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# Israel and Palestine: Conflicts and Peace

## Looking for an Answer:

### Settlements, Security and Violence in Israel

What would you say if you were told to run half a mile in 15 seconds? Impossible, right? Now imagine that you have 15 seconds to run from wherever it is you are to the nearest bomb shelter to avoid being the next victim of Hamas' recent bombardment of rockets. To us this seems unimaginable, but to the Israeli citizens living within range of Gaza, it is a routine part of their day. A mere 15 seconds is all that stands between their lives and their deaths. Israelis all over the country live in constant fear of attack; always wondering whether or not their daily bus route will be the next to be blown up, or if today is the day that they or their loved ones gets stabbed by a Palestinian terrorist. However, the violence is not only localized to the areas surrounding Gaza. Virtually all Israeli citizens are at risk of attack due to the uncoordinated, random acts of terror committed by Palestinian insurgents. While this may seem one sided, it is in-fact not. The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict has been raging on for roughly 70 years since Israel's inception. Many experts, and avid followers of the conflict, attribute the most recent wave of violence to the rise in Jewish settlement construction and the increase in security and checkpoints in the West Bank. While the rise in settlement building is only one out of dozens of alleged reasons for the demise of current peace talks and an increase in violence, I believe that it is the most important.

I am working on the topic of the effect of Palestinian violence in relation to increased settlement expansion and security. I have found that there is a correlation between the increase in settlement expansion and checkpoint security with the rise in violence by Palestinians against Israelis. Knowing the effect of settlement expansion and increased security in the West Bank helps me claim that expansion and stricter security measures leads to increased violence by Palestinians due to a sharp decrease in their autonomy and freedom. This information should help my readers better understand the complexity of settlement building and stricter security, and its relationship to the increase in terrorist attacks across Israel. This is important because we live in a world long overdue for peace and security in which innocent people are not being killed on the basis of religion or ideology. Terrorism may never cease to exist, but perhaps putting an end to this conflict can lessen terrorist fervor and mentality. The question of settlement expansion and security in relation to violence is one that can be solved, but it won't be easy. All the Palestinians really desire is the ability to live safe, stable lives, but each terrorist attack committed brings them farther and farther from that dream. Learning about the causes of the conflict and the relationship between both parties is the beginning to the long-awaited end. By gaining a better understanding as to why each side does what it does, we are that much closer to finding a peaceful solution, and possibly see an end to one of the most difficult situations in modern day history.

Depending on who you ask, person A will say the chicken came first, and person B will say the egg came first – it's just one of those cyclical questions where you aren't really sure who is right and who is wrong. Much like this age-old question, the question of who started the Israel-Palestinian conflict is also highly contested. Many people believe that the first step to solving

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this issue is to place blame, but in reality that does not matter. It doesn't matter who did or did not start the fight. What matters is how it is handled. Both the Palestinians and Israelis are to blame for the vicious cycle of violence and degradation. While there are many reasons as to why the Gaza War in 2014 began, it could have thought to have been incited by the kidnapping of the three Israeli teens in the West Bank. This led to the launching of a mission to find and arrest the various Hamas leaders in charge, which led to rocket attacks against Israel, and so on. The back and forth cycle of violence on both sides is further exacerbated by the increase in settlement construction.

The construction of Israeli settlements has been ongoing since 1967. The most common reason for this is the sheer need for housing. Israel's population is rapidly rising, and the increase in housing construction correlates to the sharp increase in population over the years. In March of 2015, The Israeli Housing Ministry was told to "stop processing a plan to expand the Jerusalem neighborhood of Har Homa which... calls for the construction of 1,500 housing units" (Ettinger). This was enacted in hopes of furthering peace talks between the Israelis and Palestinians, which was on its way to becoming successful. However, in September 2015, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu revoked that decree, and reinstated the construction of settlements in response to the rise in violence against Israelis. According to the UN Human Rights Council's Thirty-first session, "the escalation in violence in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory... led to the hardening of the government position," resulting in the increased construction of settlements "in retaliation for acts of violence by Palestinians" (Ban Ki-Moon). The construction does not come without flaws. Increased settlement construction displaces Palestinian citizens, increasing their animosity and hatred of Israelis leading to an outburst in stabbings and car-ramping. Further investigation by the Special Committee of the UN, who was tasked with investigating alleged human rights violations of the Palestinian people, concluded that "it was obvious from the testimonies that the root cause of the escalating violence is the continuing policy of settlement expansion" (Legal Monitor Worldwide). It is clear that there is a direct relationship between the increase in violence and the increase in settlement expansion. While I am not saying that Israel is right for displacing Palestinians, or that Palestinians are justified in killing innocent civilians, I recognize the complexity of the situation and the inability of either side to stop their practices completely.

It seems to be that the intensity of violence depends on the action that Israel takes in response to previous acts of violence. After the killing of the Palestinian teenager, Hamas sent dozens of rockets over the border into Israel proper in 2014. In 2015, various stabbings, bombings, and car attacks occurred in reaction to the increased security restrictions barring Palestinian entry into Israel from the West Bank. This increase in violence increases hostility, further dividing both sides, polarizing the two governments even more. The Wall Street Journal Reporter Joshua Mitnick quotes Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who claims, "in a region destabilized by militant Islamist groups, Israel will need to retain security control overall all the West Bank for the 'foreseeable' future." It is possible to assume that should this happen, there will be an even larger increase in violence across the country. What is interesting about the most current wave of terrorist attacks is that it is fought in a more guerilla-like style. The current "stabbing intifada," as it is being referred to, is highly unorganized and uncoordinated. Civilians on both sides constantly take the conflict into their own hands and think that their actions are justified and validated, which is highly incorrect. What Israeli and Palestinian radicals alike do not understand is that the increase in construction of settlements and violence will not solve their problems. All that does is amplify retaliatory reactions on both sides making it harder and harder for government officials to work towards a peaceful solution. Nikolay Abadjiev quotes Assaf

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Moghadam who says that around 14% of the terrorist attacks [taken] place in [the] West Bank... were directed to Israeli settlers as a form of opposition to the settlement policy. Professor Moghadam made this statement in 2003 during the height of the second intifada, which is still prevalent to today's conflict. While the numbers may change, the concept remains the same – Palestinians lash out through violence and terrorism in response to settlement and security policy and construction.

According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, International Humanitarian Law is a set of rules which aims to limit the effects of armed conflict by protecting persons who are not or are no longer participating in the hostilities. By actively targeting and killing innocent Israeli citizens, who are in no way involved in committing violent acts, Palestinian terrorists are in clear violation of this law. However, due to the uncoordinated and unorganized nature of the attacks, it is impossible to prosecute the attacker through the International Court of Justice. The attacks are a violation of the international norms of morality, and while considered war crimes, are not tried as such. Palestinian organizations and leaders both praise and reward the attackers, and take responsibility for those actions. Taking it a step further, they attempt to justify the various attacks against Israeli citizens by arguing that “all means are legitimate in fighting for independence against a foreign occupation” (B'Tselem).

In order to try and restrict the movement of terrorists into Israel proper, The Israeli Defense Forces have increased security through stronger restrictions and tougher checkpoints. While it is meant to increase security and safety for the people of Israel, the security restrictions only further exacerbate the problem, and further aggravate the Palestinians. Prime Minister Netanyahu was asked on more than one occasion “to deploy more soldiers and checkpoints, and to put curfews on Palestinian movement” (Jones). Stricter restriction of movement in and out of the West Bank rids the Palestinians of any freedoms they once had, causing them to respond in the only way that they know will get the Israeli Government's attention: violence. “Palestinian attacks, disorganized and unpredictable as they are, reflect the frustration and despair Palestinians young and old feel as hopes of peace remain in deep freeze” (Marshall). The reason for the increase in security is to protect innocent civilians from being killed or wounded simply because they are Israeli. Israel has tried numerous times to decrease security, but each time the soldiers let their guard down, innocent people die. The fact of the matter is that Israel does not trust Palestinian citizens enough to give them full autonomy of movement throughout the West Bank and Israel. The complete betrayal and lack of trust of Israel against the Palestinian Authority and the Palestine Liberation Organization was clearly outlined during a U.S federal trial in February 2015. At the end of the six-week trial the jury ruled that the “Palestinian government financed and supported six terrorist acts... and continues to do so today” (Kasmer-Jacobs). In addition to this, the United States “Congress has annually allocated \$400 million to the Palestinian Authority in foreign aid” to fix schools, houses, hospitals and roads (Kasmer-Jacobs). However, it is known that instead of allocating the funds where intended, they were used by Hamas to build tunnels and rockets for the sole purpose of killing Israelis. These actions validate Israel's paranoia because almost every time Israel has sent humanitarian aid to the territories, it was used to advance the terrorists agenda, not help the people. The reason Israel is so adamant against the PA having full autonomy over the West Bank ultimately comes down to security. The Judean Hills are in the West Bank and are a vital military outpost for the Israeli Defense Forces. Israel greatly benefits from the territorial expansion policy for “security concerns...having a strategic land control over the area... limiting the opportunities of any Palestinian resistance movement in the area” (Abadjiev). Herein lies the essence of the conflict; Israel tries to increase the security and safety of its citizens by

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restricting movement of terrorists, causing Palestinians to lash out and attack due to their hatred of Israeli safety implementations.

Peace is complicated. What began as a war of religion seventy years ago has now become a war of destruction in which Palestinian radicals want to see the eradication of the state of Israel. After having invested so much time and effort into trying to get a better grasp and understanding of this topic, I still do not know what the solution could possibly be. What I do know for certain is that if either side is truly serious about peace then there needs to be a serious change. If the conflict continues on the trajectory that it is currently on, we will only see more bloodshed and violence by both parties. The best way to achieve change is through a change in government and leadership. While Israel has a fairly stable government, it operates as a coalition and right now the coalition is being run by the Right. What Israel needs is “a centrist governing coalition [which] could halt Israel’s slide toward illiberalism” (Krebs). Israel needs a leader that understands the plight of the Palestinian people, to be able to sympathize with and work with the unstable PA government. Recent coalitions, arguably since Shimon Perez, continue to fuel the ethnocentric tendencies of the Israeli people brought on by decades of violence and segregation by continuing to build, and restrict Palestinian independence. In addition to this, the PA President Mahmoud Abbas has severely lost influence within his government and with the recent merger with Hamas will, no doubt, lose his power almost completely if things do not begin to change. The government is so unstable and volatile that there is a high likelihood that “the Palestinian Authority will collapse sometime in the next two years” (Al Bawaba). Since the Arab Spring in 2011, many world governments are nervous to see how the PA pans out in the coming years. They fear that there will be an increase violent insurrections, chaos, and anarchy in the region.

While this is a valid concern, I think that the Palestinian Authority should in fact collapse. By breaking down the current Palestinian regime, a new set of leaders can come into power. I have faith that a new, more moderate leader, will come into power in the coming years who would be willing to compromise with Israel to help increase the Palestinian standard of living and autonomy. What is worrying is the possibility for the complete opposite to occur. Instead of a rational, moderate leader willing to follow through with the peace talks, Hamas or potentially ISIS will take over. The merger of Fatah and Hamas in 2014 has yet to cause any major issues, but if a Hamas leader comes to power, there is no telling the outcome and level of destruction that will occur. Abbas has also mentioned that he would like to retire soon, however there is no clear indication as to who will take his place. “The most likely candidate, Marwan Barghouti, is currently serving five life sentences in an Israeli prison after having been convicted of murder in 2004” (Al Bawaba). If that is not a clear indication of the illegitimacy and instability of the Palestinian Authority, then I don’t know what is.

Even though many skeptics around the world do not believe that peace is possible in this life time, I do. I truly believe that both sides want to end this conflict. In order to do so, they both need to make sacrifices, which Israel has done, but the Palestinian Authority has not. What I fail to see is how both governments do not realize that violence is not the answer. Whether it be through construction, checkpoints, stabbings, or bombings, violence is never the answer and only makes things worse. Diplomacy is the only way to make a lasting change in this region. Instead of focusing on ways to retaliate against each other, experts should be focusing on ways to fix both governments and replace the current leaders with moderate, well-liked, sensible leaders willing to sit down and create a viable peace plan.