

Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Humanitarian Intervention

Course name

Student name

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a struggle between Israelis and Palestinians that began in the mid-20th century. Besides the fight over control of territory, the conflict also symbolizes the longstanding disagreements between the Israelis and Palestinians over a number of issues like water, borders, security, and Jerusalem. Over the years, there have been made many attempts to break off a peace agreement but all of them failed due to various reasons. Both sides have been also engaged in violent confrontations on many occasions including terrorist attacks that have resulted in the loss of over 15,000 lives. In this context, authors like Thompson contend that some form of humanitarian intervention could be an alternate solution to this impasse (138). This paper describes some of the factors that have prevented such an intervention and also discusses whether such a solution is viable in the modern context.

One of the most acute moments of this conflict was the military operation of the Israeli Defense Forces, code-named "Cast Lead" in 2009. The military claimed that the militants, accused of firing rockets into Israeli cities, were hiding in the Gaza Strip. As a result, the campaign led to the deaths of more than 1,000 residents, many of whom were children (Brown 82). Israel also achieved a blockade in the Gaza Strip, forcing more than 100,000 people to flee. Although such military campaigns were extremely violent, Israel claims that it has been acting in terms of self-defense. The Israeli government has also demolished several government buildings, schools, and mosques in the region as it alleges that these are being used to store missiles and serve as hideouts for militants. For over 3 months, residents had no access to food or water as they could not venture out and had no supplies due to the blockade. Gallagher notes that Israel has breached international humanitarian conventions by not providing help to the starving and wounded (72). The Human Rights Watch has made far serious allegations of humanitarian violations by claiming that the Israeli military used phosphorus-based munitions during street combat.

The United Nations has maintained that Israel has consistently violated UN norms on human rights and the Geneva Convention. Murphy has compared the treatment meted out to Palestinians with the atrocities faced by Jews under the Nazis during World War II (95). Despite allegations from several quarters, little has changed in the aggressive posture of Israel. Brown argues that despite requiring help and protection against ethnic cleansing and war crimes from the international community, Palestinians have had to fend for themselves (78). Unlike the role played by the United States and its allies during the Gulf War or the Yugoslavian War, international politics have prevented any such intervention in the Gaza Strip. According to Mertus, while regions like Myanmar, Darfur or Zimbabwe enjoyed quick worldwide attention due to genocide and famine, Palestinian regions like the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are yet to witness any notable forms of humanitarian intervention despite facing similar problems for several decades (153).

Arend notes that any demand for humanitarian intervention in ravaged places like Darfur and Zimbabwe should first be aware of previous interventions in places like Iraq and Yugoslavia (65). In the case of Iraq, humanitarian intervention has worsened the volatile situation, giving rise to an insurgency and a corrupt government system. It appears in most of these cases that the intervening parties have manipulated the post-conflict environment in their favor without any consideration for the welfare of the domestic populations. Hanlon says that Israel has constantly opposed any intervention in its internal issues (186). He further alleges that Israel does not allow any third party to decide over the question of a separate statehood for Israel.

On the question of whether humanitarian intervention is justified in the Israeli-Palestinian scenario, one needs to consider the history associated with this conflict. The modern state of Israel has its origins in the Zionist movement that started after the First

World War. During the next few years, many Jews from Europe and elsewhere relocated to settle in Palestine, a land that was originally inhabited by the Arabs (Mertus 173). Upon the conclusion of the Second World War and the departure of the British, the new settlers expelled nearly a million Palestinians from their homes and barred their entry into this occupied territory. The Palestinians who live in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank today are those who preferred to remain and suffer many atrocities every day. During the past 60 years, Israel has been occupying more and more land while it has been squeezing the Palestinian settlements by taking land away from them (Arend 156). Oppressive acts like these naturally led to the development of a violent resistance movement that has been categorized as a terrorist enterprise by the US government.

The moral background behind the independence of Palestine and its recognition are similar to movements in any other occupied territory. A humanitarian engagement is necessary not just to develop a secular and independent Palestine, but also eliminate further violence and bloodshed. Further, the land belongs to all those who lived there, including the ones who were forcefully expelled during the 1940s (Hanlon 162). Thus, a clear end to this conflict is only possible when both Israel and Palestine can co-exist peacefully next to each other. Humanitarian intervention is also necessary to provide Palestinians the opportunity to determine their future. The occupation of Palestine has not been good for both parties and the only solution to this problem is thus some sort of external involvement, including humanitarian intervention.

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