

# BACKGROUND TO THE CURRENT VIOLENCE IN GAZA – THE LONG ROAD TO GENOCIDE

David Mond, January 2024

Most people have been horrified by the current genocidal violence being enacted before our eyes in Gaza. However, many feel they lack background knowledge of the historical, political and social context in which the killing and destruction is taking place. This is unsurprising, as our mainstream media avoid providing such information. Below is a brief overview. We have provided a number of hyperlinks to other sources (indicated by text coloured blue), and a brief reading list, on page 17.

We believe that it is possible to feel sympathy with the aspirations of both Palestinians and Jews. Zionism, especially in its early days, offered hopes of a better life to millions of oppressed and suffering people. The long road to genocide began with idealism and the desire to create a new life, though underlain with a ruthless determination on the part of Zionist leaders to secure a land in Palestine for the Jews and displace its Palestinian inhabitants. This ruthlessness was enormously reinforced by the Holocaust. And it was surely only in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust that the world would look kindly on a nation founded on an explicitly racial, not to say racist, principle. Israel's steady slide into the overt and violent racism that has culminated in the current genocidal war on the Palestinians has perhaps been an inevitable consequence of that early foundation.

## Origins

**Palestine** The name derives from Philistia, which dates from around 1185 BC, comprising approximately current Israel/Palestine and Jordan. The Philistines are remembered in the Bible as enemies of Israel.

During Roman rule, a new province was named *Palaestina*. The Turkish Ottoman Empire (1299-1918) named the province *Filistin*. The map on page 18 shows Ottoman Palestine.

**Zionism** As a reaction to anti-Semitism and the pogroms against Jews in Northern and Eastern Europe, in 1897 Theodore Hertzl founded the Zionist nationalist movement, based on the principle that the Jews were a nation and should have national sovereignty. The location of this sovereign state should be the Land of Israel, which Jews regarded as their ancient homeland.

### “A land without people for a people without land”

The Zionists coined this phrase in respect to Palestine, to which they referred as “Eretz Israel” (the land of Israel), ignoring the fact that the country had a population of over half a million. In 1895, Hertzl had voiced his support for the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians:

"We shall try to spirit the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it any employment in our own country... expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly."

### Not all Jews were Zionists.

Many Jews were Bundists, a secular socialist movement whose ideology was to remain in their countries of birth to struggle with others for a more equal and just society for all. Orthodox Jewish communities rejected Zionism (and many still do) as they believed only

the Messiah should lead the Jews to Israel. Today there are still many Jews who oppose the ideology of Zionism, some on religious grounds and some because they see, in Zionism, a settler colonial project.

It is ironic that despite the secular nature of early Zionism, which was shunned by the Orthodox, today the idea that God gave Israel to the Jews is seriously advanced by the far right in Israel as a justification for the violent dispossession of the Palestinians. And that the greatest number of Zionists in the world are not in Israel at all, but in the United States, where 20 million Christian Zionists believe that it is necessary for the Jews to take possession of all of the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judaea in order to bring forward the Second Coming of Christ (after which those Jews who do not accept Him as Messiah will be cast into Hell). In other words, contemporary Zionism finds its justification not in rational argument but in far-fetched religious doctrine that is explicitly racist – God sides with the Jews against the Arabs – or overtly antisemitic, in the case of the Christian Zionism.

### **The Jewish National Fund (JNF)**

Formed in 1901, the JNF is a charity whose aim is to purchase land for Jews in Palestine. Once bought, the land cannot be sold. Following Israel's independence in 1948, it also acquired, without paying any compensation, the holdings of Palestinian refugees who had fled. Today, it is still actively in operation and owns 13% of land within Israel.

### **World War I, 1914-1918**

The Ottoman Empire comprising Turkey and most of its near neighbours, including the Palestine region, sided with Germany. The empire had been disintegrating since the early 1900s and collapsed at the end of World War One.

**1916: The secret Sykes-Picot Treaty** between Britain and France decided on the post-war division of the Ottoman Middle Eastern countries, with Britain administering Palestine.

**1917: The Balfour Declaration:** Arthur Balfour, British Foreign Secretary, wrote to Lord Rothschild, the UK representative of the Zionist movement, that

“His Majesty’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object.”

The letter also stated that

“nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.”

At the time, the population of Palestine - three quarters of a million - comprised Muslims, Christians and Jews, the latter making up about 4% of the population. Most of the Jews, up until the start of Zionist immigration in the second half of the 19th century, were descended from Jews who had lived there for many centuries, mostly settled in Jerusalem and integrated into the local population.

### **1918: The British take control of Palestine.**

The British referred to the population, regardless of religion, as “Palestinian citizens and British protected persons.” Palestinians received passports and the name ‘Palestine’ appeared on official documents, the currency and state institutions.

**1919 letter from Balfour to Curzon, his successor as British Foreign Secretary:**

“...in Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country, though the American Commission has been going through the form of asking what they are... The Four Great Powers are committed to Zionism. And Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land.”

## The British Mandate over Palestine

**1922:** The League of Nations (the predecessor of the United Nations) mandated that Britain should be responsible for the administration of Palestine.

The Mandate accepted Britain's promise to the Zionist movement of a Jewish national home in Palestine, but added that "No discrimination of any kind shall be made between the inhabitants of Palestine on the ground of race, religion or language." (Article 15)

**1923: The Lausanne Treaty** settled the legal status of Palestinians internationally. Ottoman subjects residing in Palestine under the British Mandate officially became Palestinian citizens. Meanwhile, the British facilitated Jewish immigration and the acquisition of Palestinian nationality for Jewish immigrants.

**1930s:** Jewish immigration to Palestine increased greatly during this period. Hitler's rise to power and his party's virulently anti-Semitic policies resulted in an increase in Jewish immigration to Palestine. Compared to 100,000 immigrants in the 1920s, Palestine received about 232,000 legal immigrants in the 1930s. By 1939, [the Jewish population numbered over 445,000 out of a total of about 1,500,000](#) – compared with about 85,000 in 1919.

**Land ownership:** By the end of 1939, Jewish holdings of land had risen to almost 1.5 million dunums of the total area of 26 million dunums, compared with 650,000 held at the start of the Mandate. (1 dunam = 0.24 of an acre = 1000 square metres )

**1936-39: Growing resentment by Palestinians** at the drive to establish a Jewish state in Palestine erupted in the Great Arab Revolt, which was brutally repressed by the British.

**1937: Palestinians reject a British proposal to partition Palestine into a Jewish and a Palestinian state.** However, the idea was accepted by the Zionist leader, David Ben Gurion who believed a Jewish state could expand the territory assigned to them. Palestinians believed, in common with Arab populations in other Middle Eastern countries that they had the right to national independence and self-determination in their country.

**1939 The White Paper limiting Jewish immigration** The British imposed a limit on Jewish immigration, of 75,000 people over five years, to quell the discontent of the Palestinian population, and changed the terms of the Balfour Declaration.

The paper called for the establishment of a Jewish national home in an independent Palestinian state within 10 years, stating that the British government “would indeed regard it as contrary to their obligations to the Arabs under the Mandate, . . . that the Arab population of Palestine should be made the subjects of a Jewish State against their will . . .”

## 1939-1945: World War II and the Holocaust

During this period, the immigration limits to Palestine set by the British were put under pressure by the hundreds of thousands of Jews fleeing for their lives from the Holocaust.

Many countries, including the UK and the US, closed their doors to these refugees, or imposed strict limits.

**Jewish paramilitary organisations**<sup>1</sup> Mainly as a result of the change of British policy in 1939, Zionist paramilitary groups Haganah, Irgun and Lehi (also known as the Stern Gang) waged a guerrilla war, conducting terrorist attacks to drive out the British. The Haganah later became the Israeli armed forces. Irgun was led by Menachem Begin, who later founded the Likud Party, and was Prime Minister of Israel from 1977 to 1983. Lehi, led by Yitzhak Shamir, who later succeeded Begin as Prime Minister of Israel, was responsible for the assassination, in September 1948, of the UN mediator Count Folke Bernadotte, who had advocated for the right of return of the displaced Palestinians, arguing that

“It would be an offence against the principles of elemental justice if these innocent victims of the conflict were denied the right to return to their homes while Jewish immigrants flow into Palestine, and, indeed, at least offer the threat of permanent replacement of the Arab refugees who have been rooted in the land for centuries.”

## 1946

Illegal migration became the main form of immigration of Jewish Holocaust survivors fleeing Europe, with 40,000 illegal immigrants arriving during the last three years of the Mandate. The Jewish population of Palestine reached 33% of the total.

## 1947

**February:** The British handed over the question of Palestine to the newly-formed United Nations and announced they would leave in 1948.

**November:** The UN decreed the partition of Palestine, awarding the Zionists a state comprising over half the country (see the map below), against the wishes of the indigenous majority. Violence broke out between Palestinians and Zionists.

## 1948

**January:** Armed forces of around 5,000 Arab volunteers from Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt began operations in Palestine against Zionist forces. They were no match for the highly trained and well-equipped Zionists.

**March:** Plan Dalet, a Zionist plan to systematically ethnically cleanse indigenous Palestinians from vast areas of the country was put in place to ensure a Jewish majority in the future Israeli state<sup>2</sup>. Villages were attacked and their inhabitants driven out or murdered. Other Palestinians fled through fear. As the future Israeli prime minister, Ben Gurion, had written to his son, Amos, in 1937: “We must expel the Arabs and take their places. . . .”

## The Nakba

By 1949, at least 750,000 Palestinians had been made refugees, losing their land, homes and belongings. Their flight was accelerated by massacres such as the one that took place at Deir Yassin on April 9, 1948, where over 100 Palestinian men, women, and children were murdered by Zionist paramilitaries from Irgun and Lehi. This ethnic cleansing throughout Palestine became known as the "Nakba" ("catastrophe").

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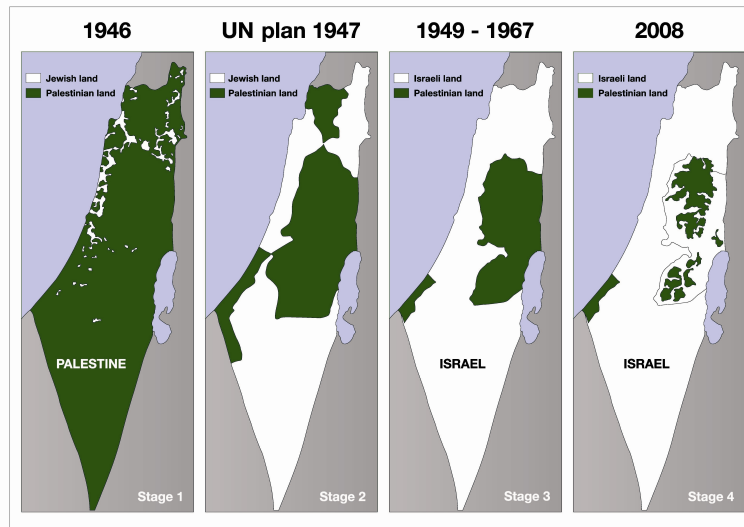
<sup>1</sup>For more on this, see Thomas Suarez, *State of Terror*.

<sup>2</sup>See Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*



Zionist forces took more than 78 percent of historic Palestine, and ethnically cleansed and destroyed or took over about 530 Palestinian villages and cities. Lands belonging to Palestinians who had fled were taken over by the Jewish National Fund (see above). About 150,000 Palestinians remained inside what became Israel, many of them internally displaced. They and their descendants now number over two million, comprising 21% of the Israeli population. They were never allowed back to their ancestral homes.

## Disappearing Palestine 1946 - 2008



**14 May 1948:** The British left Palestine and the State of Israel came into being.

**December 1949:** Israel was admitted as a member of the United Nations on condition that it complied with all previous UN resolutions, including [Resolution 194](#) that stated:

“refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible.”

Israel’s UN ambassador to the UN, Abba Eban, promised his state would honour its obligations. The Right of Return is universally recognized in international refugee law, human rights law, the law of nationality, and the law of state responsibility. It is also provided for in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

**No Right of Return for Palestinian refugees** To this day, Israel has never allowed the Palestinian refugees to return to their land, thus violating international law. On 28 July 2023, Gilad Erdan, Israel’s current ambassador to the UN [stated to the Security Council](#):

“Let me be clear, there is no right of return. You all know this. The demand of returning millions of descendants of refugees is a demand to obliterate the Jewish people’s right to self-determination. This will never happen.”

The Palestinian refugees and their descendants now number 5.9 million. Still stateless, they live, often in slum-like conditions, in refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the West Bank (administered by Jordan in 1948) and Gaza (administered by Egypt in 1948). No compensation has ever been paid for the loss of their land, homes and possessions.

**Israeli Citizenship** On obtaining independence, Israel ignored the international convention that when one state succeeds another, all of the habitual population with genuine links to the territory, should be granted citizenship of the new state.

The internally-displaced Palestinian population was granted Israeli citizenship in 1952, although they were subjected to military rule until 1966. Palestinian refugees who had fled during the Nakba have never been granted the right of return or Israeli citizenship. Their homes and possessions, and even their bank accounts, were forfeited without compensation.

To justify refusing the right of return to the Palestinian refugees, Israel changed the term ‘Palestinian’ to ‘Arab’ to negate Palestinian national identity. For example, Prime Minister Golda Meir declared in 1969: [“There was no such thing as Palestinians.”](#) In March 2023, government minister, Bezalel Smotrich announced: [“There is no such thing as a Palestinian nation. There is no Palestinian history...”](#)

**Israeli nationality does not exist** Violating international principles regarding nationality, Israeli citizens are ‘nationals’ only in terms of their ethnicity or religion, with the Jewish population enjoying superior status in legal entitlements. Muslims, Christians and Druze do not enjoy the same rights as Jews. In 2013 the [Israeli High Court rejected a petition by 21 Israeli citizens](#) of different religions to be registered as having Israeli nationality to ensure equality for all citizens before the law. The grounds for rejection were that such a change would endanger Israel’s founding principle: to be a Jewish state for the Jewish nation.

**Israeli laws** Over 50 laws discriminate against non-Jewish citizens, that is, mainly the Palestinians (but also the Druze, Bedouin and Circassians). Here are three examples:

- **The 1950 Law of the Right of Return** was one of the first discriminatory laws. It grants automatic citizenship rights to every Jew who wishes to immigrate, whereas citizenship rights are only granted to those non-Jews (virtually all of them Palestinians) who were registered as residents in Israel before 1952 (and their descendants). Palestinians who fled the country during Arab-Israeli war have no right of return.
- **Land tenure:** Palestinian citizens of Israel form 21 percent of the country’s population. However, the majority live on less than 3% of all land in Israel. Some Palestinians live in “mixed cities” like Haifa and Acre, although often in separate areas within the cities.
- **The Jewish Nation-State Basic [constitutional] Law** of 2018 enshrines Jewish supremacy over non-Jewish citizens and establishes discrimination as a constitutional value. No democratic constitution in the world designates the constitutional identity of the state on racial grounds, as serving one ethnic group. Extracts from the law include

<b>1. Basic principles</b>
A) The Land of Israel is the historic national home of the Jewish people, in which the State of Israel was established.
B) The State of Israel is the national state of the Jewish people, in which it exercises its natural, cultural, and historic right to self-determination.
C) The right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people.
<b>7.</b>
The state views the development of Jewish settlement as a national value, and will act to encourage it and to promote and to consolidate its establishment.

Examples of Jewish settlement within Israel are the Negev desert, where Israelis are driving out the long-standing Bedouin communities, and in the Galilee which has a large Palestinian population and where the Israeli government plans to “save Jewish settlement” by encouraging Jewish families to move there.

**1964 : The founding of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO),** a coalition of organisations with the purpose of liberating Palestine, achieving Palestinian self-determination, and securing the return of the refugees. Initially, some PLO organisations resorted to terrorist violence, for example killing 12 members of the Israeli team at the 1972 Munich Olympics.

**On 14 October, 1974, the United Nations General Assembly recognised the PLO,** headed by Yasser Arafat, as the “sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people”.

- On November 15, 1988 the PLO declared Palestinian independence from their base in Algiers.
- In December, 1988 the PLO recognised the existence of Israel in its 1967 borders.

**June 1967: The Six-Day War**

Following years of diplomatic friction and skirmishes between Israel and its neighbours, Egypt closed the Tiran straits to Israeli shipping, Jordan formed an alliance with Egypt and Syria supported Palestinian guerillas. Israel then staged pre-emptive strikes followed by successful ground offensives seizing:

- the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt (returned to Egypt in 1982 following Camp David Accords)
- the Gaza Strip from Egypt (still largely controlled by Israel by a blockade);
- the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, (still occupied by Israel);
- the Golan Heights from Syria (still occupied by Israel).

**November 1967: UN Security Council Resolution 242** called for Israel’s “withdrawal ... from territories occupied in the recent conflict.” Israel has never complied with this resolution.

**The occupied territories: the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights**  
“Grab the hilltops and stake your claim. Everything we don’t grab will go to them [The Palestinians]” Ariel Sharon (1928-2014), Israeli General and Prime Minister, 1998

- Since Israel occupied these three territories, the Palestinians have been steadily dispossessed of their land by Israelis to build Jewish settlements, as well as special roads to reach the settlements. (Settlements are illegal under the Fourth Geneva Convention)
- In recent years the Israeli settlers themselves, accompanied by soldiers, have been attacking Palestinian and Bedouin villages, stealing land, and destroying their crops and olive groves to drive away the inhabitants. Israeli settlers are now fully armed.
- By 2023, there were 144 Israeli settlements and 128 outposts in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. The number is still increasing, as is the size of the existing settlements. In the Golan, there are 30 settlements. Settlements in Gaza were vacated in 2005.
- There are over 700,000 settlers in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem and 26,000 in the Golan. (The Palestinian population in the occupied West Bank is 3 million, of whom 222,000 live in East Jerusalem. 25,000 Syrians and Druze live in the Golan.)
- IDF Military Firing Zones in a large part of the eastern occupied West Bank are causing the eviction of numerous Palestinian herding communities living there.
- House demolitions : While settlements are expanding apace, it is almost impossible for Palestinians to receive planning permission to build new homes or even erect agricultural outbuildings. Since 1967, the Israeli authorities [have demolished over 50,000 Palestinian homes](#) in the occupied territories. Some homes are demolished as collective punishment of families whose member or even neighbour is suspected of certain crimes. This is illegal under the 4th Geneva Convention.
- Legal systems: in the occupied West Bank, the indigenous Palestinians live under harsh military law, while Israeli settlers are governed by Israeli civil law.

**1973: The Yom Kippur War:** This war was started by a surprise attack by Syria and Egypt to force Israel to the negotiating table to return the Golan Heights to Syria and Sinai to Egypt. A UN-brokered ceasefire ended the fighting a few weeks later.

**1978: The Camp David Accords:** Egypt and Israel signed a treaty in which Israel agreed to withdraw from Sinai and Egypt opened the Suez Canal to Israeli ships that previously had been blocked.

**1982: Lebanon War:** In the 1980s, nationalist organisations within the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) had been exchanging fire with Israeli forces along the Lebanese border. Israel invaded southern Lebanon, conducting a prolonged siege on the Lebanese capital of Beirut that led to between 16,000 and 19,000 deaths and widespread destruction. Israel was supported by Lebanese Christian militias. Ariel Sharon, the Israeli Defence Minister invited the Christian militias to enter the Palestinian refugee camps of Shatila and Sabra to root out the PLO. They [massacred between 2,000 and 3,500 Palestinian refugees and Lebanese civilians](#) while the Israeli army stood by.

**The First Intifada 1987-1993** was a sustained series of protests and violent riots carried out by Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories and Israel. It was motivated by collective Palestinian frustration over Israel's military occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. According to Mubarak Awad, a Palestinian-American clinical psychologist, the Intifada was a protest against Israeli settlement expansion and repression, which included "beatings, shootings, killings, house demolitions, uprooting of trees, deportations, extended imprisonments, and detentions without trial [Administrative Detention]."

### **1993 and 1995: The Oslo Accords**

The Oslo Accords, signed by Yitzak Rabin, Prime Minister of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation, represented by Yasser Arafat were supposed to set the stage for a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine within five years to fulfil the right of Palestinians to self-determination. But an independent Palestinian state has never come about. The Accords were accepted by the Israeli Knesset (Parliament) in October 1995 by a majority of one. Likud, the opposition party, led by Binyamin Netanyahu was bitterly opposed.

<b>Agreements made</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
The PLO agreed to recognise the state of Israel and Israel agree to recognise the PLO	<i>Achieved</i>
The Israelis should withdraw from Gaza and Jericho within four months	<i>The Israelis left Gaza in 2005, while still exerting control over its borders, air space and access by sea.</i>
In the West Bank, Israel undertook to transfer power to ‘authorized Palestinians’ in education, health, social welfare, direct taxation, and tourism.	<i>The Palestinian National Authority oversees education and social welfare, but collects only a small amount of taxes</i>
Withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Palestinian centres of population	<i>The Israeli army still enters Palestinian cities, towns and villages at will</i>
The temporary division of the West Bank into three areas – A, B, and C (see the map on page 18) – while plans are negotiated for an independent Palestinian state five years later.  <b>Area A (18%):</b> under Palestinian control by the Palestinian National Authority as agreed in Oslo  <b>Area B (22%):</b> the Palestinians exercise civilian authority while Israel continues to be in charge of security  <b>Area C (60%):</b> under exclusive Israeli control	<i>The divisions still exist, but the Israeli military enters all parts of the occupied West Bank. The Palestinian Authority still exists, but in Areas A and B Israeli settlers and the army attack Palestinians, their lands and homes. In Area C, Israel has been evicting Palestinians from their homes and villages in order to take the land for themselves. Settlements are expanding exponentially. Many Israeli politicians talk of the (illegal under international law) annexation of the West Bank</i>
<b>Taxes:</b> Formally, the Palestinian Authority is entitled to collect taxes from Palestinians working within the Palestinian territory	<i>Israel collects some 75% of PA’s total tax revenue on behalf of the PA which is supposed to be transferred to the PA on a monthly basis. However, Israel often withholds these payments.</i>
<b>Water:</b> For the time being, Israel would continue to own 85% of the West Bank aquifer, while the Palestinians would have 15%.  Negotiations on water rights would be deferred until permanent status negotiations, due to take place in 1999.	<i>Israelis, including settlers in the occupied West Bank, consume of 247 litres daily per person; Palestinians in the West Bank consume 82.4 litres per person and 47% receive water less than 10 days a month. The Israeli army and settlers destroy or steal Palestinian natural water sources.</i>
<b>Within two years, Israel and the Palestinians agreed to commence negotiations on the final status of the territories in order to create a Palestinian state at the end of five years</b>	<i>The agreement did not come about.</i>

A month after the accords were signed, Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin was assassinated by a religious-nationalist Jewish fanatic. He was followed by Shimon Peres who remained in power for only one year. In 1996 Netanyahu took power and the Oslo Peace Accords were effectively scuppered.

## **The Second Intifada 2000-2005**

**Causes:** The Israeli opposition leader at the time, Ariel Sharon, triggered the uprising on 28 September 2000, when he [entered the al-Aqsa Mosque compound](#) – the third most sacred Islamic holy site - in occupied East Jerusalem. With him were more than 1,000 heavily armed police and soldiers. The following day, the uprising started in the occupied West Bank and the then-occupied Gaza Strip.

Since that date to the present, Israeli settlers and soldiers have been storming the al-Aqsa Mosque with increasing frequency, sometimes desecrating buildings and attacking worshippers. In 2023, such incidents are occurring almost daily.

Another cause has been said to be the failure of the Camp David negotiations between Israeli PM Ehud Barak and Yasser Arafat to establish the two-state solution. Since the Oslo Accords, Israel had shown no inclination to prepare for this outcome. For example, since 1993, Israel had continued building new illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank and Gaza (on land stolen from Palestinians) and expanded the existing ones by 52%. By 2000, the settler population grew to nearly 200,000, a rise of 85,000 since 1993. The Israeli government has subsidised settlement building, such as by offering cheap housing.

### **The uprising**

Most Palestinians took the route of popular resistance, such as mass demonstrations and stone throwing, to which Israelis responded with live ammunition and rubber bullets. Some factions deployed guerrilla war techniques, such as suicide bombings and shooting attacks against Israelis who in turn carried out raids, air strikes, house demolitions, and imposed no-go zones and curfews.

### **The ‘Apartheid’ Wall separating Israel and the occupied West Bank**

In 2002, at the height of the second Intifada, Israel started constructing a wall, slicing through Palestinian communities, agricultural fields, and farmland in the occupied West Bank, rather than along the internationally-recognised 1967 boundary, known as the Green Line. Israeli officials described the wall as a necessary security precaution against “terrorism”. It ushered in a period of suicide bombings and shooting attacks by Palestinians, and Israeli air strikes, demolitions, no-go zones and curfews. In 2004 the International Court of Justice (ICJ) [deemed Israel’s separation wall to be illegal](#). The 700 km route of the wall is shown on the map on page 19.

**2004: Yasser Arafat, Head of Fatah (and also of the PLO) died.** He was succeeded by Mahmoud Abbas, who won the Palestinian presidential elections of 2005 and also became Head of the PLO.

### **Hamas**

Hamas (whose name is an acronym for “Islamic Resistance”) was founded in Gaza in 1987 during the first Intifada. The movement started as an offshoot of the Egypt-based Muslim Brotherhood, and created a military wing to pursue an armed struggle against Israel with the aim of liberating historic Palestine. It is considered to be a terrorist organisation by the US and European countries.

[Hamas’ 1988 founding charter](#) called for the takeover of all of mandate Palestine, including present-day Israel – as does the founding document of the Israeli political party Likud, in power for most of the last 30 years. Hamas also offered social welfare programmes to Palestinian victims of the Israeli occupation. In its [renewed charter of 2017](#), Hamas said [it would accept the 1967 borders as the basis for a Palestinian state](#), with Jerusalem as its capital and the return of refugees to their homes. The 1967 borders refer to those that existed before the Six-Day War.



In 1981, Brig. Gen. Yitzhak Segev, a former Israeli military governor in Gaza stated to the New York Times that his government had been aiding Hamas financially, viewing it as a "counterweight" to the secularist Palestine Liberation Organization and the Fatah party, led by Yasser Arafat. Dividing the Palestinians would help to prevent the creation of a Palestinian state. In 2009, Avner Cohen, who worked in Gaza for over twenty years, told the Wall Street Journal, "[Hamas, to my great regret, is Israel's creation.](#)"

## Gaza

Gaza is one of the most densely-populated parts of the planet. A strip of land 25 miles long and 5 miles wide at its narrowest point and with 2,300,000 inhabitants, it is about one quarter the area of London, and its population density is roughly that of London. Gaza's length is about the same distance as from Heathrow Airport to London City Airport. Its width is the distance from Kensington to Brixton. The strip is bordered by Israel, Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea. 75% of Gaza's population are refugees from the 1948 Nakba and their descendants. One half of the population are children. Before 1967, Gaza belonged to Egypt. It was captured and occupied by Israel during the Six Day War of that year. Until 2005, as in the occupied West Bank and the Golan Heights, Israel administered the territory and confiscated Palestinian land to build Jewish settlements.

### 2005: Israel withdraws from Gaza

The Israeli administration pulled out of Gaza. 21 Israeli settlements, covering 40% of the territory, were dismantled and the homes destroyed. The 9,000 settlers were forced to leave. Most went to live in new (illegal) settlements in the occupied West Bank.

**Various reasons** have been suggested for the Israeli withdrawal.

1. To end any possibility of a Palestinian state.

"The significance of the disengagement plan is the freezing of the peace process. Effectively, this whole package called the Palestinian state, with all that it entails, has been removed indefinitely from our agenda."

[\(Dov Weisglass, Senior Advisor to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, in 2004\).](#)

2. To consolidate gains in the occupied West Bank, making that territory easier to administer, as well as to confiscate more Palestinian land to build more settlements there. The 9,000 settlers from Gaza would move to the West Bank.
3. Demographics: Statistics projected that by 2020, Palestinian Muslims and Christians would become a majority in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. If Israel wanted to remain a "Jewish state," it would be very difficult to maintain its Jewish identity if an ethno/religious minority continued to rule over an ethnic majority. Thus, Gaza was separated from Israel and returned to nominal Palestinian control.

To this day, Israel retains effective control over Gaza despite disengaging from the territory in 2005. The United Nations, the International Court of Justice and Israel's Supreme Court still regard Israel as the occupying power over Gaza.

- Israeli armed forces retain the ability and right to enter the Gaza Strip at will.



- Israel retains direct exclusive control over Gaza’s airspace, maritime borders, and (currently) two border crossings. Israel maintains a military present at the Egyptian-controlled Rafah crossing in the south. Gaza has no airport or sea port and access to the sea for fishermen is limited to 6 nautical miles from the coast. For the rest of the world, sovereign territorial waters extend 12 nautical miles (22km).
- Gaza remains dependent on Israel for its water, electricity, telecommunications, sewage, its currency and its ability to trade as Israel controls the movement of goods (including food) and persons in and out of the territory.
- Israel also has sole control of the Palestinian Population Registry, through which the Israeli army can regulate who is classified as a Palestinian and whether that person is a Gazan or from the West Bank.

## 2006 Palestinian Elections

In January 2006, [Palestinian legislative elections](#) took place to choose members of the Palestinian Authority in the occupied West Bank and Gaza. The turn-out was 74%. An 84-member international observer team judged the elections to have been free and fair.

Hamas won the elections, with 74 out of 132 seats. The Fatah Party, strongly supported by the USA and having ruled for 40 years, was seen by Palestinians as corrupt, and gained only 45 seats. Ismail Haniyeh was nominated as Prime Minister on 16 February 2006.

**June 2006:** An Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, was kidnapped near the border with Gaza in a bid for Israel to free female and under-age Palestinian prisoners. Israel launched a series of raids into Gaza and the West Bank, destroying civilian infrastructure and arresting dozens of Hamas supporters, including elected cabinet ministers and members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and Parliamentarians. Economic sanctions were imposed against the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority by Israel and the Middle East ‘Quartet’ (the UN, the European Union, Russia and the USA).

After an attempt to form a unity government with Fatah, Hamas took control of Gaza in 2007, following Abbas’s attempt to place Gaza’s security forces (with the help of the US) under Fatah’s control. Abbas, in turn, took control of the occupied West Bank.

## The Israel Blockade of Gaza 2007-2023

Following the establishment of a Hamas government in Gaza, Israel imposed a strict blockade over Gaza, tightening the restrictions described above. It reduced greatly, sometimes dramatically, the number of goods allowed into the territory, including food, humanitarian aid, spare parts for repairing infrastructure (such as water purification equipment, construction materials, electric generators, medicines and medical equipment and fuel).

Exports were strictly limited and exit visas (mainly for patients with serious illnesses requiring treatment in specialised hospitals in Jerusalem and family members accompanying them), were cut back severely.

High prices, poverty, food insecurity, insufficient clean water, a much-reduced electricity and gas supply, a deficient sewage system, etc. became the order of the day.

The United Nations, the European Union, Turkey and the United Kingdom, among others, have all condemned the blockade. In 2010, UK Prime Minister David Cameron [called Gaza a “prison camp.”](#)

## Israel’s attacks on Gaza before 2023:

**December 2008 – Operation Cast Lead:** Israel launched a 22-day military offensive in Gaza after rockets were fired into Israel in response to the tightening of the Israeli blockade. The Israelis used white phosphorus as a weapon. Between 1,100 and 1,500 Palestinians were killed, of whom around 80% were civilians. This is as great or greater than the number of Israelis killed in the Hamas attack of October 7th 2023.

**November 2012 – Operation Pillar of Defence:** Israel killed Hamas’s military chief of staff, Ahmad Jabari, followed by eight days of Israeli air raids on Palestine, bombing civilian infrastructure.

**July-August 2014 – Operation Protective Edge:** The kidnap and killing of three Israeli teenagers in the West Bank and a reprisal killing of a Palestinian teenager who was burnt to death, led to a seven-week war in which more than 2,100 Palestinians were killed in Gaza, along with 73 Israelis. Israel bombed Palestinian homes and much civilian infrastructure. The number of Palestinians killed is considerably greater than the number of Israelis killed in the Hamas attack of October 7th 2023.

**Mowing the lawn** Israeli generals talk about their military incursions into Gaza as “mowing the lawn”, a task that has to be performed regularly. The next war is always just a matter of time.

**October 2015** Benjamin Netanyahu says that [the idea that the Nazis should exterminate the Jews](#) came not from Hitler but from the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin Al-Husseini. The intention of his remark is clear – Palestinians are responsible for the Holocaust. Needless to say, this is entirely false.

**March 2018 – The Great March of Return:** Palestinian non-violent protests began at Gaza’s fenced border with Israel and Israeli troops, on the express orders of Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman, opened fire on the protestors. 183 Palestinians, including several medics, were killed during several months of protests, and thousands injured. The table below is taken from the [United Nations report](#) into the violence.

Category	Total	Women	Children	Body part targeted				Press <sup>e</sup>	Health workers <sup>f</sup>
				Head/ neck	Torso	Upper limb	Lower limb		
<b>Gaza:</b>									
Fatalities by live ammunition <sup>a</sup>	183	1	35	70	101	0	12	2	3
Injuries by live ammunition <sup>b</sup>	6106	159	940	175	401	493	4903	39	39
Injuries by bullet fragmentation/shrapnel <sup>c</sup>	1576	59	345	-	-	-	-	5	34
Injuries by rubber-coated metal bullet	438	36	124	-	-	-	-	4	34
Injuries by direct tear-gas canister hit	1084	60	233	-	-	-	-	-	85
<b>Israel:</b>									
Fatalities <sup>d</sup>	0	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Injuries by stones, explosives	4	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-

.Many of the 6,106 injured had their legs shattered by high-velocity rifle bullets fired by Israeli snipers, and many were up to 300 metres from the border fence when shot. A [further UN report](#) issued in 2020 looks at some of the long-term consequences of the attacks on the unarmed demonstrators, and estimates the total number of injured at over 36,000, and the number of dead as 214, including 46 children.

**May 2021 –During the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, Israeli Security forces**

accompanying Jewish settlers, injured hundreds of Palestinians at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, while evicting Palestinians from their homes in occupied East Jerusalem. Hamas gave an ultimatum for Israel to withdraw security forces and cease evictions, following which they fired rockets into Israel which retaliated by launching air raids on Gaza. The fighting continued for 11 days, with at least 260 people killed in Gaza and 13 in Israel.

**August 2022 – Operation Breaking Dawn:** More than 30 Palestinians were killed in air attacks carried out by Israeli planes. Palestinian Islamic Jihad, whose two commanders were killed in Israeli air strikes in Gaza, following Israeli army raids on Jenin in the West Bank, fired dozens of rockets into Israel in response.

**December 2022** After a series of inconclusive elections, Benjamin Netanyahu, at the head of the Likud Party, formed a coalition government incorporating some of the most overtly racist and fascist political groups in Israel. He appointed two especially notorious far-right settler leaders, [Bezalel Smotrich](#) and [Itamar Ben-Gvir](#) to important ministries. Attacks on Palestinians on the West Bank increased and intensified. Armed settlers who attacked Palestinians were often protected by the Israeli army.

**2023** Prior to October 7th, Israeli army incursions in the West Bank, and settler violence against Palestinian farmers, had resulted in [300 Palestinian deaths](#), including 42 children.

**October 7th, 2023** Hamas fighters broke through the border fence from Gaza and attacked military posts, a kibbutz and a rock festival. In the ensuing fighting, 695 Israeli civilians, 71 foreign nationals, and 373 members of the Israeli security forces were killed, as well as an unknown number of Hamas fighters. The Hamas fighters took 240 hostages back into Gaza.

*We end our historical account here. The history of the ensuing war will surely show that the Israeli response to the Hamas atrocity constitutes genocide. In the following we summarise some further long term influences on the conflict.*

**Israel and the United Nations** The US has vetoed 53 UN Security Council resolutions that are critical of Israel, including at least four condemning Israel's settlements on Palestinian land, which are considered illegal under international law. Despite its obligations to cooperate with the Special Rapporteurs and facilitate their UN-mandated work, since 2008 Israel has refused to grant entry to the UN Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories.

The United Nations Works and Relief Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA) was created in 1950. Still working in the camps set up for 1948 refugees from Israel, UNWRA continues to administer refugee services, such as welfare, health, education, infrastructure and emergency responses in times of armed conflict.

Currently, Israel is refusing visas to all UN officials following the UN Secretary's criticism of Israel's conduct during the current war in Gaza.

## Israel and International Law

Israel has violated international law in a multitude of ways during its existence, including

- official discrimination and apartheid against citizens and subjects;
- annexation of territory;
- not fulfilling its legal responsibilities as occupier (e.g. by building illegal settlements, not protecting the indigenous population from settler violence);

- by depriving the Palestinians of an adequate water supply, and diverting most of the available water to the illegal settlements;
- by mistreatment of children and minors;
- war crimes (eg. collective punishment, use of white phosphorus, the targeting of civilians);
- violations of human rights, cruel and degrading treatment against detainees;
- imprisonment without trial (‘Administrative Detention.’)

Israel is undeterred by international law, due to its extremely strong relationship with the United States. The US consistently vetoes UN Security Council resolutions on Israel’s conduct in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, preventing UN action.

**US support for Israel** In 2020, the US gave \$3.8bn (£2.7bn) in aid to Israel - part of a long-term, yearly commitment made under the Obama administration. Almost all of this aid was for military assistance. This support came as part of an agreement signed by former president Barack Obama in 2016 for an overall package of \$38bn (£26.8bn) in military aid over the decade 2017-2028. US support for Israel in part comes from the doctrines of [Christian Zionism](#) – exemplified by this 1981 quote from its leader Jerry Falwell:

“To stand against Israel is to stand against God”.

Beyond the US, international support for Israel is largely confined to other white settler-colonial countries of the former British Empire, and to other former imperial nations in western Europe and Japan – see the map on page 21.

**Apartheid** Apartheid originated in South Africa. Article 7 of the 1998 United Nations Rome Statute qualifies apartheid as a crime against humanity and defines it as

“inhumane acts...committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime”

### Who says Israel practises apartheid?

- Desmond Tutu (2014, probably earlier)
- Amnesty International (2022)
- Israeli Human Rights NGOs Yesh Din (2020) and B’Tselem (2021)
- United Nations Human Rights experts (2022)
- Human Rights Watch (2021)
- Jeremy Corbyn
- **But** not the Archbishop of Canterbury, despite appeals from Palestinian Christians that their plight be recognised by the Church of England
- **And** not the UK government or Keir Starmer’s Labour Party

Early awareness of what was to come: advertisement placed in Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz by Moshe Machover and others in 1967, shortly after the Six-Day War



Our right to defend ourselves from extermination does not give us the right to oppress others.

Occupation entails foreign rule,

Foreign rule entails resistance,

Resistance entails oppression,

Oppression entails terror and counter terror.

The victims of terror are mostly innocent civilians.

Holding on to the occupied territory will turn us into a nation of murderers and murder victims.

Let us get out of the occupied territories immediately!

### Short reading list

1. [Palestinians and Israelis, a Short History of Conflict](#) by Michael Scott-Baumann, The History Press, 2023 edition
2. [The State of Israel vs. the Jews](#), by Sylvain Cypel, Other Press, New York, 2021 – a painful and infuriating account of the callous cruelty of the occupation, and its dehumanising effect on the occupiers.
3. [The Myth of Self-Defence](#), video by David Hearst, Editor of Middle East Eye, accuses the international community and particularly the UK of giving “the greenest of green lights” to Israel to do as it likes and in particular to commit war crimes. YouTube hosts a number of other talks by David Hearst on Israel and Palestine.
4. [The Hundred Years War on Palestine, a History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance 1917-2017](#), by Rashid Khalidi, Macmillan Publishers, 2020.
5. The [website of Middle East Eye](#) suggests eleven books on the history of the conflict, including Rashid Khalidi’s book. The MEE website also has links to excellent videos by Mohamed Hassan.
6. The [website of Jewish Voice for Labour](#) is an excellent source of recent information and commentary.



- 7. [Against our better judgement](#), by Alison Weir, published in 2014, recounts the growth of the Zionist Lobby in the US, and the US's role in the formation of Israel; see also a [YouTube video](#) of a talk she gave on the same issue.
- 8. An understanding of the background to the conflict for a UK reader would be incomplete without a grounding on the “weaponisation of antisemitism” – the systematic and highly organised campaign of false allegations of antisemitism against critics of Israel. A good account of part of this is provided by Asa Winstanley in [Weaponising Antisemitism – how the Israel Lobby brought down Jeremy Corbyn](#), published by OR books, 2023.

### Maps



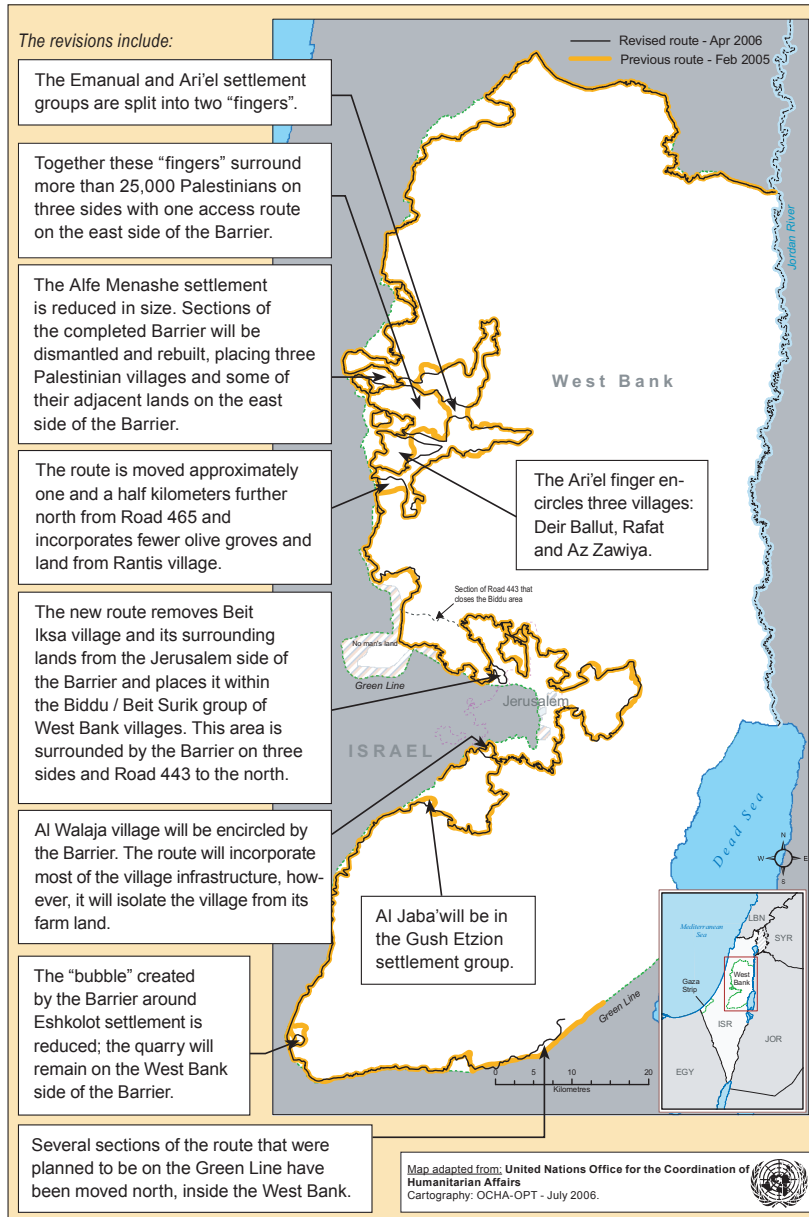
*Palestine in 1843*

(taken from [https://www.reddit.com/r/MapPorn/comments/176smxd/map\\_of\\_palestine\\_1843/](https://www.reddit.com/r/MapPorn/comments/176smxd/map_of_palestine_1843/))



*The West Bank, showing Areas A,B and C (from [www.passia.org](http://www.passia.org))*

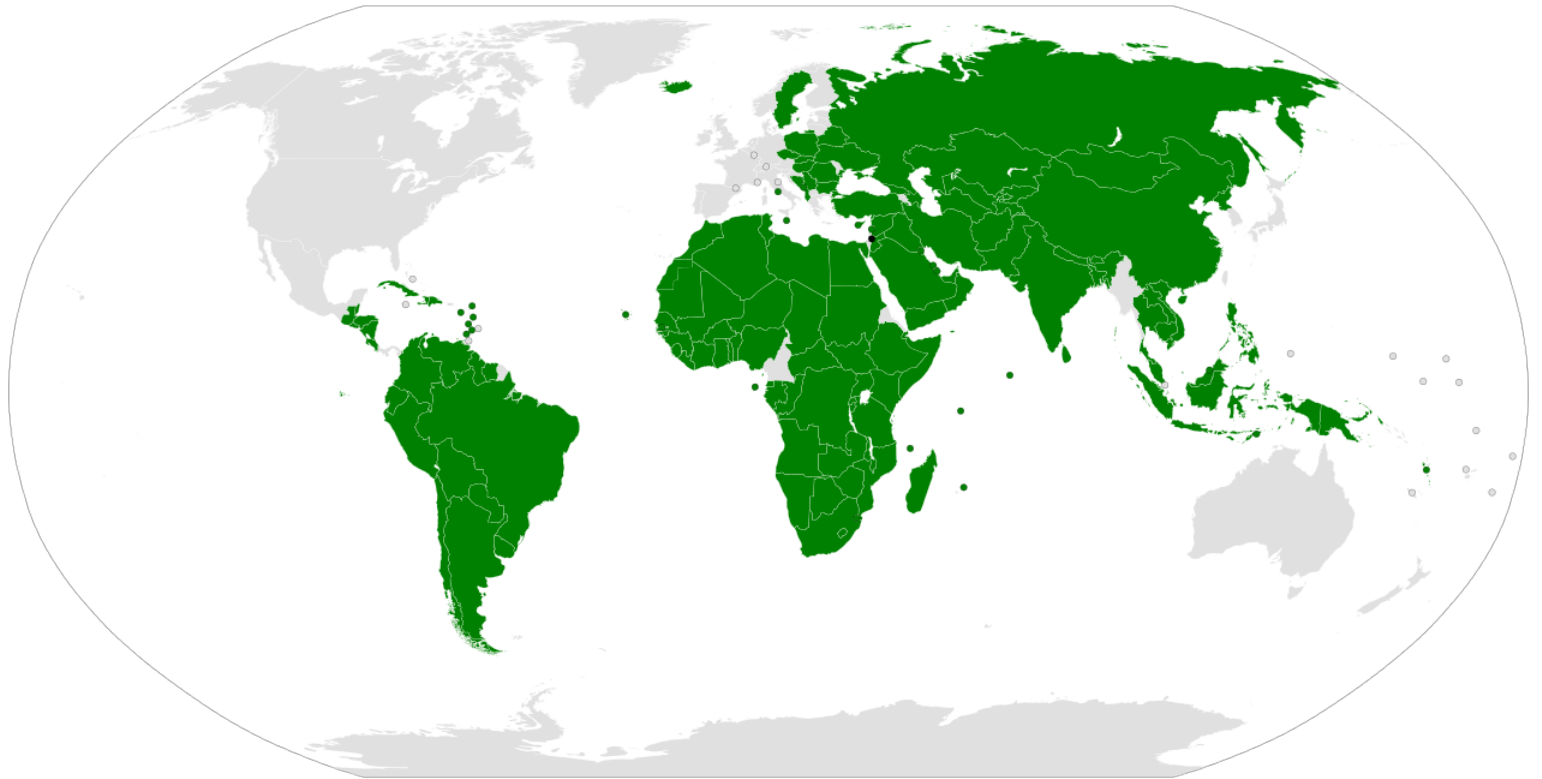
The website of the Israeli NGO Peace Now has a [very detailed and up-to-date map](#) showing the Israeli settlements in the West Bank.



*The route of the Separation Wall (from [www.passia.org](http://www.passia.org))*



*Which countries have recognised the state of Palestine?*



*Countries which recognise Palestine are shown in green, those which have not in grey*

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