

**Committee: Special Political and Decolonisation Committee**

**Issue: The question of resolving the Israeli settlements in the West Bank**

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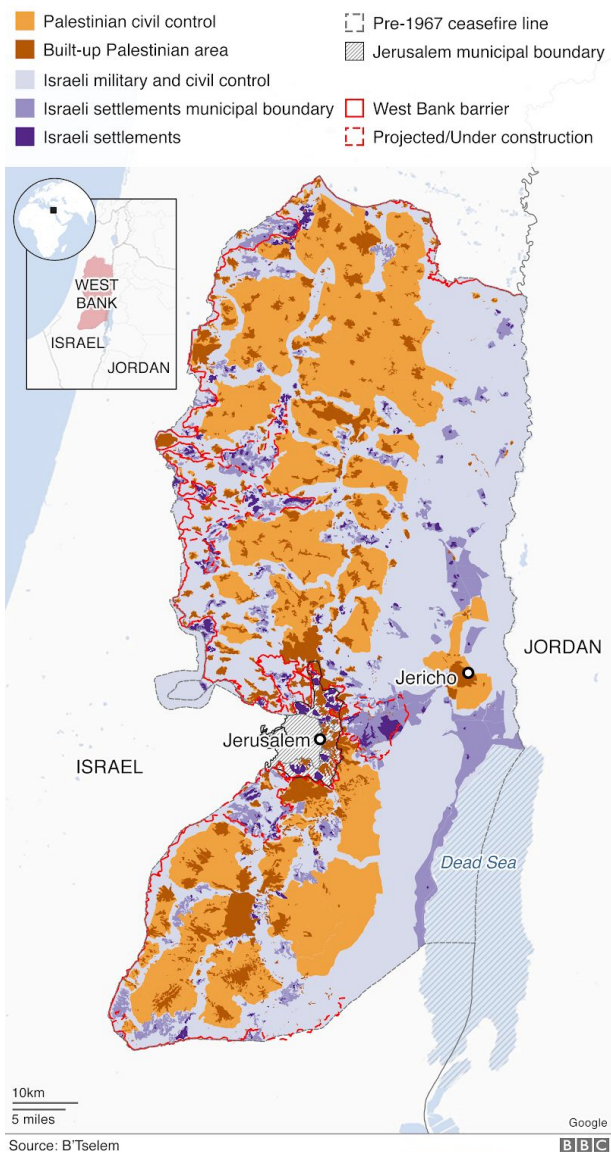
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## Introduction

After the 1967 Middle East War, the state of Israel created settlements in the seized territories of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, inhabited by predominantly Jewish Israeli citizens. Prior to 1967, the areas in question had been seized by Lebanon in the Arab-Israeli War (1948-1949). Because of the measures and strategies Israel took and implemented to seize and populate the region, causing Palestinians to leave the area, the issue of the West Bank settlements has been under the international spotlight for many years. The dissolution of the West Bank settlements is one of the most significant preconditions Palestine officials have set in order for peace talks to flourish. In response, Israel's view is that the settlements are being used as an empty argument and distraction, saying that Palestine is trying to divert from real conversations.

### West Bank settlements



The common international consensus, backed both by the UN General Assembly and the ICJ, is that settlements in the occupied territories are legally illegitimate; however, latest US policy backed by President Donald Trump is that settlements are “not inconsistent with international law”. In addition to that, being backed by the US, Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu announced in a 2019 statement his plans to annex the Israeli settlements in the Jordan Valley. The aforementioned statements were met with resentment on the side of Palestine, with the latter threatening that Israel extending sovereignty to the settlements would terminate all negotiations. Thus, it is quite obvious that even though the dispute over

the West Bank settlements is an issue between the state of Israel and the authorities of Palestine, foreign powers, especially the USA, hold great power in the situation.

## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

### Settlement

Semi-autonomous civilian communities, established in a place that was usually priorly uninhabited. Israeli settlements consist exclusively of Israeli citizens, and vary from cities to small-scale villages or outposts.

### Annexation

A formal act whereby a state unilaterally proclaims its sovereignty over territory outside its domain, thus taking possession of it<sup>1</sup>. Annexation is forbidden by international law.

### Intifada

Intifada is an Arabic word derived from the verb that translates to "to shake off". The term is used to refer to the two largest organised uprisings at the West Bank and Gaza strip in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The first Intifada broke out 20 years after Israel seized the territories and due to pressures applied by Israel, was gradually terminated in the following six years (1987-1993). The second Intifada erupted in September of 2000 and ended on February 8 2005. This second uprising is characterized by suicide missions in the name of Palestine.

### Two-state solution

The two-state solution is a proposed framework for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by establishing two states for two peoples: Israel for the Jewish people and Palestine for the Palestinian people<sup>2</sup> and was firstly proposed in the Oslo Accords.

### Zionism

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/annexation>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/two-state-solution>

A religious based Jewish nationalist movement, originating from the 17th century, that has had as its goal the creation and support of a Jewish national state in Palestine, the ancient homeland of the Jews<sup>3</sup>.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **Settlement demographics**

The data concerning settlement demographics is accounted for by the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, and only concerns population of settlements recognised by Israeli authorities, without taking outposts into account; 130 settlements are officially recognised, with a total population of over 700,000. Settlements occupy about 2% of the west bank but control 42% of the land. Population demographics vary throughout the different locations, with a great portion of it focusing on agriculture, farming and infrastructure, activities that are all financially subsidised and encouraged by the state. Industrial facilities within settlement areas enjoy tax-relief benefits, and endorse a self-sustaining local economy. These areas include their own secondary and higher education facilities, which fall under Israeli administration; again, attendance in state education institutions is encouraged by the government.

### **Israeli-Palestinian relations**

Tensions between Israel and Palestine can be traced back as far as 1920. Historically, Napoleon offered Palestine as a homeland to Jews; shortly after, the Zionist movement was born, whose aim was to protect the legacy of the Jewish nation and whose members strongly advocated in favour of the Jewish nation settling in Palestine. In 1918, following the First World War and an Arab uprising against Ottoman rule, the British obtained a UN-legitimised administrative mandate over Palestine with the purpose of establishing a Jewish homeland -thus the term Mandatory Palestine-, which triggered an uprising in both Arab and Jewish nationalist communities. Tensions between the two sides, Arab and Jews, escalated into demonstrations, disturbances, riots and strikes -what is known as intercommunal violence of Mandatory Palestine.

The conflict evolved into its modern state after the 1948 establishment and admission into the UN of the State of Israel, following the end of the British mandate. This

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Zionism>

causes more than 750.000 Palestinians to flee their homeland. An Arab-Jewish war surges, by the end of which Israel is left with more territory than envisaged; briefly after, a wave of Jewish refugees and Holocaust survivors settle in Israel. During and after the war about 711,000 Palestinian Arabs became displaced and refugees. In the following years, many reports arise of Israel claiming infiltration by Arab groups and vice versa; at the same time, the Suez War leaves both sides heavily hurt. Zionist movements rise again, and claim “ethnic cleansing” as their policy, at the expense of Palestinians; Palestinian village massacres lead to the formation of the Palestinian Liberation Ogranisation in Cairo, Egypt in 1964, whose initial goalswere to unite various Arab groups and create a liberated Palestine in Israel<sup>4</sup>.

Palestinian and Arab guerilla groups continue attacks on Jewish territory through the 1960s. On June 5th, 1967, the Six-Day War breaks out between Arabs and Jews; lasting until June 10th, it ends with Israel having control over the territories of the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza Strip, West Bank, Old City of Jerusalem, and Golan Heights<sup>5</sup>, and with it dealing a decisive blow against Arab forces. Settlements are established on behalf of Israel, and the relations between the two nations suffer a critical hit.

### **The Oslo Accords**

The Oslo Accords are considered a landmark moment for Israeli-Palestinian relations. Signed by the government of Israel and the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Ogranisation, their main axis of focus has been achieving a consensus for peace talks between the two sides. On the Palestinian side, the PLO agreed to formally recognise the state of Israel, and, in return, the Israeli side allowed Palestine a limited form of administrative autonomy. Any momentum gained from the ratification of the Oslo Accords was short-lived, since they are yet to be enforced and have certainly not lead to any lasting peace<sup>6</sup>. Officials from both sides accused each other of not following through with the agreements, and violence surged again between the communities; that lead any further talks of the issue to collapse due to complication and mistrust. Now, the Oslo Accords pose as an important card on Israel’s deck, that has been used multiple times as a negotiation stall.

### **The two-state solution**

The two-state solution suggests an independent state for Paleistine alongside the separate nation of Israel, with the much sought-after city of Jerusalem being split in two.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.history.com/topics/middle-east/plo>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/event/Six-Day-War>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.history.com/topics/middle-east/oslo-accords>

This solution has been endorsed by the United Nations, the European Union and the Arab League, with the US backing out from its support of the solution under the latest administration, and has generally been approved by the international community, with 70% of Member States recognising Palestine as an independent entity<sup>7</sup>. When it comes to what strengthens the two-state solution as a proposal, it should be noted that this would help preserve both Israeli and Palestinian national heritage and won't encourage national integration and neutralisation, while protecting each nation's social and economic demographic distribution. At the same time, this solution would theoretically guarantee security and stability for Palestine. However, the Israeli settlements in the occupied territory pose as a major obstacle for the solution to be implemented, as they encourage mistrust between the two nations, stall the peace talks and suggest a gray area that would have to be divided between the two or annexed into one state. After Israel showing aggression from the settlers' side, Palestinian officials and citizens tend to sway away from the two-state paradigm, doubting its efficiency.

## **MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED**

### **Israel**

As of January 2020, there are a total of 130 government-sanctioned Israeli settlements and at least 124 smaller outposts in the area of the West Bank. From the establishment of the very first settlement in the area in 1967, Israel has supervised and endorsed construction of new settlements, endorsing citizens with financial and religious, ideological motives. Historically, the Israeli Zionist movement has endorsed the occupation of the land as a means to reclaim the Holy Lands and fulfill a religious purpose and the government has offered financial benefits to settlers, such as cheaper accommodation and mortgages and tax relief.

One of the main axes of focus for the Israeli government has been the city of Jerusalem, which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has affirmed to be "the capital of Israel for 3000 years and the capital of the Jewish State for 70 years"<sup>8</sup> in 2015. PM Netanyahu was reelected for his position as of June 2020, following a political campaign which revolved to a great extent around the promise of the annexation of the West Bank

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theweek.co.uk/81658/israel-what-are-the-pros-and-cons-of-a-two-state-solution>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-middle-east-42303195>

territory, which has not yet been fulfilled due to severe criticism and resistance from the settlements' leaders' side, who claim that annexation "would open the door for a Palestinian state while ending any expansion of Israeli settlements in much of the West Bank"<sup>9</sup>. Despite facing both international and national criticism, Netanyahu is staying true to his original stance of annexation.

### State of Palestine

Tensions between Israel and the State of Palestine have existed since the mid-20th century. Various attempts have been made to resolve the ongoing struggle, which boils down to many different issues and disputes, Israeli settlements being a major one. Over the years, Palestinian citizens living in or near settlement territory have reported violence incidents on behalf of the settlers and that settlement infrastructure severely limits Palestinian movement, whereas the appropriation of land and water sources for settlement use leads to a loss of livelihoods for farmers, and limits the urban development of Palestinian towns and cities<sup>10</sup>. Citizen activist groups also advocate that settlements limit the possibility for a contiguous Palestinian State, both geographically and nationally.

Prime Minister of Palestine Mohammad Shtayyeh and his predecessors have, on numerous occasions, asked the international community to act against Israel over the legitimacy of settlements<sup>11</sup>; numerous peace talks couldn't cease settlement expansion. The Palestinian government severely criticised the reversal of US policy on settlements, reaffirming it contradicts totally with international law<sup>12</sup>. After latest developments of Israeli PM's annexation plan, Shtayyeh asked the international community for help, saying Israel must face consequences if it annexes land in the occupied West Bank, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said, and pointing to possible European sanctions<sup>13</sup>.

### United States of America

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[https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/01/world/middleeast/israel-annex-netanyahu-westbank.htm](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/01/world/middleeast/israel-annex-netanyahu-westbank.html)

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<https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2019/11/22/interactive-timeline-the-history-of-israeli-settlements-since-1967>

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<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/07/palestinians-demand-action-against-israel-over-settlements-law>

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<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/19/palestinians-slam-us-policy-reversal-on-israeli-settlements>

<sup>13</sup> <https://br.reuters.com/article/instant-article/idUSKBN23G1ZH>

Even though the United States of America always held a strong stance regarding the issue of Israeli settlements, their endorsement has shifted rapidly in the last decade. Historically, the US has deemed settlements as illicit with accordance to international law since 1978; from the start of Israel's occupation of Arab lands, the US opposed the establishment of Jewish settlements of the territories<sup>14</sup>. The skeptical stance of the US peaked under the Obama administration, with POTUS demanding the complete halt of the building of settlements in the West Bank, and strongly advocating in favour of the two-state solution. This demand was met with indifference from Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu, and no further actions were taken from the US side, despite the fact that their demand was not met. Following the election of Donald Trump, the US' official stanced shifted, with Secretary of State Michael Pompeo quoting that "the establishment of Israeli civilian settlements is not, per se, inconsistent with international law<sup>15</sup>". The Trump administration has also overturned decades of US policy by recognising Israeli sovereignty over East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights making the future of Jewish settlements there much more secure, and has announced a collaboration with PM of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu to draft an annexation map that would serve as a blueprint for which territories would fall under Israeli sovereignty..



### Arab League

Through the last decades, the Arab League has held a strongly disapproving stance when it came to Israel building and expanding settlements in the occupied territory. As of 2019, the Arab League condemns the US' tolerant and accepting stance towards settlements

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2537960?seq=1>

<sup>15</sup>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/18/pompeo-us-no-longer-considers-israeli-settlements-illegal>



and claims Israeli actions in the occupied territories "amount to war crimes"<sup>16</sup>. Following UN's Secretary General Antonio Gueterres' endorsement, Arab League chief Ahmed Aboul Gheit condemned Israel's plans on annexation and warned about the security implications of such a move. Following a meeting on April 2020 between the League's Secretary General and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation's Secretary General, the League issued that "The [Israeli] occupation is exploiting the world's engrossment with the coronavirus pandemic to expand their settlements and impose new realities on the ground, especially in east Jerusalem and its surrounding areas"<sup>17</sup>, shifting international attention to Israel's movements amidst the pandemic.

### TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
1967	State of Israel conquers West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip in the Six-Day War and begins the establishment of settlements on the territory
1968	UN Security Council adopts Resolution 252 reaffirming invalidity of military acquisition of territory
1993	Oslo Accords are signed, but the issue of settlements is set aside
2000	Al-Aqsa Intifada begins
2002	Israel separation wall passing through West Bank is constructed
2003	Road map for peace plan between Israel and Palestine is signed
2015	EU begins boycott to products from settlement territory Israeli PM asserts Jerusalem is the Israeli capital
2017	POTUS recognises Jerusalem as the capital of Israel
2019	Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu announces intention to annex settlement territories to the State of Israel
2020	Benjamin Netanyahu is re-elected for office and promises annexation to begin in 2020

<sup>16</sup>

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israeli-settlement-building-accelerating-arab-league/1281824>

<sup>17</sup>

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/latest-on-coronavirus-outbreak/arab-league-israel-exploits-virus-to-grow-settlements/1796862>

## UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

- [Security Council Resolution S/RES/446 \(1979\)](#), reaffirming Israeli settlements constitute an obstruction for peace in the region.
- [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2334 \(2016\)](#), reaffirming Israeli settlements are not of legal validity.
- [General Assembly Resolution A/RES/72/86 \(2017\)](#), demanding immediate and complete cessation of all Israeli settlement activities in all of the Occupied Palestinian Territory.
- [Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights A/HRC/40/42](#), regarding Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the Occupied Syrian Golan.

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

It has been made quite obvious throughout this Study Guide that a solution to the issue at hand is extremely difficult to conceive and even more difficult to enforce and implement. Having the Oslo Accords on its side, the Israeli government avoids the topic of yielding the West Bank, or even dissolving the infamous settlements. Through the previous UN unsuccessful efforts on the matter, it has been made clear that it is very hard to come up with a solution that leaves both sides satisfied and to separate the issue of abolishing the West Bank settlements from the territorial disputes in the area. However, there are some short term and even more long term solutions that could be implemented.

One of the possible solution that tackles the social side of the issue is the one suggesting that the State of Israel creating mixed Muslim and Jewish communities within the West Bank. Even though this method would enhance the presence of settlers in the area, it would also contribute to the social union between the two cultures and initiate sentiments

of peace. However, it is important to bear in mind that any solution that is to be implemented has to take the history of violent surges between the two populations and the cultural and ideological gap between them into consideration.

Secondly, an official UN proposal regarding the dissolution or not of the settlements, without demanding a change in the status of the area, would be in order. That would set aside the conversation on territorial disputes and separate the two problems; it would allow anyone to reinhabit the area, but it could also leave it uninhabited, something that would facilitate future negotiations. Certainly, we must also bear in mind that the scenario of Israel keeping the settlements under administrative control and having the issue as a whole looked over in future peace talks would still be very much in order; however, this would open a new conversation on possible annexation efforts and prevalence of presence in the area that is not to be forgotten.

Last but not least, we ask you all to bear in mind scenarios such as the one-state and two-state solution and their possible effects on the issue of settlements and their administration. The historical political conflict between the two states and the settlement problem are intertwined and certainly affect one another in complex ways, that we expect you to unravel.

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