The United Nations
Security Council (UNSC)

Israel – Palestine Conflict

STUDY GUIDE

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Introduction to the Committee:

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) works for the maintenance of international peace and security as its main responsibility. The first held session was on the 17th of January 1946 at Westminster, London. The UNSC is one of the six main organs in the United Nations and it is also responsible for reinforcing peace-making operations, establishing international sanctions, authorize military action and determine the future of any risk against international security.

Israel-Palestine Conflict:

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the continuous dispute between the Arab-Palestinian and Jewish population over the area of Palestine, nowadays divided among the Gaza strip, the West Bank and the State of Israel. Since Israel was founded in 1948 by local and international statesmen, diplomats and organizations have endeavoured to achieve a two-state solution respectful of the peoples’ rights and self-determination. Nevertheless, disagreement over water rights, borders, refugee rights, security and control over the city of Jerusalem have prevented a final resolution of the conflict. The problem between the Arab-Palestinian and Jewish peoples is part of the broader Arab-Israeli conflict and remains as one of the most notorious international disputes.

Origins and history of the conflict from late 19th Century to present

Late 19th century to 1920’s: Origins

Before the First World War, the region of Palestine, controlled by the Ottoman Empire, was mainly inhabited by Arab Muslims as well as by minorities of Arab Christians and Jews. However, most of the Jewish population was scattered around the world, with significant communities in Eastern and Central Europe, the Mediterranean and the American continent.

At the time (from the 1850’s to the 1880’s) the Jewish population of several parts of Europe was facing serious persecution- the pogroms in Russia are an example. As a solution to this problem, Jewish intellectuals began considering the emigration of Jews back to their ancestral homeland: the Land of Israel in Palestine. In fact, this Return to Zion had been part of Jewish religious thought over centuries. However, it was until then that the question took force, leading to the creation of the World Zionist Organization in 1897, a political movement which advocated for the creation of a Jewish homeland in the Land of Israel. The recently established organization encouraged Jewish immigration in Palestine by funding land purchases; as a result, Arab nationalism emerged in the region.

The increasing land purchases made by European and Russian Jews from Arab owners raised concern in the area, due to the Arabs being dispossessed. In 1892 the Ottoman authorities intervened and banned land sales to foreigners; however, this was not because they were Jews, but European and Russian. Still, by the beginning of the First World War, Jewish population in Palestine had risen to more than 60,000.

During the war, the population of Palestine, both Muslim and Jewish, supported the Allies (lead by Britain, France and Russia) since their victory in war would mean the release of Palestine from Ottoman rule. Even before the end of the war, Britain promised the Arabs and Jews the creation of states for both peoples. When the Ottomans were finally defeated, the control of Palestine passed to British hands.

1920-1948: British Mandate of Palestine

The Treaty of Sevres (the Treaty that dealt with the defeated Ottoman Empire) finally granted Britain the territories of Palestine and Transjordan- in the latter kingdom of Jordan - was created with the aim of giving a homeland to the Palestinians in 1921.
Growth of anti-Semitism in Europe led to further Jewish immigration to Palestine during the mandate period; by 1926, 90,000 Jewish immigrants had arrived since the end of the First World War. Fed by a feeling of threat to national identity, Arab nationalist groups became hostile towards the Jewish population. Through the 1920’s, relations between both groups were marked by the use of violence and terror, hence, throughout the decade and well into the 1930’s various riots against the Jewish population took place: the Jaffa Riots in 1921, the Palestine Riots in 1929 and the Arab Revolt (1936-1939). In response to the violence used by the Arabs, which lead to massacres and big blood sheds, the Jews founded a defence force - the Haganah, first a loose organization but after the Arab riots in 1929, a highly organized and effective force.

The British intervened on various occasions by bringing up potential solutions; most notably the Peel Commission (1936-37) and the White Paper (1939). While the Peel Commission proposed a reasonable two-state solution, accepted by some sectors of the Jewish leadership and immediately rejected by that of the Arabs, the White paper of 1939 proposed a one-state solution that undermined the rights of the Jewish population (the Jews would become a minority under such a state).

After the Second World War, the Jews established the Jewish Resistance Movement, a paramilitary organization dedicated at launching attacks at the British authorities due to Britain’s persistent policies, mainly the immigration restrictions to Jews entering Palestine. Later on, the organization would focus its efforts on helping European Jewish refugees to enter Palestine illegally.

On the 3rd of September 1947 a committee from the newly established United Nations issued a report recommending the establishment of an Arab State, a Jewish State and the City of Jerusalem. This report later formed part of the UN’s Partition Plan for Palestine.

On 14 May 1948 David Ben-Gurion, executive head of the World Zionist Organization, declared the establishment of a Jewish state upon the borders proposed by the 1947 Partition Plan for Palestine. The new state would be known as the State of Israel and become independent upon the expiration of the British mandate for Palestine the next day. The decades following the establishment of Israel were marked by wars and violence between both conflicting sides.

1948: The Arab-Israeli War

The declaration of the establishment of Israel was followed by the rapid invasion of the armies of Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon on the days of 15 and 16 May 1948. This invasion exploded into a war between Israel and the mentioned Arab States that ended with
Israel’s victory and, consequently, the signing of an armistice (1949 Armistice Agreements). The victorious Israelis annexed territory beyond the borders proposed by the UN in 1947 for a Jewish State and into those for a proposed Arab state. Meanwhile, the remaining territory was controlled by two Arab nations- the Gaza Strip by Egypt and the West Bank by Jordan. Also, the city of Jerusalem was divided, with Israel controlling the west side and Jordan the east side. These armistice lines were respected until 1967.

The outcome of the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 was a massive exodus of Arab Palestinians from the new State of Israel into neighbouring states were they ended up as refugees. Official UN sources fix at 726,000 the number of Arab-Palestinians that mobilized out of Israel. Similarly hundreds of thousands of Jews were expelled from Arab countries, with the advantage, however, of having the opportunity to become citizens of a country of their own. With the exception of Jordan, the rest of neighbouring Arab countries would not grant Palestinians the citizenship.

1948-1967: The Suez War, the PLO and the Six Day War

The following years were of relatively peaceful relations between Israel and its neighbouring Arab countries, until in 1956, as part of an Arab economic boycott, Egypt closed the Suez Canal, cutting Israel’s trade and supply of essential goods. Israel decided to invade Egypt, starting the 1956 Suez War, along with Britain and France. The conflict ended with the efforts of the USA and the USSR, both of which pressured the forces (Britain, France and Israel) to withdraw. The result of the war was a radicalization of the conflict, were Arab leaders openly spoke about the need to eliminate Israel.

In May 1964 a very important event took place for the Palestinian people; the founding of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Its aim was the liberation of Palestinian territory through armed struggled to grant the Palestinian people self-determination. The PLO would eventually become composed of different guerrilla groups and political organizations, such as Fatah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). It was recognized as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people by the United Nations and over 100 states and has enjoyed observer status at the UN since 1974 (independent from the Palestinian Authority founded in 1994, which recently obtained the status of observer, non-member state at the UN).

The events leading to the 1967 Six Day War included: terrorist activity after the formation of the PLO, tensions with neighbours (e.g.: Jordan and Syria), Egypt’s expulsion of UNEF (emergency forces stationed at the Egyptian-Israeli border after the Suez War), and the military agreements between Syria, Jordan and Egypt. In such state of affairs, in June 1967 Israel decided to launch a preventative attack against Egypt, that with Egypt’s and other Arab states’ retaliation became known as the Six Day War. By the end of the war Israel had seized the Gaza Strip and the entire Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the West Bank from Jordan (including East Jerusalem) and Syria’s Golan Heights. The UN’s Security Council Resolution 242 of 1967 urged the
“Withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict”. The outcome of this war was a further radicalization of positions, where the Arab countries agreed at the Khartoum summit to “no recognition, no negotiation, and no peace with Israel.”

IDF tanks roll into the Sinai, 1967

1967-1980’s: Yom Kippur War, terrorism and 1982 Lebanon War

The defeat of the Arab countries in the war left the Palestinians disappointed about what those countries could actually do for them. In 1968 the Fatah and Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine factions achieved majority at the Palestinian National Council (the legislative branch of the PLO) in Cairo; the following year Yasser Arafat would become chairman of the PLO, a position he would hold for the rest of his life. Under Fatah rule, the PLO attempted to seize power in the West Bank, however Israel’s Defence Forces (IDF) swiftly deported them to Jordan.

From Jordan attacks on Israel resumed and this time it was King Hussein (of Jordan) who took measures against the PLO’s factions. He ordered his army to disband the power of these groups, leading to a bloody fight on September 1970 (Black September). The fighting became a civil war, where thousands of Palestinians were killed or left the country; the conflict ended on July 1971 when the Jordanian army managed to banish the PLO and its approximate 15,000 fighters to Lebanon.

Once in Lebanon, the PLO was granted autonomy in the south of the country by the Lebanese government. Such a decision paved the way for a breeding ground of terrorist attacks against Israel and the world. Massacres, bombings, hijacking of buses and airplanes were commonplace throughout the 70’s.

The meantime, in 1973, a war broke out once again between Israel and some of its neighbours. The conflict, later named the Yom Kippur War was caused by three main factors: the failure of the international community to settle the Arab-Israeli dispute; the emergence of an Arab coalition that sought to fight and challenge Israel once more; and the pouring of arms from the superpowers into the region (the USSR to its Arab allies, the US to Israel). The fighting started when on October 6, 1973 (the day of Yom Kippur, the holiest in the Jewish calendar) Egypt and Syria mobilized their troops into Israel as part of a surprise attack. During the initial part of the war, the Arabs were successful in advancing into Israel as part of the Six Day War; however the following days the situation was reversed in Israel’s favour. Eventually an armistice was agreed by both parts on October 24 and later on a disengagement plan was fulfilled by May 1974 where Israel was to withdraw from the Suez area and the Golan Heights. This disengagement plan lead to the Camp David Accords of 1978, where a peace treaty was signed between Egypt and Israel; the accords would bring about Israel’s return of the Sinai to Egypt.

After the defeat of the Arab states in the Yom Kippur War, the PLO realized they had to structure a long-term plan to gain territory in Israel. This is why in 1974 the Palestinian National Council approved the Ten Point Program. Its aim was to establish a national authority over every part of Palestinian territory liberated and again it supported the views the PLO had always expressed: the denial of Israel’s existence, the right of return to Palestinian refugees and the creation of an Arab-Palestinian state in the actual state of Israel. The Ten Point Program stated armed struggle would remain a means of achieving these aims, however it also emphasized the need to recur to diplomacy.
As mentioned before, terrorist acts from the PLO’s factions against Israel were common during the 70’s. As a consequence of the atrocities committed by such groups and by a need to tackle these problems, the conservative Likud Party won the Israeli legislative elections of 1977: the party’s agenda was largely devoted to the establishment of settlements in the West Bank. The coastal road massacre in 1978 was the straw that broke the camel’s back: Fatah members captured a bus in Israel and shot and killed 37 people. In response to the massacre the Israeli government launched Operation Litani with the purpose of occupying the south of Lebanon up to the Litani River - the Operation was successful and the PLO withdrew to Beirut.

Following the operation a cease fire was agreed (in 1981) that lasted until the summer of 1982 when a member of the PLO attempted the assassination of the Israeli Ambassador in the UK. In this way Israel invaded Lebanon (1982 Lebanon War) with the aim of expelling the PLO definitely from that country. The city of Beirut was surrounded until the US government brokered an agreement to end the siege and evacuate Arafat and the PLO from Lebanon into faraway Tunisia; here the PLO relocated its headquarters but its military units became dispersed around North Africa and the Middle East. After the fighting the world was outraged by a massacre committed during the fighting by a Christian Arab phalange while Israeli troops surrounded the camp where Palestinian civilians were living as refugees - between 700 to 3500 people were slaughtered.

1987-1993: First Palestinian Intifada

The social problems, insecurity and tension prevailing among Palestinian society exploded into a rebellion: disobedience to the authorities, strikes, a boycott on Israeli goods, and stone-throwing at Israel’s Defence Forces. The Uprising or ‘Intifada’ began in Gaza and spread to the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The PLO was not involved nor did it start the riots that lasted from 1987 to 1993; approximately 2000 Palestinians were killed and 160-300 Israelis. 1987 also brought the foundation of a radical Palestinian Islamic movement - Hamas. Since its creation it has insisted upon the need of destroying Israel and creating an Islamic state in place.

On November 15, 1988 the Palestinian National Council proclaimed the establishment of the State of Palestine upon the Green Line border (border demarcated in the 1949 Armistice Agreements), comprising the territories of Gaza and the West Bank. The declaration of the state was interpreted as an acceptance of Israel within its pre-1967 borders; therefore the government of the US as well as many others granted recognition to the PLO.

The PLO’s position in the 1991 Gulf War was a bad move: Yasser Arafat approved of Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait and condemned the US and its allies for attacking Iraq. This led to the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from Kuwait and to many states cutting off their financial aid to the PLO.

In 1991, the efforts of the USSR and the US lead to the realization of peace talks between Israel and Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and a Palestinian, non-PLO-associated delegation. The conference, held in Madrid, was a success in the sense that it engaged both sides into negotiation and served as a prelude to the Oslo Peace Process.
What began as secret negotiations in Oslo, Norway, between Israeli and PLO representatives in January 1993 became a huge step toward the achievement of peace thru the pursuance of a two-state solution. In September of that year the PLO made a memorable decision; it officially accepted Israel’s right to exist and renounced to terrorism. Israel’s Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, in turn, signed a document in which Israel recognized the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. This was the beginning of a long round of negotiations known as the Oslo peace process.

Major achievements of the peace process include: the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the return of the PLO to the territories of the created PA. The PA was established in 1994 and in May 4 of that same year the Cairo Agreement was signed which gave control of Gaza and the West Bank to the PA. On September 28, 1995, the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza was signed by Rabin and Arafat in Washington. The agreement permitted the PLO to move its headquarters to the Palestinian Authority’s territory (Gaza and West Bank).

In return for the agreed and negotiated, the Israeli government urged the PA to foster tolerance for Israel among Palestinians. While the process further developed, various incidents took place including the massacre of 25 Palestinians at a mosque in Hebron by a Jewish extremist; the launching of bomb suicide attacks to Israeli civilians by Hamas; and the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin by another Jewish extremist on November 1995. Shimon Peres became the new Israeli Prime Minister and, the following year, Benjamin Netanyahu of the conservative Likud Party won the elections under a promise of adopting a harder position with the Palestinian Authority at the negotiations.

Four years later, Ehud Barak took office and gave continuity to the peace process. During his administration, the Camp David 2000 Summit was held with the purpose of achieving a final status concerning Jerusalem, refugees, security, resources and borders. At the final negotiations Israeli Prime Minister Barak made overwhelmingly generous offers: the entire Gaza strip and 95% of the West Bank, the creation of a state within those territories, the destruction of isolated settlements within Palestinian territory and control over eastern Jerusalem. Arafat rejected the offer and walked out; he didn’t make a counter proposal and rather insisted upon the right of return of refugees to Israel.

The Second Intifada broke out in September 2000, triggered by the visit of a member of the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) to the Temple Mount. The period was marked by the use of violence and terror, especially by Hamas. In response, Israel’s Defence Forces made arrests and raids in the West Bank.

The following year began with the Taba Summit; again a Palestinian and an Israeli representative met together to reach a final status, however there was no concrete result. The Prime Minister elected after Taba, Ariel Sharon, came to office with a hard-line policy toward Palestine’s terrorist organizations and Yasser Arafat. The upcoming year brought another Summit- the Beirut Summit on March 2002. The Arab League countries met together to discuss a proposal to Israel; nevertheless such a proposal, the first initiative of the Arab world, was turned down by Israel.
Continued terrorist acts from Hamas lead to Israel setting Operation Defence Shield (March-May 2002). The operation consisted in the invasion and reoccupation of the West Bank and its major towns, where the IDF’s target became the destruction of the Palestinian Authority’s infrastructure. Operation Defence Shield plus the construction of the West Bank Security Fence in 2003 contributed to a 90% decrease of terrorist attacks in Israel.

West Bank security fence

In 2003 the Road Map for Peace plan was put forth by the US, the EU, Russia and the Middle East which would later be known as the Quartet on the Middle East. The plan aimed at creating a democratic Palestinian state that would definitely abandon violence and force. Before starting the talks the US and Israel made clear it was necessary that Arafat appoint Mahmoud Abbas as Prime Minister because they were not willing to negotiate with Arafat once again. The condition for Israel was to freeze settlement construction so as to contribute to the process of peace-making. The plan consists of three stages that culminate with a final agreement and an end to the conflict. The Road Map for peace was several times interrupted and its goals haven’t yet been achieved to this day.

After Yasser Arafat passed out in November 2004, Mahmoud Abbas became president of the PA and returned to the implementation of the Road Map for peace plan. In February 2005 Abbas and Sharon agreed to a cease-fire and in August of that year, the Israelis would start their withdrawal from the settlements- in total they expelled approximately 9,000 people from 25 different settlements both in Gaza and the West Bank.

2005 to present: Hamas in Gaza and Palestine voted non-member observer state

Quickly after Arafat’s death Fatah became increasingly unpopular, one of the reasons being rumours about a lack of transparency in the management of finance by party members. At the same time Hamas was growing in popularity because it did improve the people’s welfare through the establishment of institutions and, moreover, it was emphatic in that it did not recognize Israel’s right to exist. In the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections Hamas (considered a terrorist organization by the US and other nations) won a majority of seats and consequently many countries, including the USA, cut off funds to the Palestinian Authority.

Since Hamas’ victory in the elections it has caused trouble; in 2006 it began fighting with Israel in Gaza and in 2007 it began a conflict with Fatah that lead to the division of the Palestinian Authority into two, with...
bombarding Hamas’ public infrastructure as well as houses, schools, hospitals, etc. In January 3, 2009 IDF invaded Gaza by ground.

On 25 November 2009, probably under US pressure, Israel issued a 10-month construction halt on settlements in the West Bank as an attempt to restart negotiations. Although the Palestinians initially refused, in September 2010 the US managed to arrange talks between Israel and the PA (represented by Mahmoud Abbas) in Washington. The talks, however, were interrupted when the PA realized the building moratorium of settlements was about to expire. The Palestinians stated they would quit negotiations if the Israeli government didn’t renew the moratorium. Israel refused to renew the moratorium, however it then announced it would renew it if the PA recognized Israel as the national home of the Jewish people, an offer rejected by the Palestinian leadership.

In September 2011 the Palestinian Authority issued a request to the United Nations to be recognized as the State of Palestine and therefore as a full-member state. Although the request was not voted, it was seen as a pointless action that would certainly be vetoed by the United States. After Mahmoud Abbas submitted the application the White House communicated it “opposed actions to achieve a Palestinian state through the United Nations”. The US holds that position because it believes taking decisions directly concerning Israel and Palestine only serves to distance the parts, whereas a direct negotiation between both sides is the only way to reach a true solution to the conflict.

On November 12, 2012, exactly 65 years after the Partition Plan for Palestine was passed, the General Assembly voted to grant Palestine non-member observer status at the United Nations. The resolution was adopted with 138 in favour to nine against with 41 abstentions by the 193-member Assembly. The observer status grants Palestine the right to speak at the UN’s General Assembly meetings, participate in procedural votes but not to vote on resolutions. While Abbas called the resolution a “birth certificate of the reality of the State of Palestine”, Ron Prosor, the Israeli Ambassador, said peace could only be achieved through negotiations, not via the UN route.

On November 14, 2012, Israel’s Defence Forces launched Operation Pillar of Defence in the Gaza strip with the purpose of ending the continued rocket attacks over the past 24 hours. The offensive began with the killing of Ahmed Jabari, the chief of Hamas’ military units and the responsible for many of the terrorist actions committed against Israel from Gaza. By 18 November Israel’s Defence Forces had attacked approximately 1,350 terrorist targets and of the total 1,128 rockets fired from Gaza into Israel, 324 were intercepted by the Iron Dome missile defence system. Although IDF tried to avoid the killing of Palestinian civilians, more than half of the dead turned out to be women and children. The fighting ended with a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas with Egypt’s mediation.

Problems generated by the conflict:

Throughout the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict there have been other problems as consequence of the conflict created:

Borders of Jerusalem: Jerusalem in both Jew and Arabic religion is the most important settlement in which the main religious aspects take place; therefore Jerusalem has a sacred meaning to both Israel and Palestine. Israel claims that Jerusalem should stay within Israel’s political and cultural control and it is also considered as “Israel’s
capita”; Palestine claims several Jerusalem territories which are claimed not to be part of Israel’s settlement. Jerusalem’s population has been a victim of attacks by the Palestine population referred as terrorists; terrorist’s attacks like bomb explosions, destruction of property and murder of population; there have been protests claimed to be from the Palestine/Arab population.

Refugees: One of the main consequences for the Israel Palestine conflict is the destruction of many families’ settlements in both territories. The number of refugees has been rising as the Israel-Palestine conflict continues. Two of the main reasons are: most of both territories’ population are in danger of any sort of attack which leads to severe destruction of edification and their own lives; also, a large amount of population have been displaced from their homes, specially Arab habitants of Israel and Jew habitants of Arab and Palestine. Most of refugees have settled in refugee’s camps, but most of these camps have been unable to attend the necessities of these people because of their lack in space and resources to maintain large amount of people. Although the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) provide aid to Israel and Palestine conflict victim refugees, there is still a large amount of refugees (an estimate of 2 million people registered in refugee camps) which does not cover the resources offered in refugee camps. There are 58 UNRWA-recognized refugee camps in places like Jordan, Lebanon, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and Syria.

Immigration: Immigration refers to the “The action of coming to live permanently in a foreign country.” This consequence can be divided as two parts within the Israel Palestine conflict context. The first immigration consequence throughout the conflict is shown when the Palestine population was prohibited to cross Palestine borders; Palestine people who lived in Israel were forced to leave the territory. Palestine population who made an attempt to cross the border lead to violent responses from Israel’s guardians which lead the restriction of many families’ reunification. The UN adopted resolution 194, which stated "that the 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 in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible.” Although this resolution was settled, Palestine population is still in a social conflict where they are not accepted into Israel’s lands.

The other consequence related to immigration has been a problem not only for both territories in conflict but for other territories as well. Many of the populations living in life danger and not appropriate living conditions have been immigrating to other places like Lebanon, Syria and Saudi Arabia. These countries receive large numbers of immigrants and although these countries have refugee camps for any Israel Palestine conflict victims, they are in denial of receiving many immigrants to live in their lands permanently.

Fatalities: According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, there is an estimate of 14,500 Israelis and Palestinians killed between 1948 to 2009. Also, many cities between the two territories in conflict have been destructed during attacks where bombs, shootings and murders have taken place. The destruction of cities has left most of the population in extreme poverty and as refugees. One of the main consequence which the Israel Palestine conflict have lead to, is the extreme environment of violence and non peaceful
resolutions between them; this has affect decisions and actions taken place during the conflict which always lead to life threatening situations for the population.

Questions to consider:

1. Which is your country’s position and opinion towards the conflict?
2. As delegate of your country, is your country participating in any type of intervention for the conflict?
3. Has your country participated in any type of aid? Financial? Social?
4. What is your country’s position about war? Do you support the violence in the conflict?
5. Keeping in mind your country’s financial conditions, is your country willing to give financial aid to refugee camps or any other situations in necessity?

Further Reading:

- The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: http://www.trust.org/alertnet/crisis/israeli-palestinian-conflict
- Historical time-line of the conflict: http://israelipalestinian.procon.org/view.resource.php?resourceID=000635#israel1
- The Middle East/ Israel-Palestine: http://www.mideastweb.org/
- History and current issues: http://www.palestinefacts.org/

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