

Security Council

Topic Area B: The Situation in The Middle East

The Palestinian Question remains one of the most discussed topics in the Security Council since Israel declared its independence in 1948. The Six-Day and October War and the Israeli invasions of Lebanon have only further complicated the process of resolving the Palestinian question both in terms of displaced persons and defining Palestinian territory. In 1987 Jordan ceded its rights to the West Bank to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Israel and the PLO signed the Oslo Accords in 1993. As part of the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian Authority replaced the PLO in 1994 and became the governing body of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. While progress towards resolution of the Palestinian question was at first promising, the peace process broke down due to attacks by Palestinian groups and the ever expanding Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

After the breakdown of the peace process and the beginning of the Second Intifada in 2000, work towards peace in the Middle East has been a difficult process. The most recent progress occurred in 2003 with the Quartet, composed of the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations, backing what is known as the Road Map. The Road Map suggested a permanent two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Palestinian refugee problem. Israel rejected some portions of the Road Map, while the Palestinian Authority pledged its support. Direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians held by US President Barak Obama in September 2010 met their demise only weeks after beginning due to Israel failing to renew a settlement freeze in the West Bank.

The situation in Gaza has been tense since the establishment of a blockade in 2007 when Hamas gained control of the Gaza Strip following parliamentary elections. The ensuing humanitarian and economic crisis precipitated a conflict in Gaza from 27 December 2008 to 18 January 2009. This conflict was originally sparked by rocket attacks from within Gaza and led to the deaths of 1,010 Palestinians and the destruction of 1,008 buildings in Gaza. A United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) investigation resulted in a 575 page report which found both Israeli forces and Palestinian militants guilty of committing war crimes. The report found the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) directly targeted and arbitrarily killed Palestinian civilians and directly targeted industrial and water installations while using Palestinians civilians as human shields. It also found Palestinian militants affiliated with Hamas to be guilty of deliberately targeting civilian populations. Several UN facilities were damaged during the conflict.

Following the conflict, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon called for the blockade on Gaza to be lifted in light of the humanitarian situation. The UN has estimated that nearly 80% of all imports to Gaza come through smuggling tunnels due to the blockade. An attempt to break the blockade on 31 May 2010 by a flotilla originating in Turkey ended with Israeli Defense Forces raiding and boarding multiple ships and nine attempted blockade breakers dead.

Efforts at restarting the peace process and moving toward a two-state solution, originally envisioned in General Assembly Resolution 181 of 1947, have reached a stumbling block due to Hamas control of Gaza

and the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon has stated that expansion of Israeli settlements is illegal and acts against international law. Frustrated by a lack of progress in recent years the Palestinians are set to seek recognition from the UN General Assembly in September 2011. It is not yet clear if the Palestinians will seek membership as a sovereign state or a non-binding resolution recognizing Palestine as a state. Palestinian Observer Riyad Mansor argued in front of the Security Council 26 July 2011 that recognition of Palestine as a state would not hurt the peace process but instead would strengthen efforts toward establishing a two state solution. Israel views the Palestinian appeal for state recognition as an effort to by-pass direct peace talks. Palestine is unlikely to gain UN membership as a state at this time due to the threat of a US veto. The question of how to establish and maintain a lasting peace in Israel, Palestine, and neighboring states remains.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective include the following

- What steps can be taken to persuade Israel, Palestine, and surrounding nations to adhere to the Road Map? Is the Road Map still a viable solution?
- Is a two-state solution a viable way to resolve conflict and bring about the changes envisioned in Resolution 242 and subsequent documents?

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