

Introduction to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

History, Analysis, and Prospects

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I. The Middle East Conflict: History in Data

1. Origins: from the First Zionist Congress to the Foundation of Israel

Key Words and Major Developments:

European nationalism, antisemitism, and colonialism/imperialism, **Zionism**

World War I, **The British Mandate**, World War II and the **Holocaust**, the **Foundation of Israel**

- 1886 Theodor Herzl publishes *Der Judenstaat* (“The Jewish State”)
 The book is one of several important foundational publications by Jewish intellectuals in Europe, including Russia. Many of them argued the Jews needed their own nation-state, in order to protect them from discrimination and persecution.
- 1897, August Foundational Congress of the World Zionist Organization in Basel
 The Zionists ask and work for a “Jewish Home” as an alternative to assimilation. For a long time, Zionism remains a minority position among Jews, other major alternatives to assimilation being socialism, autonomy, or Bundism (particularly in Poland).
- 1888-1903 First wave of Jewish immigration (“*aliya*”) into Palestine
- 1917, Nov. 2nd Balfour Declaration
 British Foreign Minister Lord Balfour declares, “his Majesty’s Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish People, and would use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object”.
 Major motives for the declaration were Christian philosemitism, antisemitism (e.g., prevention of emigration from Eastern European Jews to Britain or fantasies of Jewish power to keep the Russians in the war against Germany and get the Americans into it), and geostrategic considerations (protection of the British Empire and the pathway to India).
 (Arthur Koestler called the Balfour Declaration “an impossible notion”: one nation promising another nation the land of a third nation.)
- 1922, July 24 The League of Nations gives Great Britain the official “Mandate” over Palestine
 After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, France and the UK take over large areas in the Middle East as mandates – a kind of trusteeship. The League of Nations Council transfers the mandate over Palestine, then the whole area between the river Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea, to Great Britain, including the responsibility to implement the Balfour declaration.
- 1936-1939 Arab revolt against Jewish immigration and the British Mandate
 (brutally put down by Great Britain, meaning the end of a promising perspective for a successful Palestinian resistance; the revolt also demonstrates serious divisions between Arab nationalists and radical islamists)
- 1938, July International conference in Evian near Geneva
 Initiated by US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, representatives from 32 states and 24 relief organizations discuss the problem of rapidly rising numbers of refugees from Germany. With the exception of the Dominican Republic, not one country was willing to accept Jewish refugees, a boon to the Nazis’ antisemitic propaganda and a very strong negative signal to Jews everywhere.
- 1939-1945 World War II and murder of six million Jews in German concentration or extermination camps
 The Holocaust became a central factor in the switch to majority support for Zionism among Jews everywhere and for international support for a Jewish state in Palestine.

- 1939, May The McDonald White Paper makes major changes in British Mandate Policy
- It severely limits Jewish immigration (75 000 people in five years) and restricts the acquisition of land to certain areas, excluding those densely populated by Arabs; after five years further immigration would require Arab consent. The White Book envisages a binational Jewish-Arab state which would become independent within ten years and explicitly rejects the project of a Jewish state in Palestine, “reinterpreting” the Balfour Declaration:
- “His Majesty’s Government believe that the framers of the Mandate in which the Balfour Declaration was embodied could not have intended that Palestine should be converted into a Jewish State against the will of the Arab population of the country (...) His Majesty’s Government therefore now declare unequivocally that it is not part of their policy that Palestine should become a Jewish State. They would indeed regard it as contrary to their obligations to the Arabs under the Mandate, as well as to the assurances which have been given to the Arab people in the past, that the Arab population of Palestine should be made the subjects of a Jewish state against their will.”
- The major reason for the changes were (1) that the British now considered division (as suggested by the Peel Commission in 1937) “impractical” and (2) that – with major war against Germany becoming a serious possibility – they had to make concessions to the Arabs in order to prevent their defection to the other side.
- The McDonald White Paper was a shock to the Zionists, particularly the restrictions on immigration, which the British secured with force even during and after the war and the desperate situation of Jews in Europe (refugees and survivors of the holocaust; see the notorious “Exodus” affair). Illegal immigration rose, radical Jewish groups began a terrorist campaign against British soldiers and diplomats, and the Zionists now worked hard to secure support for a Jewish state from the United States,
- 1942, May Zionist Conference at the Biltmore Hotel in New York
- The conference unequivocally declares the conversion of all of Palestine into a Jewish state as the central goal of the movement, no longer the establishment of a “Jewish home” or state *within* Palestine.
- 1947, Nov. The UN General Assembly accepts a plan for the division of Palestine
- The majority vote was close; Britain abstained. More important was that both remaining superpowers, who were soon to become the dominating rivals in the East-West conflict casting their shadow and/or control over the Middle East conflict, at that time supported the creation of the Jewish state and even worked on the details together. The Soviet Union was the first country to legally recognize Israel, even before the USA. Zionist activities against Britain in the final years of the Mandate had given the Soviets hope that good relations with the new state would be a positive factor in its revived rivalry with British imperialism. This situation soon changed in the early years of the Cold War and in the 1950s the USSR finally switched to the Arab side with major weapons deliveries.
- The UN resolution for division leads to civil war between Jews and Arabs with violence on both sides, the expansion of Jewish controlled territory and the flight or forced expulsion of 300.000 Arabs even before the war of 1948/49.
- 1948, May 14 Britain resigns from the mandate and passes the conflict on to the UN
- 1948, May 14 Israeli Declaration of Independence
- 1948, May 15 Military units from several Arab countries march into Palestine

2. The Phase of Israeli-Arab Wars: from the War of Independence (Jewish perspective) or the Nakba (i.e. Catastrophe, Palestinian perspective) to Peace between Israel and Egypt

Key Words and Major Developments:

Israeli-Arab conflict, embedded within **East-West conflict**

Gamal Abdel Nasser's **Panarabism** (Nasser supports the Algerian Liberation Front and Palestinian guerillas fighting against Israel)

The 1967 war moves the conflict from **“deadlock”** (no compromise possible) to **“dilemma”** (compromise possible via “land for peace”, depending on trust and the correlations of domestic forces).

- 1948-1949 First Israeli-Arab War, Israel conquers additional territory up to the “Green Line”
- It is not, as is often suggested, a war of David against Goliath, rather a war of a David against even weaker Davids. The Jewish side was much better trained and organized militarily, and with weapons deliveries from the CSSR (after the Czech “Communist “coup”), which were supported by the Soviet Union, the Zionists also gained superiority in heavy weapons.
- The war ends with armistice agreements between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria; Jordan annexes the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Egypt occupies the Gaza Strip. Altogether 726.000 Palestinian Arabs fled or were expelled between 1947 and 1949: origin of the Palestinian refugee problem.
- 1956 Suez-War (Great Britain, France, and Israel against Egypt)
- After Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal, the UK and France bombard Port Said. Israel occupies the Gaza strip and conquers the Sinai Peninsula for territorial expansion. The USA and the Soviet Union rein Israel and the UK and France in and arrange, through the UN, a return to the status quo ante.
- 1964 Foundation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization
- (spectacular international terrorist activities in the coming years)
- 1967 Six-Day-War or “Naksa” (set-back)
- After growing tensions (border skirmishes, acts of sabotage by Palestinian guerillas) and fears of major war, Israel destroys the Egyptian and Syrian air forces in a surprise attack and conquers East Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Golan Heights and Gaza plus the Sinai peninsula, all within six days.
- 1973 Yom Kippur or October War
- Egypt and Syria, who want to recapture their lost territories, launch surprise attacks on Israel on the Sinai peninsula and the Golan Heights on a high Jewish holiday. Arab forces make major “progress”; Israel is saved through rapid US weapons deliveries and turns the war around, its troops standing near Kairo.
- In the end, to avoid their own confrontation, the superpowers intervene to stop the conflict from further escalation; the US force an armistice on Egypt and Israel, and Israel withdraws its forces to the status quo ante. UN forces are stationed on the Sinai and the Golan Heights.
- 1977 Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat talks about peace in a speech before the Knesset
- 1979 Under the mediation of US-President Carter, Egypt and Israel sign a Peace Treaty
- Egypt moves into the “Western” camp, end of major Arab-Israeli wars.

3. From Prospects for Peace to Stalemate and New Violence

Key Words and Major Developments:

PLO gives up terrorist activities, a major multilateral peace conference plus agreements between Israel and the PLO follow: for the first time, both sides **recognize** each other and establish the PA (**Palestinian Authority**), **division of the West Bank** into three areas with (very limited) Palestinian self-rule.

Continuous **increase of Jewish settlements** in the West Bank, even during peace negotiations

Israel annexes East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, withdraws from Gaza

Peace Treaty between Israel and Jordan

A major “**Land for Peace**” deal comes within sight, but strong frustration about the hiccups of the peace process and violent opposition to a substantial compromise from “veto groups” on both sides lead to stagnation and collapse, a major reason being the rise of Jewish and Islamic national and religious fundamentalism.

Israeli settlers and military withdraw from Gaza, remain in control of borders, however; Hamas gains leadership in the Gaza strip over the Palestinian Authority.

Several violent conflicts between Israel and Hamas or other Palestinian radicals in Gaza follow.

The **civil war in Syria** (since 2011) demonstrates **major power shifts in the region** (Kairo, Beirut, or Damascus are no longer the centers of Arab politics in the Middle East; the new heavyweights are Riyadh, Teheran, Abu Dhabi and Dubai): geopolitical rivalries and hostilities between the Islamic Republic of Iran and its proxies on the one hand and Arabian monarchies on the other, also leading to a rapprochement between Israel and further Arab countries.

Israel tries to prevent the buildup of a second northern front by Iranian revolutionary guards plus Hisbollah as part of their “axis of resistance”.

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| 1980, June 30 | The Knesset by law annexes East Jerusalem and declares the whole city its perpetual undivided capital |
| 1982 | Lebanon War

Israel wants to secure its northern border and to chase the PLO out of Lebanon: a long siege and heavy bombardments of Beirut follow, including a huge massacre among Palestinian refugees at the Sabra and Shatila camps by Christian militias under the eyes or even with the support of the Israeli military. The US mediate an armistice, the PLO withdraws to Tunis and Israel establishes a “Security Zone” in the south of Lebanon. |
| 1987 | The first and essentially peaceful Palestinian Intifada begins |
| 1987 | Foundation of Hamas

(which soon becomes a radical Islamic competitor to the essentially secular PLO) |
| 1988 | The PLO officially declares the end of its strategy of violent resistance

(which is not accepted by all Palestinians) |
| 1991 | International Peace Conference in Madrid

(no major breakthroughs in the various bilateral working groups) |
| 1993 | Oslo I

Secret negotiations between Israel and the PLO lead to a Declaration of Principles with mutual recognition and a declaration by the PLO to abstain from terrorism. |
| 1994 | Gaza-Jericho Agreement, establishment of the Palestinian Authority |
| 1995, Sept. 24 | Oslo II

(Interim Agreement, division of West Bank area into three functional sectors; all substantial controversial final status issues to be solved within five years) |

- 1995, Nov. 24 Prime Minister Jitzhak Rabin murdered by a radical religious nationalist
(after vicious attacks on him by settlers and the opposition, including rabbis and Benjamin Netanjahu)
- 2000, July End status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians at Camp David
They come close to a settlement, but are followed by a complete collapse, the domestic consensus for an agreement having become weaker and weaker on both sides.
- 2000, Sept. 28 Second and heavily violent Intifada begins (suicide attacks within Israel)
- 2002, March Arab Peace Initiative
(offer of a general Arab and Islamic recognition of Israel for a return to the borders of 1967; almost completely ignored because of the violence on the ground)
- 2002, March-May Israel reoccupies the whole West Bank
- 2002, June Israel begins building a wall around and partly within the West Bank
- 2005, Sept. 24 Israeli settlers and military withdraw from the Gaza strip, but Israel remains in control of the air, the sea and of the borders on the ground
- 2006 2nd Lebanon War
Provoked by Hisbollah which kills several Israeli soldiers and captures two more in order to extort the release of prisoners; Israel reacts with a major offensive, Hisbollah then rains more than 4000 (Iranian) rockets on Northern Israel. The war ends with a stalemate.
- 2007 Signs of civil war between Fatah and Hamas in Gaza, Hamas wins and has governed Gaza since then
- 2008/2009 1st military conflict between Hamas in Gaza and Israel
- since 2011 Civil War in Syria, becoming the dominant conflict in the region
involvement or weapons deliveries from Russia and regional powers (Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia) or radical groups such as Hisbollah from Lebanon; Israel concerned about increased Iranian military influence in Syria (second northern front)
- 2012 2nd military conflict between Hamas and Israel
- 2014 3rd military conflict between Hamas and Israel
- 2017 US President Trump recognizes the whole of Jerusalem as Israel's capital
- 2018, May 10 In its biggest of several military actions in Syria since the Yom Kippur War of 1973, Israel attacks Iranian command and logistical centers as well as arms stockpiles
- 2019 US President Trump recognizes Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights
- 2020, Jan. US-President Trump presents his peace plan for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; the Palestinians reject any discussion of it.
(They were offered a state, but the Jordan valley, the settlements and East Jerusalem would remain in Israel's hands.)
- 2020, recently The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain both recognize Israel, and Prime Minister Netanjahu postpones further planned annexations in the West Bank; Sudan may soon follow

Sources: most data are from Asseburg/Busse, *Der Nahostkonflikt*, pp. 120-122; the annotations are mostly my own, sometimes based on Asseburg/Busse, on Johannsen, *Der Nahostkonflikt*, or Krämer, *Geschichte Palästinas*, or on entries in the net.

II. The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Analysis

1. A Conflict about Territory and Rule

In 1919, David Ben Gurion, who at this time already was a political heavyweight in the small Jewish community in Palestine and who is often considered the architect of the Jewish state and „the father of the nation“, already made a very clear and open statement about the conflict between the Zionists and the Arabs: Everybody realized what the problem in their relationship was, but not everybody recognized that the problem had no solution. There was no solution. One could not solve the conflict between the interests of the Jews and the Arabs with specious arguments. He did not know any Arab who would agree that Palestine belonged to the Jews. This was a national question. The Jews wanted the land for themselves, and the Arabs also wanted it for themselves (the quote is from Segev, *One Palestine Complete*, p. 116).

Conflicts about objects as concrete and material as the territory on which people live and over which they have command and control are very common historically, and they reached a climax in the 19th and 20th century, the age of nationalism. They have become less frequent since World War II, particularly in Western and Central Europe. But they still exist in many areas of the world: take the recent military conflict about Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Both sides insist Karabakh belongs to them.

An interesting specialty of the conflict between Zionism and the Arabs and the self-assuredness with which Ben Gurion speaks about their mutually exclusive claims is that, at that time, very few Jews actually lived in the area about which he made his statement. So the Zionists had to use special arguments for their territorial claims. One strategy was denial of the other side's existence. An often-used argument was that Palestine was a country without a people, and the Jews were a people without a country. Even today, Palestinians can be very angry about Golda Meir, Israel's Minister President from 1969 to 1973, who once insisted that a Palestinian people did not exist. A corollary to these kinds of denials of a Palestinian justification of their claims was the insistence of the Zionists that they had earlier rights to the land between the river Jordan and the Mediterranean, because the Jews had already lived and had even had states there in ancient times, before they were expelled from Judea and Samaria by the Romans. The problem with this position is that stable international relations would be impossible, if every ethnic or national group laid claim to territories in which it had resided hundreds of years ago but which had then become the home of different people. When the rabbis of Vienna sent two of their colleagues to a fact-finding mission to Palestine after the First Zionist Congress, they cabled back home: "The bride (i.e. Palestine) is beautiful, but she

is married to another man (i.e. belongs to another people)” (quoted from Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 3).

Other rhetorical strategies used the quite common European paternalistic stereotypes about the so-called less developed people in the south: The Arabs would benefit greatly from the presence of Jewish immigrants, economically and culturally. A small group of Zionist idealists believed that Jews and Arabs could live in friendship side by side and mutually profit from their joint development. This was a clear minority position on both sides, however, and actually the relationship between Jews and Arabs in Palestine was conflicting from the very beginning, also because Great Britain as a trustee gave preferential treatment to the Jewish immigrants. In the 1930s, debates about a transfer of Palestinian Arabs to other Arab countries gained ground, including the option of forced resettlement, if necessary (so Ben Gurion himself in 1938). (There are many sources for the debates among Zionism, see Avineri, Rubinstein, Segev, or Shlaim, e.g.)

Competitive claims to territory can be solved either through war with victory versus defeat – the result of which the defeated side can try to reverse; or through compromise such as autonomy or the division of the territory. Up into the 1970s, the Arabs did not accept any separate nation-state for the Jews in Palestine, so the conflict was deadlocked. There was no territory to be divided, so wars resulted. As I have already mentioned, the conflict moved into a dilemma situation when Israel greatly expanded its territory in 1967 and thus achieved “bargaining chips”, which it might, under certain circumstances, be willing to give away, if the other side would offer acceptance of a Jewish state and give up its original goal of reclaiming all of Palestine. The strategy worked with Egypt and Jordan but not with Syria or the Palestinians. This is why it is called a dilemma situation: How can each side guarantee the other that their offers are genuine and will not be subverted by veto groups. Unfortunately, this is what happened. On the surface, the peace camps cooperated politically, working on a compromise, whereas the veto camps, which still saw and still see each other as enemies, cooperated structurally – each providing the veto group on the other side with new arguments for their subversive strategies, thus justifying their own subversion. The veto groups are, roughly speaking: national radicals and Islamic fundamentalists on the Palestinian side, and radical nationalists or fanatical settlers and religious fundamentalists on the Jewish side. In the long term, the losing side have always been the Palestinians, whose territory has continuously melted away (see the maps in the annex).

2. A Conflict not just about Territory but also about Resources

(my sources are mostly Asseburg/Busse, *Nahostkonflikt*, pp. 77-80, Johannsen, *Nahost-Konflikt*, pp. 91-98, and Pabst, pp. 225-227)

Since conflicting claims on territory and the security dilemma seem so obvious and dominant dimensions of the Middle East conflict, it is often forgotten that resources are also an important factor, in particular water. Water is a highly controversial resource in the region, and the depletion of the Jordan river, the shrinking of the Dead Sea, and the salinization of aquifers by sea water are serious problems for a growing population. Many water resources essential for Israel such as the tributaries to the river Jordan lie in the adjoining territories of Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, and most of the large aquifers lie under the hills in the center of the West Bank. After the occupation of the Palestinian Territories in 1967, Israel declared all water resources there as state property under military command, later military administration. Today, Israel meets its demands for water to a large extent from sources outside of its own territory, in the occupied territories, in Lebanon and on the Golan Heights. Israel's National Water Carrier, completed in 1964, takes water from Lake Kinneret and sends it into southern Israel. It also takes water from the Jordan river for its local agriculture. More than a third of its total demand for water comes from the Jordan, which has turned into a meager rivulet downstream. Israel and the settlements also use the largest part of the aquifers in the West Bank; they control the drilling of wells and rarely grant the Palestinians permits for new wells. Quite to the contrary: radical settlers sometimes take wells away from Palestinian farmers, or let the respective ground be declared as security areas by the military (see the books by David Shulman for details).

Since the aquifers are, apart from rainfall, the only water resource for the Palestinians in the West Bank, Palestinian agriculture suffers greatly from lack of water. Even more serious is the scarcity of drinking water. Palestinians must buy their own water from Israeli water companies for a high price. Water usage per person is below the minimum suggested by the World Health Organization; Israelis use between three and five times as much water per person per day as the Palestinians. Israeli settlements are connected with comparatively big pipes for water while surrounding Palestinian communities with more people have much thinner pipes. A hydrogeologist working in the area calls the situation "hydro-apartheid". The water problem in Gaza is even worse than in the West Bank. Theoretically, joint water management, new technologies for saving water in agriculture, repairs of water pipes (leakage of water in decrepit pipes is a serious problem), and desalinization of sea water, where Israel has already made great progress, could improve the situation for the whole region, and some groundwork

for cooperation has been laid in the Oslo II Agreement. Unfortunately, general instability, the lack of trust between the major parties and Israel's control and domination of all water issues prevent the urgently needed multilateral solution.

3. A Religious Conflict?

Religion is another important cause of the Middle East conflict. All three major monotheistic religions originated in the area and the Holy Land and its religious monuments are central points of reference for all of them. Many monuments are controversial not just ideally and rhetorically, but also in terms of physical ownership and power politics. Just think of the crusades, which are still part of collective historical memories, and not just among Muslims. In the Christian support for early Zionist plans of a return to the Holy Land, such memories played an important role in the West and very prominently in the public discourse in the United States. Between 1916 and 1917, the New York Times, the Chicago Tribune, the Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times published articles about a Palestine which had long suffered under the oppression of "uncivilized" Muslim Turks, while it still was the land of the Bible; it belonged to the civilized Christian-Western world. After the Balfour declaration, these newspapers printed euphoric articles about the return of the Jews to the Holy Land; and when Edmund Allenby, the general who had led the British Army into Jerusalem during World War I (in which the Ottoman Empire had fought on the side of Germany against Britain), died on May 14, 1936, they confirmed these associations. The Washington Post situated Allenby next to Richard the Lionheart and Gottfried of Bouillon, famous leaders of the Christian crusades in the Middle Ages, and the New York Times wrote in an editorial, Allenby would be remembered forever in human history as the liberator of the Holy Land. And this is not the end of the story. Even today, not only nationalist-religious Jews but also Evangelical Christians in the United States, a major clientele of the Republican Party (80 percent of this group are considered Trump voters), truly believe that God had given the Holy Land to the Jews, as one can read in the Bible. (For the early reactions in the US, see my own research report about the USA and the Middle East conflict, in particular pp. 12-13.)

The Temple Mount or Haram al-Sharif is extremely important for religious Jews and religious Muslims, as you all know. The use of the area had been controversial between Jewish immigrants and the indigenous Palestinians from the very beginning and repeatedly led to violent confrontation; it is highly sensitive to this day even more so, since politicized religion has grown since the 1960s and 70s, both among Jews and Muslims. Israel's first major national-religious party was actually a quite moderate force, and originally ultra-orthodox Jews were

apolitical, even anti-Zionist. The way to Jewish salvation would be decided by the Messiah, not through politics. This has changed since the conquest of Judea and Samaria, as the occupied territories are called by Israeli nationalists and large numbers of religious Jews. Jewish nationalists have become more religious and orthodox Jews more nationalistic; Neo-Zionism is the expert term for this turn (see Rubinstein, e.g.). If you consider that today about one third of the officers in the Israeli Army are religious nationalists, you may understand why attempts to give up major parts of the occupied territories may lead to serious domestic complications in Israel. About 50 percent of the settlers are steadfastly against the withdrawal of settlements in the West Bank, and radical groups use violence or so-called “price-tag attacks” against Palestinians or their property not only in revenge but also if they disagree with moves by their own government.

While religion may not be the central determining factor in the Middle East conflict, it certainly has fortified uncompromising positions. A younger colleague of mine from the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, who has written a brilliant dissertation about the role of politicized religion in Israel and the failure of the Oslo peace process, came to the conclusion that politicized religion with its illiberal, particularistic and escalatory interpretation of the Middle East conflict had a major influence on the deterioration of the negotiations in the 1990s. But it was not an independent factor; it rather jumped onto the bandwagon of a highly ambivalent democratic liberalism which saw its own role in the conflict as democratic, liberal, and Western-civilized, and the other side as an “unjust enemy”, as an unpredictable and unlawful rogue state or rather rogue non-state. Both processes of securitization, the politicized religious as well as the ambivalent liberal discourse, lead to the same result: the justification of exceptional measures in order to protect the object of reference, i.e. the holy territory and the salvation which it entails *or* the national security of the state of Israel against an existential threat (see Baumgart-Ochse, p. 315).

As for the other side, it is important to mention the Islamic revival after the failure of socialism in the Arab world, and particularly the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which have added religiously fanatical groups to Israel’s enemies such as Hisbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza, apart from Iran itself. The infamous suicide attacks not only in the West Bank, but also in Israel itself, which have done more than anything else to destroy the Israeli peace camp, are only one example of the devastating effects which Islamic fanaticism can have on political developments. In addition, religious alliances among Muslims and serious animosities between them, particularly between Sunnis and Shiites, are a central factor of domestic and international instability and violence in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Syria.

4. The Colonial Dimension

Many Arabs and many other people in the so-called developing countries believe that the Middle East conflict was not a typical conflict between nation-states or national movements, but rather a late manifestation of several hundred years of colonization of large parts of the world by the Europeans and later the United States, which had grown out of its own colonial status. Even in Western scholarly discourse, “settler colonialism” has become a professional technical term not only in Marxist but also in mainstream research. Wolfgang Reinhard, e.g., a German liberal historian, calls Israel “the last Western settler colony” in his monumental study of the global history of Western expansion. He adds a question mark to the phrase, but in his text he argues that Israel began as a settler colony and since 1967 has also become a colonial power. (Wolfgang Reinhard, *Die Unterwerfung der Welt: Globalgeschichte der europäischen Expansion*, Munich 2016, pp. 1244-1251)

Other historians maintain Israel could never have been a colonist or even colonial power because the Zionists did not have a colonial mother country. Yet the Zionists did see themselves as settlers wanting to “colonize” a new or rather resettle their assumed former home country, and they knew that they needed support from major powers for their planned “national home”, which they received. And of course, the major powers at the time *were* colonial powers. When US President Woodrow Wilson spoke about democracy and self-determination as the way to secure peace after World War I, he did not mean democracy or freedom for colonized people all over the world – not even for blacks in the United States, by the way. When asked for support for Zionism in the debates among the Great Powers about the future of the former Ottoman Empire, which the British and the French had already divided up and secured for themselves, Wilson, who was a pro-Zionist Christian, said to Stephen Wise, an American rabbi and the vice president of the Zionist Organization of America: “Don’t worry, Dr. Wise, Palestine is yours” (as quoted in Krell, USA, p. 6).

And in a very telling internal memo of 1919 for the British Foreign Office, which was published 30 years later, Lord Balfour wrote (as quoted in Khalidi, p. 38):

The contradiction between the letter of the Covenant [the Charter of the League of Nations, GK] and the policy of the Allies is even more flagrant in the case of the ‘independent nation’ of Palestine than in that of the ‘independent nation’ of Syria. For in Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country. 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. In my opinion that is right.

Famous Zionists knew and admitted that the mutual claims to Palestine were actually a colonial conflict. Wladimir Jabotinsky, the President of the Revisionists, the major minority party in the early years of the Yishuv (the technical term for the pre-state Jewish community in Palestine) and a kind of precursor to the Likud, wrote an article to that effect which first appeared in Russian and was published in English under the title *The Iron Wall* in 1923. He wrote (quoted from the internet):

It is utterly impossible to obtain the voluntary consent of the Palestine Arabs for converting 'Palestine' from an Arab country into a country with a Jewish majority. [...] I suggest that they [my readers, GK] consider all the precedents with which they are acquainted, and see whether there is one solitary instance of any colonization being carried on with the consent of the native population. There is no such precedent. The native populations [...] have always stubbornly resisted the colonists.

Jabotinsky argued that the conflict about Palestine – which for him was all Palestine and even more – had to be solved with military means in favor of the Jews. His experience in Russia had convinced him that the Jewish people could only survive if they had their own state – and this was before the holocaust! The Arabs had so many countries that the Palestinians would easily find new homes. Once the Jews had secured their majority and thus a safe place in Palestine, they could offer peace and co-existence to the Arabs. (For Jabotinsky see also Avineri, Profiles of Zionism).

There is not much difference between Jabotinsky's view of the origins of the Middle East Conflict and that of one of the most respected Palestinian historians (Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood*, Boston, Mass. 2006, p. 119):

For the Palestinians to accept such an idea of a national home in Palestine for what they saw as another people in some form would certainly have removed or at least weakened the ludicrous but widely believed accusations that they were motivated by no more than anti-Semitism in their opposition to Zionism, rather than just being a colonized people trying to defend their majority status and achieve independence in their own country. (...) It is important to understand in his regard that Palestinians did not see Jewish immigrants to Palestine primarily as refugees from persecution, as they were seen by most of the rest of the world. They saw them instead as arrogant European interlopers, who did not accept that the Palestinians were a people or had national rights in their own country, believed that Palestine instead belonged to them and were coldly determined to make that belief into a reality.

So to really understand the Middle East conflict, you have to look not only at 1967 and at 1948/49, but also at 1917. The conflict's long history is only part of the story, however. In several respects, Israel has moved beyond its colonial origins; it has taken in several hundred thousands of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust and of Jewish refugees who emigrated or were expelled from Arab countries in the course of the wars between Israel and the Arabs. On the

other hand, Israel has established, since 1967, a new combination of colonization and colonialism including separation, structural discrimination, control and creeping displacement in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, plus the blockade of Gaza; all in the name of security and/or nationalism and fundamentalist religion. Are there alternatives to the present semi-colonial status quo, and what are the prospects for the future?

III. Options for a Solution of the Middle East Conflict and Possible Developments

You may have read in the papers that at a recent demonstration in Frankfurt against the situation of the refugees on the Greek island of Lesbos a spokesperson for a pro-Palestinian group demanded the liberation of Palestine, and that several members of the group during their march later shouted “Palestine shall be free from the river to the sea”. The phrase is often regarded as a programmatic statement for the abolishment of Israel. In the occupied territories and among Palestinians in Israel one can find people who call the presence of Jews in the area into question generally. They had no business being there and should go back to the countries which they came from. In other Arab or in Iranian pronouncements or documents you can read much nastier comments asking for the elimination of what they call the “Zionist entity” which they literally regard as a cancer to be removed. (See the examples in the annex to Krell/Müller, *Noch ein Konflikt im Nahen Osten*.) How this could be done without a major war and the killing of thousands of people these statements or documents do not say. Their authors should rather take for granted that Jews would not let themselves be mass-slaughtered again; Israel would rather fight to the very end, including the use of its nuclear weapons, than be “removed” or “eliminated”. A one-state Palestinian solution to the Middle East conflict is out of the question.

Much more likely is an Israeli one-state solution, with the current situation coming close to this option already. The recent reconciliation between the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain with Israel looks like a clear signal that Arab leaders no longer demand a separate Palestinian state as a condition for their acceptance of Israel, which has postponed the planned annexation of further Palestinian territory but has already begun to considerably expand its settlement activities. Both a softening and a hardening of Israel’s policies in the occupied territories are possible variations in the near future. Much depends on the future reactions by Iran, Hisbollah, and Hamas to the geostrategic changes in the region, and on the future correlation of forces within Israel. Israel could offer the Palestinians a weakening of restrictions on movement or infrastructure (building houses or drilling wells) and for once reign in on the encroachments on peaceful Palestinians by radical settlers, or also grant the Palestinians more political

leeway at the communal or regional levels. The more likely option at this moment is that Israel hardens its stand and increases its policies of dispossession and displacement. Until 2015 alone Israel declared 18 percent of the West Bank as training ground for its military, of which it actually uses only one fifth. So the training ground is just an excuse, the true reason being the clearance of the area from Palestinians. Permits for new houses are not granted; infrastructure such as wells or solar panels, often financed by the EU or its member states, are destroyed or confiscated by the Israeli army again and again. (Interview with the director of B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights organization, by a group of European diplomats who visited the West Bank, as quoted in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, October 21st, p. 7.) And on the day of the Presidential election in the United States, Israeli bulldozers protected by the military completely raised down a settlement of Bedouins in the West Bank, destroying solar panels, tents, sheds, and EU-sponsored sanitary installations, leaving 74 people homeless, including 41 children. According to a statement by a spokesperson from the EU this major act of demolition represented the increasing trend of confiscation and destruction of Palestinian facilities. It seems that Israel is more and more seeing the C-areas, which amount to 60 percent of the West Bank, as parts under its exclusive sovereignty (FAZ, November 6, 2020, p. 5).

Most experts believe that the two-state solution, for which at least some ground had been laid by the Oslo peace process in the 1990s and under President Clinton in 2000, and for which unofficial bilateral expert groups such as the Geneva Initiative of 2003 have developed detailed and sophisticated plans, is no longer an option. Uri Boehm, a young Israeli philosopher, who occasionally writes about the Middle East conflict in German newspapers, has suggested that anyone who still believes in the two-state solution might as well deny climate change. Indeed, the one is as dead as the other is alive. The material substance for a separate Palestinian state has disappeared under the weight of Israeli settlements and the deliberate cutting up of the territory in the West Bank. Any Israeli government trying to rescind this process would risk civil war. Israel will not reverse its control over and acquisitions in the West Bank; such a reversal has become impossible ideologically or economically and thus politically.

Which leaves the option of two democratic binational states in a confederation. Omri Boehm has not invented it but has presented it in a wonderful book in English and German; its English title being *A Future for Israel: Beyond the Two-State Solution*. Boehm has worked out a fascinating framework for the constitution of such a confederation. In the two states both Jews and Arabs would have the same civil and political rights and could move and settle freely in both. Both states would look after their own domestic security and would agree on a mutual defense treaty. Confederate institutions would decide about applications from Jews or from

Palestinian refugees of 1948-1949 or 1967 who wanted to settle or resettle in either of the two states. Boehm knows that his plan is utopian; the German title of his book being: Israel – eine Utopie. But he insists that in their early writings before the Arab revolt and before the holocaust, many Zionists had been more open to cooperation with the Arabs and had insisted more on Jewish autonomy than on a Jewish state. In 1977, after peace with Egypt, even Minister President Menachem Begin, the founder of the Likud, developed a plan with equal political rights for Arabs and Jews, even if in a Greater Israel and not in two confederate states. Boehm also insists that today daily life between Jews and Arabs in Haifa comes close to his utopia.

To open the way in the direction of such an option, Boehm also suggests that Jews and Arabs give up their exclusive focus on their respective national traumas. Wolfgang Reinhard suggested something similar in his study of 2016 on the history of European expansion. What if young Arabs left the Nakba, the catastrophe of their parents' and grandparents' expulsion, and young Jews left the Shoah, the mass murder of their grandparents' generation, behind them as traumas for identification and looked for a joint future of their pasts? (Reinhard, p. 1251).

A lot of other things would have to happen for the confederate option of two democratic binational states to come true. Let us wait and see. A democratic revolution in Iran and a moderation of radical Islam, drastic democratic reforms in Palestine and Gaza, followed by a move back to the political center in Israel – maybe all utopian; certainly unlikely, even if not totally impossible. Unfortunately, and quite apart from the strained relationship between Israel and the Palestinians, more military conflicts and even a major war in the region and beyond about security and geostrategic hegemony, often combined with religious domination, are much more likely.

IV. Recommendations for Reading or Using

(source: my personal library; most of the books in German by Israelis or Palestinians are also available in English)

Introductions and Overviews

Muriel Asseburg/Jan Busse, *Der Nahostkonflikt: Geschichte, Positionen, Perspektiven*, 3rd ed., Munich 2020

Margret Johannsen, *Der Nahost-Konflikt: Eine Einführung*, 3rd ed., Wiesbaden 2017

Martin Pabst, *Der Nahostkonflikt: Eine Einführung*, Stuttgart 2018

Encyclopedias or Documents

Walter Laqueur/Barry Rubin, *The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict*, 6th ed., New York – London – Victoria 2016

Gernot Rotter/Schirin Fathi, *Nahostlexikon: Der israelisch-palästinensische Konflikt von A-Z*, 2nd ed., Heidelberg 2003

Books About the Origins and the Development of the Middle East Conflict

Shlomo Avineri, *Profile des Zionismus: Die geistigen Ursprünge des Staates Israel: 17 Porträts*, Gütersloh 1998

Claudia Baumgart-Ochse, *Demokratie und Gewalt im Heiligen Land: Politisierte Religion in Israel und das Scheitern des Osloer Friedensprozesses*, Baden-Baden 2008 (a brilliant dissertation about politicized religion and its reinforcing role of dichotomous views of self and other in democratic decision-making in the Middle East conflict)

Rashid Khalidi, *The 100 Years' War Against Palestine: A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance*, London 2020 (a new standard work from the leading American-Palestinian historian)

Gudrun Krämer *Geschichte Palästinas: Von der osmanischen Eroberung bis zur Gründung des Staates Israel*, sixth ed., Munich 2015

Gert Krell, *Die USA, Israel und der Nahost-Konflikt: Studie über demokratische Außenpolitik im 20. Jahrhundert*, HSK-Report 14/2004 (In this research report I analyze the role of the United States in the Middle East conflict from World War I up to President Bush jr. I come to the conclusion that the US does not carry responsibility for the origins of the conflict, but that its role has been deficient in three major respects: (1) the tradition of “altruistic imperialism” which dominated its role in the early years of Zionism, (2) the delegation of a solution to the Jewish refugee question in the 1930s and 40s to the “South”, and (3) a lack of impartiality in its attempts to settle the conflict. Mostly, the US accepted the asymmetries in the Israeli-Palestinian relationship and their reflection in the peace process.)

Ian S. Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank-Gaza*, Ithaca, NY 1993 (one of the best social science studies about the Middle East conflict; Lustick compares the three cases under a theoretically informed historical perspective with a focus on the respective socio-political power struggles about discourse hegemony and the domestic correlations of forces in the political fights about colonial policies and options of decolonization)

Sari Nusseibeh (with Anthony David), *Es war einmal ein Land: Ein Leben in Palästina*, 6th ed. Munich 2009 (a political autobiography from a famous Palestinian intellectual and pacifist)

Amnon Rubinstein, *Geschichte des Zionismus: Von Theodor Herzl bis heute*, Munich 2001 (a classic from the pen of the minister of education in Rabin's cabinet)

Tom Segev, *Es war einmal ein Palästina: Juden und Araber vor der Staatsgründung*, 6th ed., Munich 2006 (Tom Segev is one of the best known modern Israeli historians.)

Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, New York – London 2000 (a standard work of moderate post-Zionist historiography)

Books About Israeli Policies and Politics of Occupation in the West Bank

Nir Baram, *Im Land der Verzweiflung: Ein Israeli reist in die besetzten Gebiete*, Munich 2016 (an often depressing report about meetings with all kinds of people, including very nasty but also moderate settlers, and the everyday problems and complications of life in the West Bank under Israeli domination and discrimination)

Breaking the Silence, *Israelische Soldaten Berichten von ihrem Einsatz in den Besetzten Gebieten*, Berlin 2012 (disturbing reports from a well-known Israeli NGO)

David Shulman, *Dark Hope: Working for Peace in Israel and Palestine*, Chicago – London 2007 (David Shulman is a famous Indologist and also a well-known peace activist who tries, together with Palestinian and with other Israeli pacifists, to protect Palestinian farmers and shepherds in the West Bank against suppression and displacement by settlers and the Israeli military.)

David Shulman, *Freedom and Despair: Notes from the South Hebron Hills*, Chicago – London 2018 (This book is a follow-up with more disturbing evidence. Here are Shulman's conclusions: "One cannot violate the inner being of an entire people without violating and impoverishing one's own inner life", p. 181.)

Idith Zertal/Akiva Eldar, *Die Herren des Landes: Israel und die Siedlerbewegung seit 1967*, Munich 2007 (a classic study about Israeli settlements and settlement policies in the occupied territories and what they mean for the Palestinian original inhabitants)

Books About Strategies and Prospects for Peace and Cooperation

Omri Boehm, *Israel – Eine Utopie*, Berlin 2020 (Omri Boehm, a young Israeli political philosopher, develops the concept of a confederation between two binational states, for which he can find at least some empirical basis in current realities on the ground and even in early Zionist programmatic thinking.)

Alexandra Senfft, *Fremder Feind, so nah: Begegnungen mit Palästinensern und Israelis*, Hamburg 2009 (Alexandra Senfft, a highly respected author and journalist with long experience in the area, gives 20 people from both sides wide room to present their views, mostly people who work for peace and reconciliation.)

Guido Steinberg, *Krieg am Golf: Wie der Machtkampf zwischen Iran und Saudi-Arabien die Welt-sicherheit bedroht*, Munich 2020 (here the focus is not on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but on major developments in the whole region; they also affect Israel for whom the policies of the Iranian Islamic Republic have become of central concern)

Studies About German Views of the Middle East Conflict or Germany's Relationship to It

Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Nico Apel, *Wir sind alle deutsche Juden* (A very moving film of 2020 by the famous German-French politician, who tries to find out what his Jewish identity means to him. A major part of this process is his search for a balanced position on the Middle East conflict. He talks to many people from a broad spectrum in Israel and the occupied territories and comes to the conclusion that in order to find peace, both sides had to give up parts of their national or religious dreams and to compromise on a fair division of the territory between "the river and the sea". There are German and French versions of the film which can be viewed on the internet under vimeo.com/428161382; the password is elio.)

Wolf Iro, *Nach Israel kommen*, Berlin 2018 (Beginning in 2014, Wolf Iro was the director of the Goethe-Institute in Tel Aviv for several years. He writes about his experience there, in particular typical German improper behavior, and asks for a critical but always empathetic and historically attentive relationship with Israel.)

Gert Krell, *History and Responsibility: Shadows from the Past in Germany's Relationship to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, in: Alfred Wittstock (ed.), *Rapprochement, Change, Perception and Shaping the Future: 50 Years of German-Israeli and Israeli-German Diplomatic Relations*, Berlin 2016, pp. 55-92 (In this research report I discuss the role of the Holocaust in the history of the Middle East conflict and the political consequences deriving from it for a responsible German position to both parties.)

Gert Krell/Harald Müller, *Noch ein Krieg im Nahen Osten? Zum misslungenen Anstoß von Günter Grass zu einer überfälligen öffentlichen Debatte*, HSFK Report Nr. 2/2012, Frankfurt a. M., https://www.hsfk.de/fileadmin/HSFK/hsfk_downloads/report_0212.pdf (In an infamous political poem about the Middle East crisis around the Iranian nuclear program the famous German writer suggested that Israel was not only the major or even sole danger to peace in the region but also a major threat to world peace, and that it was willing to risk the obliteration of Iran and with it even the whole world in a global nuclear war, and all that because it was taking a big mouth seriously without any supporting evidence. In the research report, I compare Grass' strange views with analyses of the responsibility for the crisis by serious scholars and journalists. Grass poem contains several more or less obvious anti-israeli or even antisemitic clichés which are discussed in more detail by my colleague Harald Müller. In the annex we document a number of highly aggressive remarks by Iranian political or religious leaders asking for Israel's elimination, including President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Grass' "mouthpiece".)

Avi Primor/Christiane von Korff, *An allem sind die Juden und die Radfahrer schuld: Deutsch-jüdische Missverständnisse*, Munich 2010 (Avi Primor was the Israeli ambassador in Germany from 1993 to 1999. He writes with affection but also critically about both Israel and Germany.)

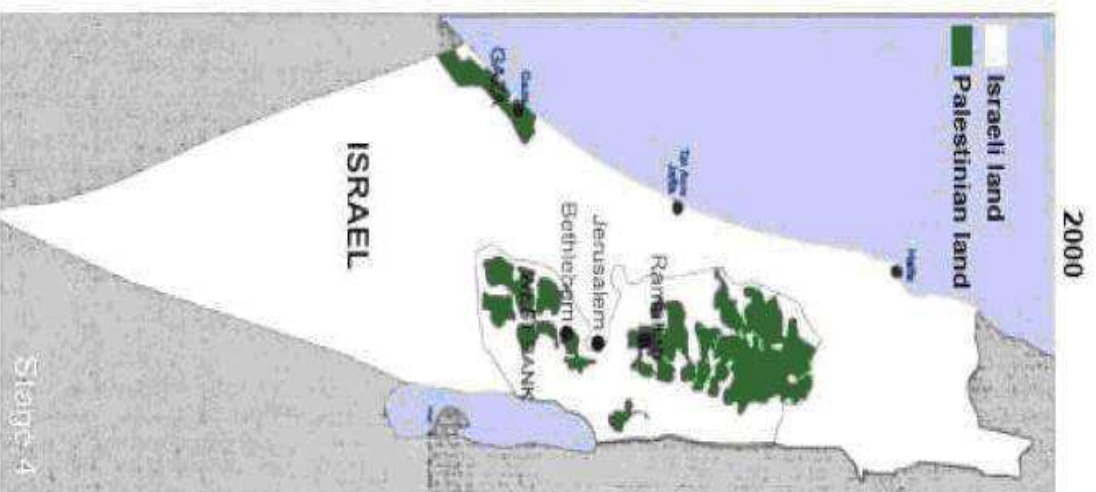
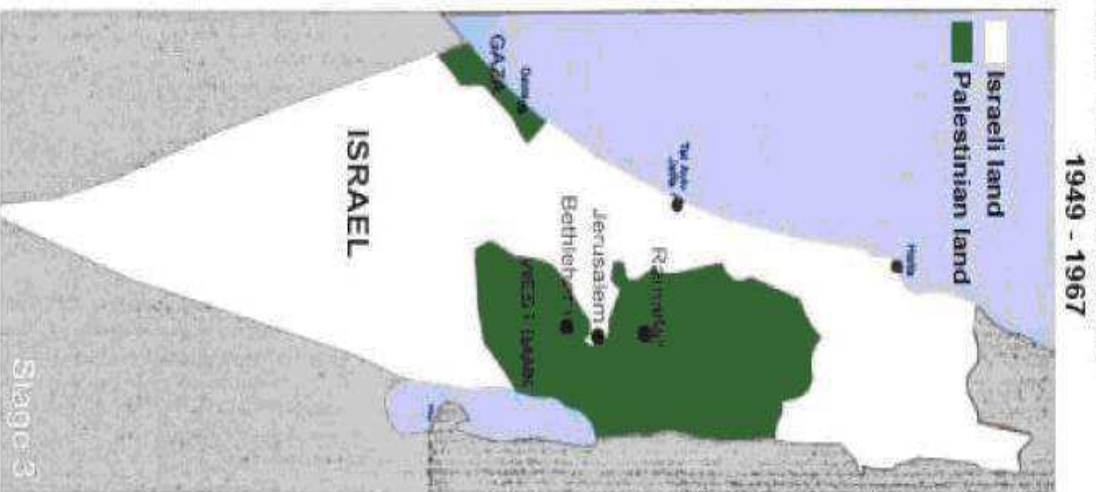
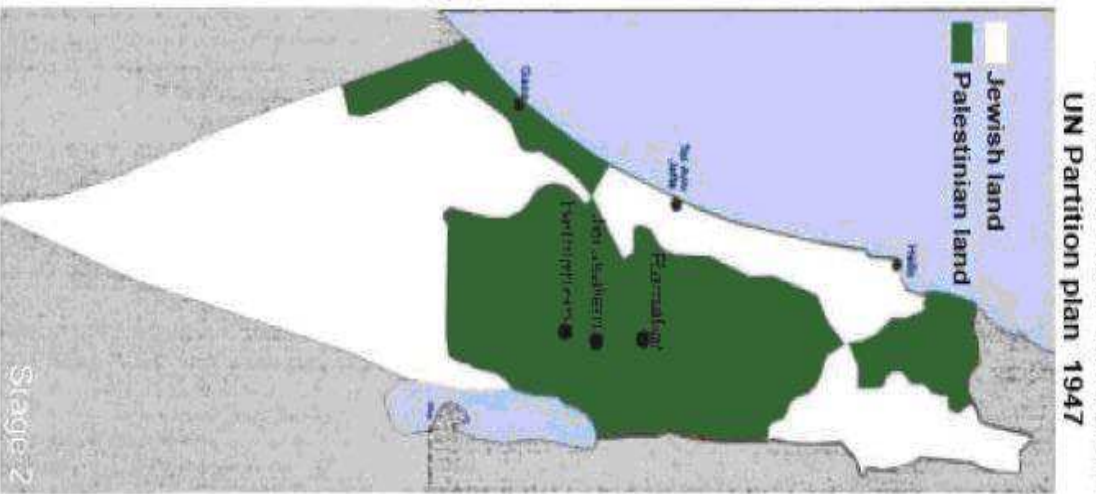
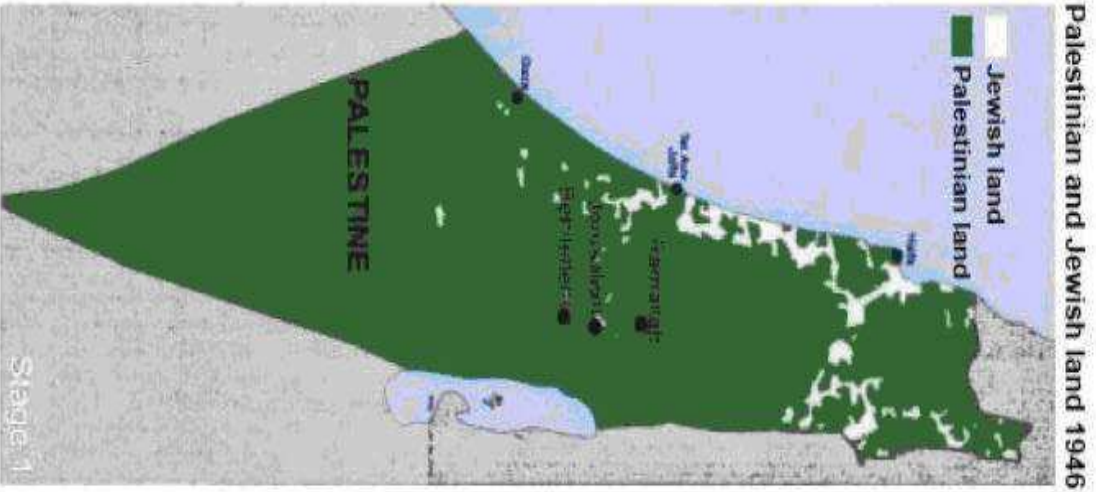
Rolf Verleger, *Hundert Jahre Heimatland: Judentum und Israel zwischen Nächstenliebe und Nationalismus*, Frankfurt am Main 2017 (Rolf Verleger is a politically active psychologist. In his book he combines autobiographical experience of political controversies in the Jewish community in Germany with family history – many of his relatives were murdered by the Nazis – and with an empathetic and at the same time critical view of the history of Zionism and the Middle East conflict. He pleads to give preference to the humanistic side in Jewish religious and intellectual tradition over nationalism and fundamentalism.)

V. Annex: Maps

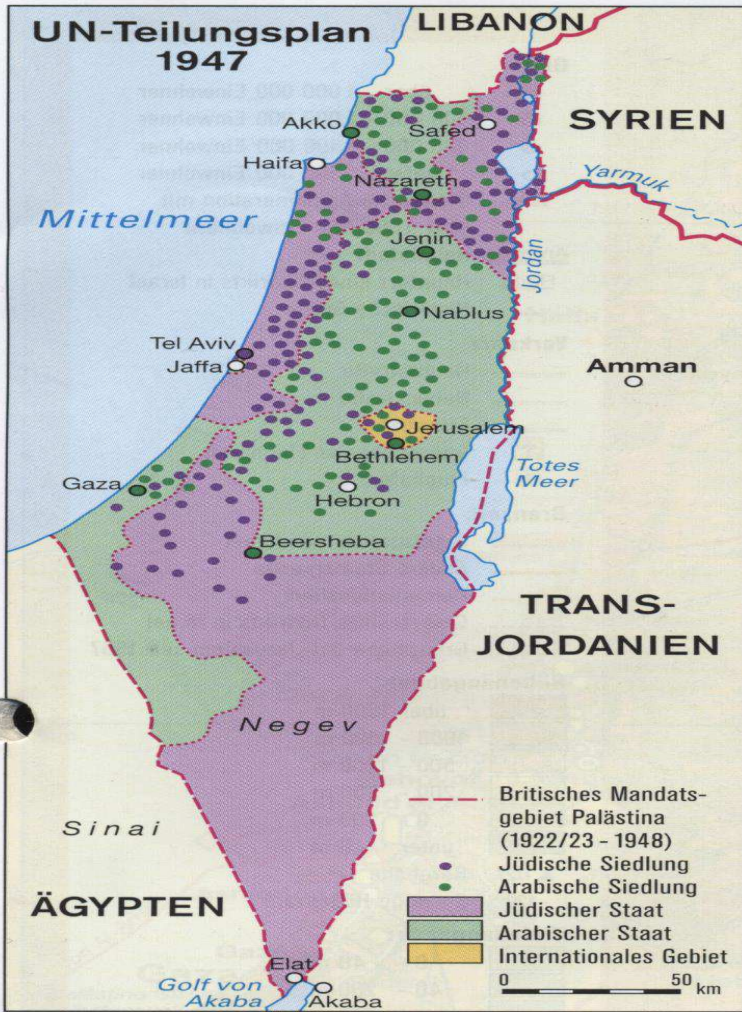
Geographically, Israel is a small country; the distance between Tel Aviv and the Palestinian Territories being about 15 km.



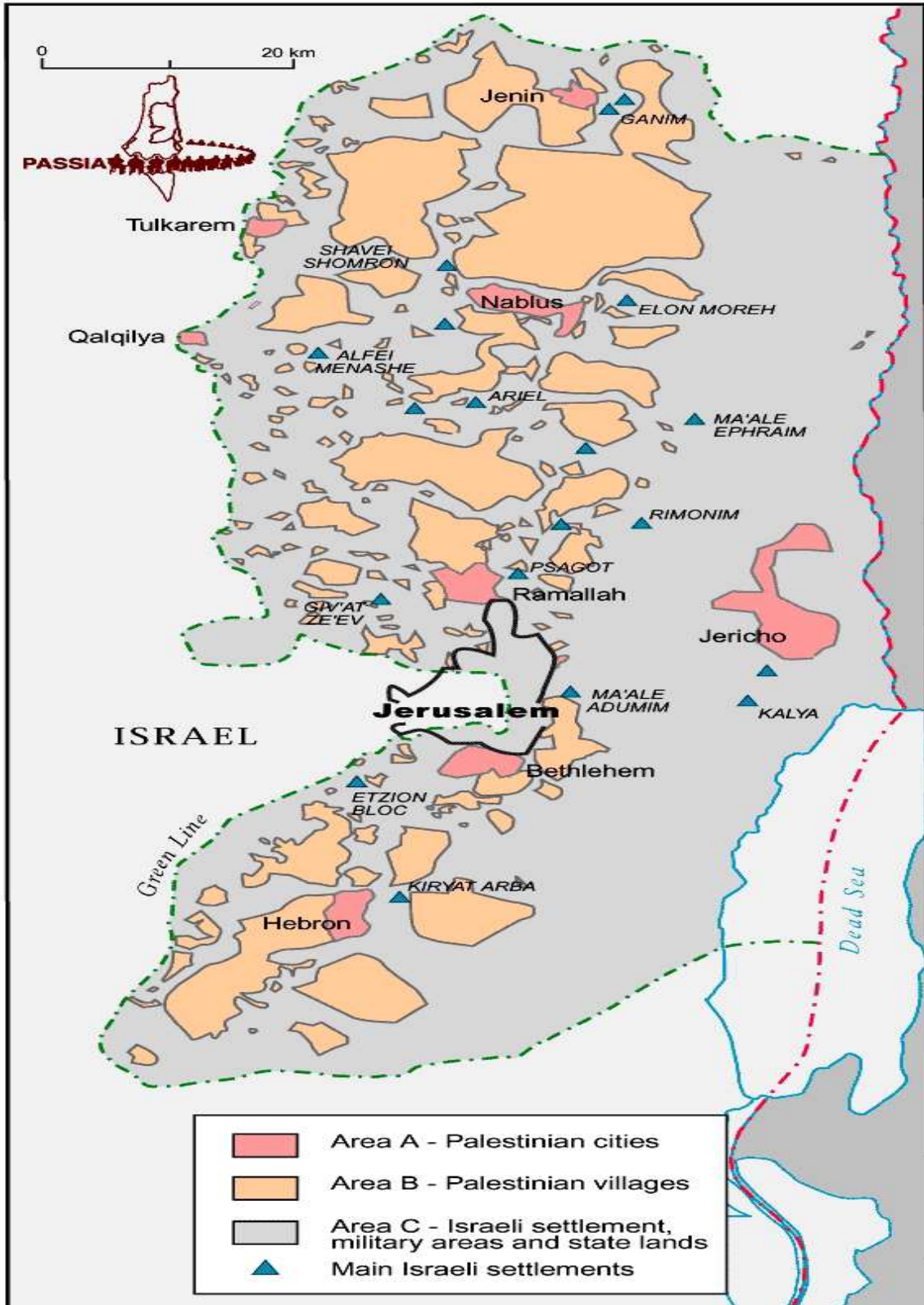
The following maps show the territorial developments from 1946 up to the year 2000 and the status of the wall in 2014.



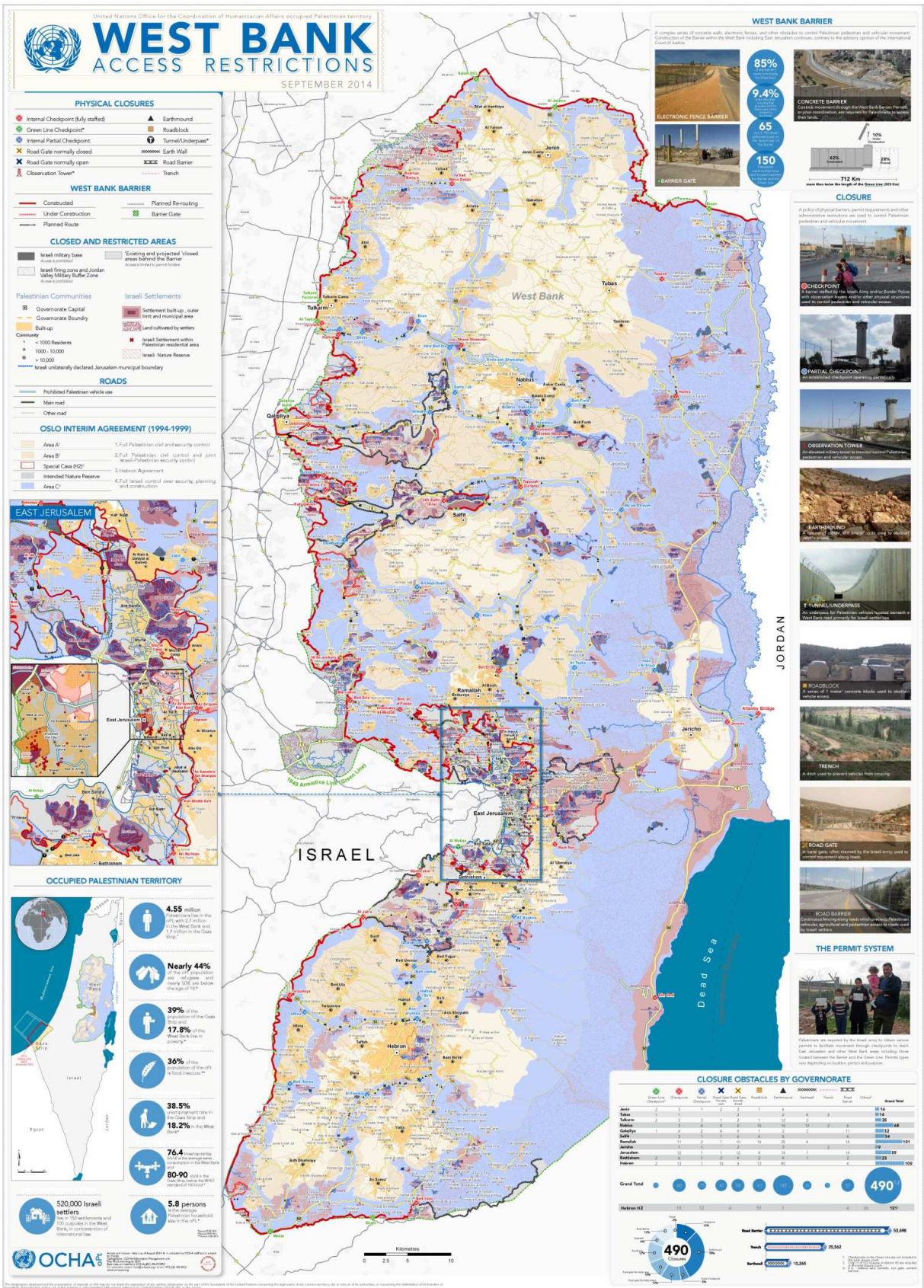
Historische Entwicklung im Nahen Osten



Oslo II, 1995



Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA)



OCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

- 4.55 million Palestinians live in the West Bank and East Jerusalem in the West Bank and East Jerusalem in the West Bank.
- Nearly 44% of the population are refugees and many live in overcrowded camps.
- 39% of the population of the West Bank live in poverty.
- 36% of the population of the West Bank live in poverty.
- 38.5% of the population of the West Bank live in poverty.
- 18.2% of the population of the West Bank live in poverty.
- 76.4% of the population of the West Bank live in poverty.
- 80-90% of the population of the West Bank live in poverty.
- 5.8 persons are arrested daily in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.
- 520,000 Israeli settlers live in 120 settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

CLOSURE OBSTACLES BY GOVERNORATE

Governorate	Green Line Checkpoint	Internal Checkpoint	Internal Partial Checkpoint	Road Gate normally closed	Road Gate normally open	Observation Tower	Earthbound	Tunnel/Underpass	Earth Wall	Barrier	Trench	Other	Road Total
Jerusalem	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	16
Hebron	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	16
Nablus	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	16
Ramallah	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	16
Jericho	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	16
Beit She'an	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	16
West Bank	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	100
Grand Total													490