jordan delegation due to the fact that Israel legally prohibited any contact with PLO representatives. The main contribution of this Conference was the creation of a new framework for negotiations.

2.5. 1993-1994: The Oslo Accords and the creation of the Palestine National Authority

After unofficial Israeli-Palestinian talks, the Oslo Process began to crystallise when the Knesset removed the legal obstacles to conduct negotiations with PLO representatives. Norway, with the support of the US, acted as a mediator to achieve the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (DOP) which implied that Palestinians and Israelis mutually recognised each other. On 13 September 1993, the Israeli-Palestinian DOP was signed in the White House between Isaac Rabin and Yasser Arafat. Permanent status negotiations were scheduled to begin no later than three years following the DOP. The Palestinian National Authority (PA) was established in 1994 as a five-year transitional institution acting as a government for the Palestinians until the conclusion of final status negotiations. In the meantime, the Palestinian territories were divided into three different zones according to the degree of Israeli control over them. The Palestinian Legislative Council, the Presidency and the government of the PA were set up after the elections of January 1996.

However, deteriorated economic conditions, disappointment with the little progress made in the Peace Negotiations and the construction of Israeli settlements radicalised the Palestinian society and guerrilla organisations from Fatah, Hamas and the Islamic Jihad were strengthened.

2.6. 2000–2001: Camp David and Taba Talks

The election of Ehud Barak (leader of the Labour Party) offered a window of opportunity for peace. Negotiations re-started with the aim of drawing up the Framework Agreement on Permanent Status. Barak and Arafat met with Clinton in Camp David in July 2000. Nevertheless, Arafat refused to sign the agreement, expressing that no consensus was reached about the territory for the future Palestinian state, including the highly controversial issue of Jerusalem, that Israel's position on refugees and the right of return was unacceptable. The US blamed Arafat for the failure of the summit but insisted on giving him a new opportunity and the PA and Israel negotiated on the same lines (the so-called Clinton parameters) in a meeting convened in Taba in 2001. Despite this failure, there was a wide consensus that a two-state solution for the Palestinian issue was likely to follow the lines of what had been negotiated in these two meetings. As some experts on the Peace Process often recall, "everybody knows how the definitive peace solution will look like, but nobody knows how to get there".

2.7. 2002: The Quartet for the Middle East

Due to the failure of the Camp David and Taba talks, the new Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon considered the Oslo process was finished. He accepted a new proposal drafted by the so-called Quartet for the Middle East, formed by the US, the EU, the UN and Russia. This road map proposed three phases that should lead towards regional peace. In the first phase, (to be completed in May 2003), Palestinian violence would come to an end; Israel would withdraw from Palestinian urban areas and freeze the settlement expansion; Palestinian elections would also be held. In the second phase, between June and December 2003, an International Conference would be convened to support Palestinian economic recovery and launch a process that would lead to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders; it would also include the revival of multilateral engagement on issues including regional water resources, environment, economic development, refugees and arms control issues; Arab states should also restore pre-Intifada links to Israel. The third and last phase, to be completed in 2005, would be marked by a second international conference that would push for the permanent status agreement and end of conflict; agreement would be reached on the final borders, the status of Jerusalem, refugees and settlements; Arab states would also agree to conclude peace deals with Israel. Despite the many meetings of the quartet and the appointment of a special envoy, it was impossible to go beyond the first phase.

2.8. 2007–2011: Latest US attempts (from Annapolis to the indirect talks) and the Palestinian multilateral strategy

At the end of George W. Bush's mandate, Condoleezza Rice hosted and organised a new International Conference. The meeting, held in Annapolis (Maryland) in November 2007, gathered more than 40 countries and organisations and focused on the Israeli-Palestinian bilateral track. The main outcome of this meeting was that both Israelis and Palestinians supported the two-state solution. It also confirmed the US central role as a mediator in the conflict. Nevertheless, this process that started immediately after and which was supposed to reach a final peace agreement in a year's time, could not achieve any meaningful progress. Several analysts have pointed out at the rigidity of the calendar (which obeyed more to the US electoral schedule than to the needs of the Arab-Israeli conflict) and the exclusion of actors such as Hamas and Iran, as causes of its failure.

Since then, the proliferation of new settlements and construction in existing ones has become a major obstacle in the peace process. Palestinians have pointed at stopping these constructions as a pre-condition to re-launch negotiations. Israel has also become more adamant in demanding Palestinians to recognise Israel as a Jewish State. In this increasingly tense context, the US started indirect talks in summer 2010 without much success. In 2011, Palestinians decided to follow a different strategy by applying for membership in the United Nations and other international organisations such as UNESCO.

2.9. Why have negotiations failed

The academic studies on the Peace Process have focused on identifying the causes that might explain the failure of subsequent attempts to achieve a durable peace in the Middle East and particularly between Israelis and Palestinians. The literature on the role of external mediation, particularly regarding US foreign-policy making, is particularly rich. The book written by John Mearshimer and Stephen Walt is a solid and detailed analysis of how lobbies favouring Israeli positions have been able to determine US policy in this conflict. The article by Ilan Peleg and Paul Scham in 2008, which has a strong prescriptive approach, also emphasises the role of the US in the historical breakthroughs of the Arab-Israeli conflict, but identifies other factors such as the existence or lack of strong regional leaderships, the degree of comprehension of the other side's redlines or the awareness of the other side's political constraints.

Other authors such as Álvarez-Ossorio and Izquierdo have mainly focused on Israel's privileged position in the negotiation process and argue that the reasons for the failure of the negotiation process are to be found in the correla-

tion of forces inside Israel. The unwillingness of Israel to resolve this conflict is also underlined by Jerome Slater and in his study on the failure of the Camp David negotiations he argues that

“the right-of-return issue is far more a symbolic than real obstacle to a settlement”.

He adds that

“the continued insistence by Israelis and their defenders that it poses an insurmountable problem suggests that they are unwilling or incapable of listening closely to Palestinians.”

Slater, Jerome (2001). “What Went Wrong: The Collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process”. *Political Science Quarterly* (vol. 116, n° 2, pp. 171–199).

As for those authors that have put the emphasis on the Palestinian side, it is worth mentioning the article of Wendy Pearlman in *International Security*. She puts forth two hypotheses:

“First, negotiating and spoiling as internal contestation are more likely when at least one party to a conflict lacks an institutionalized system of legitimate representation. Second, whether internal contestation motivations lead factions to act as peace makers or peace breakers depends not only on their policy preferences but also on the balance of power within their community”.

Pearlman, Wendy (2008). “Spoiling inside and out: Internal Political Contestation and the Middle East Peace Process”. *International Security* (vol. 33, n° 2, pp. 79–109).

She analyses two episodes: the Palestine Liberation Organisation’s (PLO’s) bid to join the Geneva peace conference in 1973–74 and their engagement in the Oslo peace process from 1993 to 2000. In the conclusions, she also reflects on the effects of the isolation of Hamas after their victory in the 2006 elections. Thus, political competition within a group that lacks full state institutions is pointed out as one plausible explanation for the failure of the peace process and a lesson to be carefully reminded of when trying to re-launch peace negotiations.

Recommended readings

Allegra, Marco; Napolitano, Paolo (2011). “Two States or Not Two States? Leadership and Peace Making in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict”. *Mediterranean Politics* (vol. 16, n° 2, pp. 161–278).

Álvarez-Ossorio, Ignacio; Izquierdo, Ferran (2009) *¿Por qué ha fracasado la paz?* Madrid: Los Libros de la Catarata.

Indyk, Martin (2009). *Innocent Abroad: An Intimate Account of American Peace Diplomacy in the Middle East*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Mearshimer, John; Walt, Stephen (2008). *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Pearlman, Wendy (2008). “Spoiling inside and out: Internal Political Contestation and the Middle East Peace Process”. *International Security* (vol. 33, n° 2, pp. 79–109).

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3. Nationalism in the Middle East: Zionism, Arab nationalism and Palestinian movements

As already said in the introduction, social scientists working on Middle Eastern affairs are often confronted to criticisms and accusations of partiality or, even worse, of legitimising the policies and goals of one of the conflicting parties. Among the many aspects that have been studied, this section deals with one aspect of the literature that is particularly rich: the emergence of Zionism and Palestinian nationalism. The origins of the Arab-Israeli conflict are to be found in the clash between two mutually exclusive forms of nationalism that compete to create a state in the same territory. Thus, in order to understand the dynamics of this conflict, it is particularly important to examine how the intellectual basis and the goals of these two nationalist movements and how they have interacted.

In an article in the *American Historical Review*, Rashid Khalidi wrote:

“As with many aspects of Middle Eastern history, the study of Arab nationalism has tended to remain isolated from broader trends in history and the social sciences and specifically from the comparative study of nationalism. Similarly, most writing on nationalism has drawn sparingly on Middle Eastern examples”.

Rashid Khalidi

Thus, the literature has overemphasised the peculiarities and the exceptional character of Arab nationalism (including Palestinian movements) as well as Zionism. Yet, as Khalidi argued in that very article, Middle Eastern nationalisms were

“a child of the intellectual atmosphere of the nineteenth century and one of the many responses to the process of incorporation of the world into a single system with Europe at its center which that century witnessed”.

Rashid Khalidi

Fred Halliday, in his book *The Middle East in International Relations*, describes the situation as follows:

“Nationalism, as an ideology developed in Europe in the early nineteenth century but, although an alien import, has, in modern times, become the dominant political ideology in the Middle East”.

Rashid Khalidi

In the case of Zionism, it can be argued that the linkages with the implosion of European nationalist movements are particularly strong. Zionism blossomed in a context of raising repression against the Jews living in Central and Eastern Europe. Considered as the father of this new evolution of Zionism, Theodor Herzl argued, in his book *Der Judenstaat* (*The Jewish State*) from 1896,

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Halliday, F. (2005). *The Middle East in International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Khalidi, R. (1991). “Arab Nationalism: Historical Problems in the Literature”. *The American Historical Review* (vol. 96, n° 5, pp. 1363–1373), Oxford: Oxford University Press.

that the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine was the only viable and permanent solution to the Jewish problem and that the Jewish people were a people like any other. By organising the First Zionist Congress in 1897 in Basel, the Zionist movement achieved an international dimension. Its main objectives were to promote Jewish migration to Palestine (*Aliyah*), the acquisition of land (which was owned by local Arab inhabitants), the establishment of diplomatic alliances to support the goal of establishing a Jewish State in Palestine and the creation of embryonic state-structures (e.g. armed forces, university etc.). Thus, Zionism can be understood as a nationalist movement originating in Europe by European Jews but also as a reaction to the persecution of Jewish population by radical nationalist groups in Europe.

The literature on the emergence and evolution of Zionism, understood as the modern intellectual basis for the creation of the State of Israel, is particularly rich. Shlomo Avineri, Arthur Hertzberg, Walter Laqueur and David Vital are widely recognised as some of the authors that have analysed the modern Zionist idea from a historical approach in depth. As Hedva Ben-Israel Kidron argued:

“it was only recently that the question was raised whether Zionism was like or unlike other national movements”.

Kidron, Hedva Ben-Israel (2003). “Zionism and European Nationalisms: Comparative aspects”. *Israel Studies* (vol. 8, n° 1, pp. 91–104).

The diasporic character of the Jewish people would be one of the elements that would make Zionism distinct to most nationalist movements that follow a recurring pattern:

“an ethnic group, recognized as such and bound to a place and to a local language or dialect, at some point demands for itself the political right of national self rule”.

Kidron, Hedva Ben-Israel (2003). “Zionism and European Nationalisms: Comparative aspects”. *Israel Studies* (vol. 8, n° 1, pp. 91–104).

Moreover, students of Zionism have difficulties in including this movement in any of the two classical types of nationalism: civil or ethnic nationalism and as that article points out many Zionist thinkers combine “a sense of innate superiority with the use of an apparently selfless discourse on equality”. As we will see in the next section, this discussion is particularly relevant in the characterisation of democracy in Israel.

Several authors, starting in the 1930s, have also analysed the emergence of Arab nationalist movements. Most of these authors agree that the Arab nationalist idea developed partially in opposition to the Zionist movement, but even more important, as a response to the decline of the Ottoman Empire (and the supremacy of the Turkish element in it at the expenses of the Arab peoples)

Recommended readings

Hertzberg, Arthur (1970). *The Zionist idea*. New York: Atheneum.

Vital, David (1975). *The Origins of Zionism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Laqueur, Walter (1976). *A History of Zionism*. New York: Schocken Books.

Avineri, Shlomo (1981). *The Making of Modern Zionism: The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State*. New York: Basic Books.

Vital, David (1982). *Zionism: the formative years*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kidron, Hedva Ben-Israel (2003). “Zionism and European Nationalisms: Comparative aspects”. *Israel Studies* (vol. 8, n° 1, pp. 91–104).

and also as a response to the growing colonial interests in this region. Yet, specialists on Arab nationalism disagree on the relative importance of each of these factors. For instance, Sylvia Haim wrote:

“Arab nationalism is now less a step toward unification, in spite of some outward signs in that direction, than a belief with a particular aim, namely, the defeat of the State of Israel.”

Sylvia Haim

Rashid Khalidi contested this approach in his book *The origins of Arab Nationalism* and argued that:

“To reduce Arab nationalism to no more than opposition to the State of Israel, as Haim seems to be doing, is surely unjustified given the differing resonances of the ideology in different parts and in different social strata of the Arab world over nearly a century”.

Rashid Khalidi

The case of Palestinian nationalism is particularly complex. It can be analysed as a by-product of Arab nationalism but also as a result of the Israeli domination in Palestine. Thus, the emergence of a Palestinian nationalism, which affirms the existence of a Palestinian people and their right to have their own state in Palestine, was in contradiction with the Zionist movement, but also against the pretensions of some Arab states that wanted to exercise control over Palestine. Yet, as Yezid Sayigh argued in his book *Armed Struggle and the Search of a State*, following the creation of the State of Israel, Palestinians

“sought national salvation by joining Arab opposition parties or hoped that new Arab leaders would come to power and launch their armies to destroy Israel and liberate Palestine. [...] the re-emergence of distinctly Palestinian nationalist politics depended primarily on the progress made by the scattered Palestinian communities in rebuilding their sociological space, that is, reviving their social networks, value systems and norms, and cultural symbols. This was a painstaking process, and it was not until the early 1960s that Palestinian society approached the critical mass required to generate its own, overt politics and to sustain an autonomous national movement”.

Yezid Sayigh

In a similar vein, E.G.H. Joffé argued that

“Although the Palestinians may have believed that the path back to a Palestinian nationalist community lay through the goal of Arab Unity, the 1967 War was to make it clear that it was not the case.”

E.G.H. Joffé

The expression of nationalism in Palestine has thus evolved over time but, as Yezid Sayigh said, the armed struggle has been the main factor in the consolidation of a distinct Palestinian national movement. In an article published in the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Helga Baumgarten identifies “three separate and distinct Palestinian movements, with differing ideologies, approaches and even, to an extent, goals”. These are: the Movement of Arab Nationalists (which dominated in the fifties and sixties; Fatah, which is the expression of a more specific Palestinian nationalism and which became the dominant

Recommended readings

Antonius, Albert (1938). *The Arab Awakening; The Story of the Arab National Movement*. London: H. Hamilton

Haim, Sylvia (1964). *Arab Nationalism: an Anthology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Tibi, Bassam (1990). *Arab Nationalism: a Critical Enquiry*. London: MacMillan.

Khalidi, Rashid et al. (1991). *The origins of Arab Nationalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Khalidi, Rashid (1991). “Arab Nationalism: Historical Problems in the Literature”. *The American Historical Review* (vol. 96, n° 5, pp. 1363–1373).

Dawisha, Adeed (2002). *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: from Triumph to Despair*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

force in Palestinian politics after 1967; and, finally, Hamas, born with the first intifada as the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood. Baumgarten states that

“all three movements had the same starting point: the liberation of all of historical Palestine, principally if not totally by armed struggle”.

Helga Baumgarten

This author, in a clear example of the normative approach of most studies on the Arab-Israeli conflict, concludes that the emergence of a fourth phase of Palestinian nationalism which embraces non-violence mass resistance

“seem(s) to be the only hope for the Palestinian dream of freedom and independence”.

Helga Baumgarten

Recommended readings

Baumgarten, Helga (2005). “The three Faces/Phases of Palestinian Nationalism, 1948–2005”. *Journal of Palestinian Studies* (vol. 34, n° 4, pp. 25–48).

Joffé, E.G.H. (1983). “Arab Nationalism and Palestine”. *Journal of Peace Research* (vol. 20, n° 2, pp. 157–170).

Muslih, Muhammad (1988). *The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Porath, Yehoshua (1974). *The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement, 1918–1929*. London: Frank Cass.

Porath, Yehoshua (1977). *The Palestinian Arab National Movement: From Riots to Rebellion, 1929–1939*. London: Frank Cass.

Sayigh, Yezid (1997). “Armed Stuggle and State Formation”. *Journal of Palestine Studies* (vol. 26, n° 4, pp. 17–32).

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4. Israel's political system

Is Israel a democratic state? The country is counted as a functional democracy in most international indexes such as the well-known but also controversial Freedom House. Yet, some people claim that while Israel is an electoral democracy, enjoying freedom of press, expression and association, it presents significant deficits regarding inequalities between Jewish and non-Jewish Israeli citizens and also in the fulfilment of their obligations in the territories under Israeli occupation.

The Declaration of Independence of 1948 defined Israel as a Jewish State:

“We, members of the people's council, representatives of the Jewish community of Eretz-Israel and of the Zionist movement, are here assembled on the day of the termination of the British mandate over Eretz-Israel and, by virtue of our natural and historic right and on the strength of the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish State in Eretz-Israel, to be known as the State of Israel”.

Later on, several Basic Laws characterised Israel as “Jewish and Democratic State”. Taking into account that Israel does not have a written constitution, both the Declaration of Independence together with these Basic Laws define the nature of Israel's political system.

Is the Jewish nature of Israel compatible with its democratic character? Or, does it mean that only Jews benefit from the Democratic nature of Israel? Several authors have utilised terms such as ethnic democracy or ethnocracy and have elaborated on what it means to be a Jewish State. Before entering into these debates, we should analyse the functioning of Israel's political system.

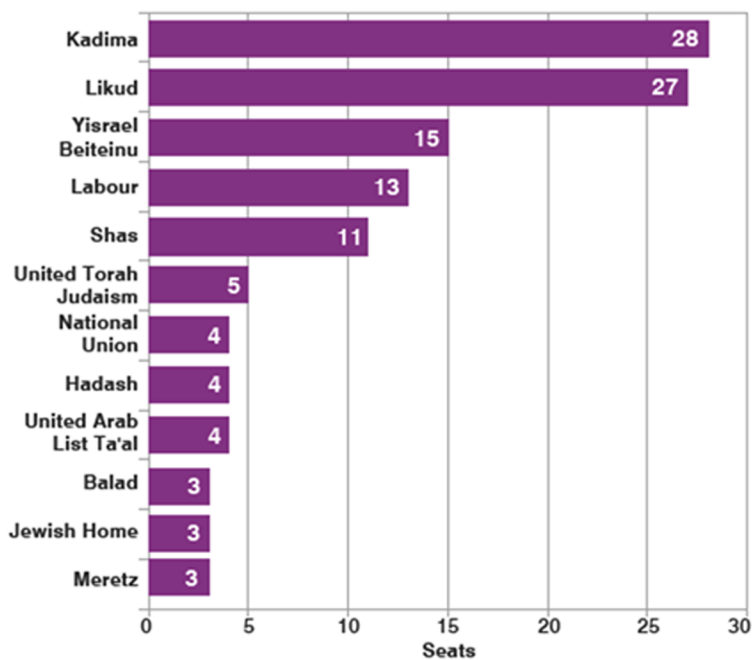
Israel is a multiparty parliamentary system in which the President of the Republic fulfils ceremonial and representative duties but does not have any executive power. The Government is elected by the Parliament (*Knesset*) and is headed by a Prime Minister. One of the characteristics of the Israeli parliamentary system is the wide proportional representation. The attribution of seats is purely proportional with a threshold of 2% (before 1992, it was 1%). This system benefits small parties representing ethnic groups such as the Arab Israelis, the Jewish of Russian or Sephardic origin or even sectorial interests such as the GIL, the Pensioners of Israel, which became the 7th political force in the 2006 elections. The fragmentation of the Knesset favours coalition governments and, consequently, increases the instability of governments in place.

Several cleavages overlap in Israel's political system: the left/right, the confessional/secular, the Jewish/not Jewish, the Ashkenazi (Jewish of European origin), Sephardic (Jews from Spain, Greece, Turkey and North Africa) and

Mizrahi (Jewish coming from Middle Eastern states and the Caucasus) differences, and, finally, the one opposing pacifists and hard-liners regarding peace negotiations.

The combination of overlapping political and social cleavages, together with the proportionality of Israel electoral system results into a system that requires coalition governments that bring together political groups of very different kinds. The five parties that obtained the highest score in the 2009 elections are representative of the diversity of Israel's political parties: the two parties that have been the structuring forces of Israel's politics (the conservative Likud and the Labour party), Kadima (a centrist party that was established in 2005 by moderates of the Likud), Yisrael Beiteinu (also a recent party, created in 1999, that has a strong presence of Jews from Eastern Europe and whose leader, Avigdor Lieberman, has held hawkish positions regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict) and Shas (the strongest among the religious parties, which is voted mainly by Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews). Despite the fact that Kadima obtained more votes, Likud, headed by Benjamin Netanyahu, was able to obtain the power thanks to a coalition with other political groups.

ISRAEL ELECTIONS 2009 [120 seats in Knesset (Parliament) 100% of votes counted]



Source: BBC

The definition of Israel as a Jewish state has triggered a vivid academic debate on whether Israel meets the criteria of a democratic state and, if so, which kind of democracy would it be. Most of the literature pays particular attention to the individual and collective rights of the non-Jewish Israeli citizens (mainly the Arab minority) in order to characterise the nature of Israeli democracy. Sammy Smooha, professor at Haifa University, argued in an article published in *Israel Studies*, that Israel is neither a liberal democracy (where ethnicity is private), nor a consociational democracy (where ethnicity is accepted as a major

Recommended readings

Diskin, Hanna; Diskin, Abraham (1995). "The Politics of Electoral Reform". *International Political Science Review* (vol. 16, n° 1, pp. 31–45).

Shamir, Michal; Arian, Asher (1999). "Collective identity and electoral competition in Israel". *American Political Science Review* (n° 93, pp. 265–277).

Maor, Moshe; Hazan, Reuven (1999). "Parties, elections and cleavages: Israel in comparative and theoretical perspective". *Israel Affairs* (vol. 6, n° 2).

Peretz, Don; Gideon, Gideon (2000). "Sectorial politics and the peace process: The 1999 Israel elections". *The Middle East Journal* (vol. 52, n.2, pp. 259–273).

Shamir, J.; Shamir, M. (2007). "The Israeli–Palestinian conflict in Israeli elections, International". *Political Science Review* (vol. 28, n° 44, pp. 469–491).

Ottolenghi, Emanuele (2001). "Why Direct Election failed in Israel". *Journal of Democracy* (vol. 12 n° 4, pp. 109–122).

Andersen, Robert; Yaish, Meir (2003). "Social cleavages, electoral reform and party choice: Israel's 'natural' experiment". *Electoral Studies* (n° 22, pp. 399–423).

Hazan, Reuven (2007). "Kadima and the Centre: Convergence in the Israeli Party System". *Israel Affairs* (vol. 13, n° 2).

Ben-Rafael, Eliezer (2008). "The Faces of Religiosity in Israel: Cleavages or Continuum?" *Israel Studies* (vol. 13, n° 3, pp. 89–113).

principle in the organisation of the state, but the state is not identified with any of the constituent groups). While many authors have described Israel as an Apartheid system, Smootha objected to assimilating Israel to other regimes in which democracy is confined to a master race or group and is denied to other groups (*Herrenvolk* democracy) as it was the case of South Africa until 1994.

Because Israel does not fall under any of these categories, Smootha proposed the concept of ethnic democracy as a system that

“combines the extension of civil and political rights to individuals and some collective rights to minorities, with institutionalization of majority control over the state. Driven by ethnic nationalism, the state is identified with a core ethnic nation, not with its citizens. The state practices a policy of creating a homogenous nation-state, a state of and for a particular ethnic nation, and acts to promote the language, culture, numerical majority, economic wellbeing, and political interests of this group. Although enjoying citizenship and voting rights, the minorities are treated as second-class citizens, feared as a threat, excluded from the national power structure, and placed under some control. At the same time, the minorities are allowed to conduct a democratic and peaceful struggle that yields incremental improvement in their status”.

Sammy Smootha

Smootha affirms that

“an ethnic democracy is a system in which two contradictory principles operate: ‘the democratic principle’, making for equal rights and equal treatment of all citizens, and ‘the ethnic principle’, making for fashioning a homogenous nation-state and privileging the ethnic majority”.

Sammy Smootha

Smootha’s article has been particularly influential and some authors have applied this concept in other countries (for instance in the Baltic Republics). Yet, other scholars have criticised his approach. For instance, As’ad Ganim and Nadim M. Rouhana have underlined the impossibility of establishing an ethnic democracy in a bi-ethnic context, arguing that structural, state sanctioned and long-term inequality of ethnic rights cannot coexist with democratic rule. These authors argue that the limitation imposed on collective rights also entails the violation of individual rights and, hence, the breaching of a fundamental democratic principle of individual civil equality.

The debate on the Jewish and democratic nature of Israel is at the core of the debate on the alternatives to resolve the Palestinian issue. For instance, among the supporters in Israel of the two state solution, many argue that it is the only way in which Israel could remain a Jewish and Democratic state. Only a minority envisage a one state solution as a consociational democracy for both Arab and Jews in the territories of the former British mandate of Palestine.

Recommended readings

Davis, Uri (1987). *Israel, an apartheid state*. Zed Books Lt.

Ganim, As’ad; Rouhana, Nadim N. (1998). “Questioning “Ethnic Democracy”: A Response to Sammy Smootha”. *Israel Studies* (vol. 3, n° 2, pp. 253–267).

Gavinson, Ruth (1999). "Jewish and Democratic? A Rejoinder to the 'Ethnic Democracy' Debate". *Israel Studie* (vol. 4, n° 1, pp. 44–72).

Kopelowitz, Ezra (2001). "Religious Politics and Israel's Ethnic Democracy". *Israel Studies* (vol. 6, n° 3, pp. 166–190).

Regan, Bernard (2008). "The State of Israel and the Apartheid Regime of South Africa in Comparative Perspective". *Holy Land Studies* (vol. 7, n° 2, pp. 201–212).

Smooha, Sammy (1997). "Ethnic Democracy: Israel as an Archetype". *Israel Studies* (vol. 2, n° 2, pp. 198–241).

Smooha, Sammy (2001). "The model of ethnic democracy: Israel as a Jewish and democratic state". *Nations and Nationalism* (vol. 8, n° 4, pp. 475–503).

Yiftachel, Oren (2009). "Voting for Apartheid: The 2009 Israeli Elections". *Journal of Palestine Studies* (vol. 38, n° 3, pp. 72–85).

Summary

This module analyses the origins, phases and actors involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict as well as the multiple attempts to promote peace negotiations among the different conflicting parties. It provides students with a basic knowledge on the evolution of this long-lasting conflict, with particular emphasis on the evolution of nationalist movements in the Middle East as well as on the impact of this conflict on Israel's political system.