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GA4: Special Political and Decolonisation (SPECPOL)

Research Report

Topic 2: Proposing the establishment of Jerusalem and Palestine as UN trust territories to minimise conflict



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Introduction

The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the most protracted and contentious issues in modern international relations. The consistent violence from both parties has led to several humanitarian crises, such as the ongoing war in Gaza, which directly causes suffering to civilians, including starvation, displacement, barriers to basic healthcare, and death.

Despite numerous attempts at securing peace deals, the dispute over Palestine's recognition as a state and broader territorial claims persists. Establishing Jerusalem and Palestine as United Nations trust territories has emerged as a potential solution to minimise conflict by providing neutral and legitimate governance supervised by international authorities, protecting the human rights of all civilians, and creating a strong foundation for sustainable peace. This report provides an insight for SPECPOL's responsibility to explore the feasibility of such an approach, its implications, and potential pathways for implementation.

Definition of Key Terms

UN trust territory: Geographic areas that are under the administration of the UN Trusteeship Council and authorised to a single country, in order to promote political, economic, social, and educational advancement of the inhabitants, and their progress towards self-government or independence.

Jerusalem: A city with profound religious, cultural, and political significance to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, currently claimed as a capital by both Israel and Palestine.

Palestine: The territory historically comprising the modern-day West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, currently recognised as a state by 138 UN member states but facing disputes over sovereignty.

Two-State Solution: A proposed solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict envisioning independent states for both peoples.

Demilitarisation: The process of reducing or eliminating military forces in a specific area, often as part of a peace agreement.

Humanitarian aid: Assistance provided to address immediate needs during crises, such as conflicts or natural disasters. This aid includes food, water, shelter, medical services, refugee support, and rehabilitation efforts, often delivered by international organisations.¹

Background Information

Israeli-Palestinian conflict has persisted for over a century, rooted in ethnic divides and territorial disputes. Following the end of World War One and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Britain took control of the now-Palestine region, which was inhabited by a Jewish minority and Arab majority. This multicultural coexistence soon dissolved into ethnic tension, as the UK was tasked with establishing a "national home" in Palestine for Jewish people, which angered the Arab population. The Jewish population also began to grow between the 1920s and 1940s, due to Zionist immigration waves and Jewish refugees fleeing from persecution in Europe, which only exacerbated violence between the Arabs and Jews.²

In 1947, the United Nations proposed a Partition Plan that sought to divide the region into separate Jewish and Arab states, with Jerusalem as an international city under UN administration. Jewish leaders accepted the plan, but Arab leaders rejected it. In 1948, Britain withdrew from the territory which allowed Jewish leaders to declare formal Israeli statehood, forcing hundreds of thousands of Arabs to become displaced, fleeing mainly to Gaza and West Bank, the former currently being extremely dense in population. These Palestinian refugees have been refused to return to their homeland, as Israel claims it would threaten the sovereignty of the Jewish state. As for the question of Jerusalem, Israel claims the city to be its capital, while the Palestinians claim East Jerusalem as the capital of a hoped-for future Palestinian state. Over the past few decades, several negotiations and meetings between involved parties have taken place, but none have solved the political unrest.²

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

Israel – Maintains sovereignty over West Jerusalem and significant parts of the West Bank, while claiming Jerusalem as its undivided capital.

Palestine – Claims East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state and seeks international recognition for its sovereignty over the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Hamas – An Islamist group that took control of Gaza in 2007 following its election by the Palestinian nation. Its main commitment is the destruction of the Israeli state, which has contributed to its recognition of a terrorist group by several countries.

United States – Traditionally a key ally of Israel, the U.S. has mediated numerous peace talks but faces criticism for perceived bias.

Arab League – Supports Palestinian sovereignty and has repeatedly called for international action to end Israeli occupation.

¹ cf. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (n.d.). What we do. <https://www.unocha.org/what-we-do>

² cf. BBC News. (2018, May 16). What are the arguments for and against reparations?. <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-44124396>

United Nations – Play a central role in mediating peace efforts, monitoring human rights, and providing humanitarian aid to Palestinian refugees through UNRWA.

Relevant UN Resolutions

1. *The Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples adopted by the UN General Assembly (1960)*³

4. All armed action or repressive measures of all kinds directed against dependent peoples shall cease in order to enable them to exercise peacefully and freely their right to complete independence, and the integrity of their national territory shall be respected;

5. Immediate steps shall be taken, in Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories or all other territories which have not yet attained independence, to transfer all powers to the peoples of those territories, without any conditions or reservations, in accordance with their freely expressed will and desire, without any distinction as to race, creed or colour, in order to enable them to enjoy complete independence and freedom;

2. *Resolution 478 by the UN Security Council (1980)*⁴

3. *Determines* that all legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, which have altered or purport to alter the character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem, and in particular the recent “basic law” on Jerusalem, are null and void and must be rescinded forthwith;

4. *Affirms also* that this action constitutes a serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East;

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

³ cf. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). (n.d.). Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-granting-independence-colonial-countries-and-peoples>

⁴ cf. United Nations Security Council. (1980). Resolution 478 (1980) on the status of Jerusalem. <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/478>

UN Partition Plan (1947): The proposal to end British control over the region of Palestine, and instead achieve a two-state solution in which the State of Israel and the State of Palestine would be autonomous and independent, with Jerusalem internationalised. However, this led to the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, from which Israel emerged victorious, gaining control of a large territory, forcing Palestinians to flee to neighbouring countries such as Egypt and Jordan.⁵

Oslo Accords (1993): A series of agreements between the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), which aimed to achieve a framework for peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It was successful in that there was mutual recognition: the PLO recognised Israel's right to state sovereignty, while Israel recognised the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. However, it was unsuccessful in that a large majority of the Palestinian population opposed the Accords, and violence by extremist groups such as Hamas strained the peace-making process. Far-right Israelis also opposed the Accords, and in 1995, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by a right-wing extremist for signing the Accords.⁶

Other Organisations:

E.g. Groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have highlighted violations in the region, calling for accountability and adherence to international law to support a fair resolution. Furthermore, comprising the UN, the EU, the United States, and Russia, the Quartet on the Middle East has worked to mediate peace talks, including the Roadmap for Peace, which outlined steps toward a two-state solution.

Possible Solutions

Trusteeship Governance Model

- Place Jerusalem and Palestinian territories under UN Trusteeship Council oversight.
- Establish a neutral administrative body to govern the territories, ensuring fair resource distribution and protection of cultural heritage.

International Peacekeeping Presence

- Deploy UN peacekeepers to monitor ceasefires and prevent escalations.
- Demilitarise contentious areas to reduce the risk of armed conflict.

Economic Development Initiatives

- Launch international development projects focused on education, healthcare, and infrastructure in Palestinian territories.
- Encourage investment and trade to reduce dependency on foreign aid.

Cultural and Religious Access Agreements

⁵ cf. United Nations. (n.d.). The question of Palestine and the United Nations: A history. Retrieved December 23, 2024, from <https://www.un.org/unispal/history/>

⁶ cf. Office of the Historian. (n.d.). The Oslo Accords and the Arab-Israeli peace process. U.S. Department of State. Retrieved from <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1993-2000/oslo>

- Guarantee freedom of access to holy sites for all religions under UN protection.
- Develop shared governance of religious sites to prevent unilateral control.

Long-Term Independence Goals

- Use trusteeship as a transitional phase, preparing both territories for eventual sovereignty.
- Outline clear benchmarks for progress, including democratic governance and human rights standards

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