

ISRAELI-PALESTINE WARS AND THE PROSPECTS OF A TWO-STATE STRUCTURE, 1947-2024

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Abstract

The Israeli-Palestinian war remains one of the most enduring and complex conflicts in contemporary international politics, deeply rooted in historical grievances, competing nationalisms, territorial disputes, and external geopolitical interests. Central to international efforts at conflict resolution is the two-state structure, which proposes the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel as a pathway to sustainable peace. This study, therefore, adopts a multi-theoretical framework, drawing primarily on Conflict Theory, Realist Theory, and Liberal Peace Theory, with supplementary insights from Constructivism. Conflict theory is employed to explain the structural inequalities, power asymmetries, and competition over scarce resources that fuel hostility between Israelis and Palestinians. At the same time, realism provides insight into state behaviour, security dilemmas, and the strategic calculations that shape the actions of Israel, Palestinian actors, and external powers. Together, these theories offer a comprehensive lens for understanding both the internal and external dynamics sustaining the conflict and constraining peace efforts. Findings reveal that while the two-state structure remains the most internationally endorsed solution, its practical implementation has been severely undermined by continued Israeli settlement expansion, the occupation of Palestinian territories, recurring cycles of violence, and political divisions within Palestinian leadership. The study recommends renewed, genuinely impartial international mediation anchored in international law, a freeze on settlement activities, and the promotion of Palestinian political unity as prerequisites for reviving the two-state solution, and further advocates confidence-building measures, economic reconstruction, and sustained humanitarian interventions to address immediate suffering and create conditions conducive to long-term peace.

Keywords: *Israel-Palestine, Two-State Solution, Conflict Theory, Humanitarian, International Law*

Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains one of the most protracted, complex, and emotionally charged conflicts in modern international relations. Rooted in competing nationalist aspirations, colonial legacies, religious significance, and geopolitical rivalries, the conflict has endured for

over seven decades, defying numerous diplomatic efforts to achieve a lasting peace. Central to international efforts to resolve this conflict is the two-state framework, a model premised on the coexistence of two sovereign states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. Despite its widespread endorsement by the United Nations and major global powers, the two-state solution has faced persistent obstacles, raising critical questions about its feasibility and future relevance.

The origins of the Israeli-Palestinian war can be traced to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the rise of Zionism and increasing Jewish migration to Ottoman and later British-controlled Palestine intersected with the political awakening of Arab nationalism. British colonial policies, particularly the Balfour Declaration of 1917, laid the groundwork for competing claims over the same territory, sowing seeds of distrust and hostility between Jewish and Arab communities.¹ These tensions culminated in the United Nations Partition Plan of 1947, which proposed the division of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states. While Jewish leaders accepted the plan, Arab leaders rejected it, leading to the outbreak of war following the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948 and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, a tragedy Palestinians refer to as the Nakba.²

Subsequent wars, notably the 1967 Six-Day War, dramatically reshaped the conflict's territorial and political landscape. Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and other Arab territories entrenched military control and intensified Palestinian resistance, further complicating prospects for peace.³ It was in the aftermath of the 1967 war that the two-state structure gained renewed international traction, particularly through United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, which called for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from occupied territories and the recognition of all states in the region.⁴ Over time, this framework became the cornerstone

¹Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 9th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2017), 91-95.

²Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 32.

³Mark Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 383.

⁴United Nations Security Council, Resolution 242 (1967).

of diplomatic initiatives aimed at reconciling Israeli security concerns with Palestinian aspirations for statehood.

The two-state structure gained its most concrete expression during the Oslo Peace Process of the 1990s, which established limited Palestinian self-rule and envisioned a gradual path toward full statehood. However, the failure of final-status negotiations, continued Israeli settlement expansion, Palestinian political fragmentation, recurrent violence, and deep mutual mistrust have undermined the process.⁵ The resurgence of large-scale hostilities in recent years has further exposed the fragility of the two-state framework, with critics arguing that facts on the ground, particularly settlement entrenchment and territorial fragmentation, have rendered a viable Palestinian state increasingly unattainable.

Nevertheless, the two-state structure remains a dominant reference point in international diplomacy, largely because it is perceived as the most pragmatic means of reconciling the competing national claims of Israelis and Palestinians. Proponents argue that it offers a legal and moral basis for peace grounded in self-determination, international law, and mutual recognition. Opponents, however, contend that decades of conflict, power asymmetries, and unresolved core issues such as Jerusalem, refugees, borders, and security have eroded the foundation upon which the two-state solution was built.⁶

This paper seeks to examine the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in its historical and political context while critically analysing the evolution, challenges, and prospects of the two-state structure. By situating the conflict within broader debates on nationalism, colonialism, and international conflict resolution, the paper aims to provide a balanced understanding of why the two-state solution has persisted as a diplomatic ideal despite repeated failures, and what its future, or possible alternatives, may hold for peace in the Middle East.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains one of the most deeply entrenched and protracted conflicts in contemporary international relations, persisting despite more than seven decades of diplomatic initiatives, peace negotiations, and international intervention efforts. Central to the

⁵Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 21-24.

⁶Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006), 217.

enduring nature of the conflict are unresolved issues surrounding land ownership, national identity, sovereignty, borders, security, the status of Jerusalem, and the question of Palestinian refugees. Although the international community has long endorsed the two-state solution as the most viable framework for achieving lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians, developments on the ground, including the continued expansion of Israeli settlements, political divisions within Palestinian leadership, and shifting regional and global political alignments, have significantly weakened its feasibility. The conflict has also generated severe humanitarian crises characterised by recurrent wars in Gaza, mass displacement, restrictions on movement, economic blockades, and widespread allegations of human rights violations affecting millions of civilians. In addition to its humanitarian consequences, the conflict continues to destabilise the Middle East by fueling extremism, undermining diplomatic relations, and deepening mistrust among regional and international actors. Despite numerous peace accords, ceasefires, and mediation efforts, no agreement has successfully addressed the fundamental issues of occupation, territorial boundaries, refugees, security arrangements, and mutual recognition between the parties.

Within this context, this study examines the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the lens of the two-state structure to assess its viability as a sustainable framework for conflict resolution and long-term peace in the region. Specifically, the study explores the historical and political origins of the conflict and how these have shaped contemporary hostilities; analyzes the conceptual foundations and evolution of the two-state structure as a proposed solution; assesses the political, territorial, security, and humanitarian challenges confronting its implementation; evaluates the roles and positions of key actors including Israel, Palestine, regional stakeholders, and the international community in either sustaining or undermining the two-state framework; and ultimately determines whether the two-state structure remains a feasible and realistic pathway toward lasting peace in light of contemporary developments. The study focuses on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as it relates to the proposal and implementation of the two-state solution from 1947 to 2024, examining key historical milestones, peace initiatives, and the evolving political, territorial, and humanitarian dimensions of the conflict.

Geographically, the research is limited to Israel, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, as these territories form the core of the territorial dispute at the centre of the two-state debate. The analysis primarily emphasises the political, legal, and security dimensions of the

conflict while making limited reference to social and economic issues where they directly influence the feasibility of the proposed framework. The significance of the study lies in its contribution to scholarly and policy-oriented debates on conflict resolution in one of the most enduring conflicts in global politics. By critically evaluating the two-state structure in the context of ongoing hostilities, the study provides insights into the strengths and limitations of existing peace frameworks. It enriches academic discussions on international conflict, peacebuilding, and Middle Eastern politics. The findings may also provide useful perspectives for policymakers, diplomats, international organisations, and peace advocates seeking informed approaches to the future of Israeli-Palestinian relations, while serving as a valuable reference for students and researchers interested in the evolving challenges associated with the two-state structure. The study is further justified by the conflict's persistence and intensification despite decades of diplomatic efforts centred on the two-state framework, as continued violence, territorial fragmentation, settlement expansion, and humanitarian crises raise important questions about the practicality and relevance of this solution in the current geopolitical environment. In response to these concerns, the research seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical commitments to the two-state idea and the realities of prolonged conflict by providing a balanced and systematic evaluation that may inform future academic inquiry and policy discussions.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative research approach rooted in historical analysis, drawing on both primary and secondary sources to trace the origins and evolution of the conflict. Primary materials include archival records, United Nations documents, diplomatic correspondence, treaties, memoirs, and international legal instruments such as the Balfour Declaration, United Nations resolutions, the Oslo Accords, and relevant provisions of the Geneva Conventions. Secondary sources include academic books, peer-reviewed journals, policy reports, and publications from research institutions such as the International Crisis Group, RAND Corporation, the Brookings Institution, and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. In addition, the study utilises selected case studies such as the Gaza wars of 2008-2009, 2014, and 2021, the First and Second Intifadas, and major diplomatic initiatives to illustrate patterns of conflict escalation and attempts at de-escalation. Through qualitative analysis, the research examines political, demographic, geopolitical, security, and ideological variables that influence the viability of the two-state model, making this methodological approach particularly suitable for

exploring the complex historical trajectories and interpretive dimensions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Theoretical Framework

The Israeli-Palestinian war and the enduring debate surrounding the two-state solution can be best understood through a combination of theoretical perspectives drawn from international relations and conflict studies. Given the protracted nature of the conflict, no single theory sufficiently explains its origins, persistence, and the repeated failure of peace initiatives. This study, therefore, adopts a multi-theoretical framework, drawing primarily on Conflict Theory, Realist Theory, and Liberal Peace Theory, with supplementary insights from Constructivism. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive lens for analysing the structural causes of the conflict, the strategic behaviour of actors, and the challenges confronting the two-state solution.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory, rooted in the works of Karl Marx and later developed within political sociology and peace studies, emphasises inequality, power struggles, and competition over scarce resources as central drivers of social and political conflict. Applied to the Israeli-Palestinian war, conflict theory highlights the deep structural asymmetries between Israelis and Palestinians, particularly in terms of military power, political influence, economic resources, and control over land.

The struggle over territory, sovereignty, and self-determination reflects a classic conflict over material and symbolic resources. Palestinian dispossession following the creation of Israel in 1948 and subsequent occupations after the 1967 war entrenched systemic inequalities that continue to fuel resistance and violence.⁷ From this perspective, the two-state structure is conceived as a mechanism for redistributing power and resources by granting Palestinians territorial sovereignty and political autonomy. However, conflict theory also explains why the two-state solution has struggled to materialise: dominant actors in this case, Israel, have limited incentives to relinquish advantages derived from occupation and control.⁸ Thus, conflict theory underscores that without

⁷Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, 45-47.

⁸Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 88.

addressing structural inequalities, land dispossession, and power imbalances, diplomatic frameworks such as the two-state solution are unlikely to achieve sustainable peace.

Realist Theory

Realist theory, particularly classical and neo-realism, offers another crucial explanatory framework for understanding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Realism views international politics as a struggle for power among self-interested actors operating in an anarchic international system where security is paramount. States, according to realists, prioritise survival, territorial integrity, and strategic advantage above moral or legal considerations. From a realist standpoint, Israel's policies, military dominance, territorial control, and settlement expansion are rational strategies aimed at ensuring national security in a hostile regional environment.⁹ The reluctance to fully embrace the two-state structure stems from security concerns, fears of hostile neighbours, and doubts about the viability of a Palestinian state capable of preventing militant attacks.

Similarly, Palestinian actors operate within realist constraints. Groups such as Hamas adopt armed resistance as a strategy to counter Israel's overwhelming power, while the Palestinian Authority pursues diplomatic engagement to gain international recognition. External actors, including the United States and regional powers, also act on realist calculations, often prioritising strategic alliances over equitable conflict resolution.¹⁰ Realism thus explains why the two-state solution, despite its legal and moral appeal, remains subordinated to security dilemmas, power politics, and regional geopolitics.

Liberal Peace Theory

Liberal peace theory provides a contrasting perspective, emphasising cooperation, international institutions, economic interdependence, democracy, and the rule of law as pathways to peace. This theory underpins much of the international community's support for the two-state structure. Institutions such as the United Nations, the European Union, and various peace initiatives are grounded in the liberal belief that negotiated settlements, mutual recognition, and

⁹John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 19.

¹⁰Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 412.

institutional frameworks can mitigate conflict. The Oslo Accords of the 1990s exemplify liberal peace assumptions by promoting dialogue, gradual trust-building, and shared governance mechanisms. Proponents argue that the establishment of two sovereign states would institutionalise peace by embedding cooperation into political, economic, and security arrangements.¹¹ However, critics of liberal peace theory point out that the failure of the Oslo process and subsequent negotiations reveal its limitations in contexts marked by severe power asymmetries and ongoing violence. Without enforcement mechanisms and genuine commitment from both parties, liberal frameworks struggle to translate agreements into reality.¹² This critique is essential for understanding why the two-state solution has repeatedly stalled despite sustained international endorsement.

Constructivism

Constructivist theory complements the above perspectives by focusing on the role of identity, narratives, historical memory, and social constructions in shaping political behaviour. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is deeply embedded in competing historical narratives, religious symbolism, and national identities. Jerusalem, for example, is not merely a territorial issue but a powerful symbol of religious and national belonging for both sides. Constructivists argue that the persistence of the conflict is reinforced by mutually exclusive narratives of victimhood and legitimacy, which hinder compromise and reconciliation.¹³ From this viewpoint, the two-state structure faces not only political and territorial obstacles but also psychological and identity-based resistance. Sustainable peace, therefore, requires narrative transformation, mutual recognition of historical grievances, and reconciliation alongside political agreements. By integrating conflict theory, realism, liberal peace theory, and constructivism, this study adopts a holistic framework for analysing the Israeli-Palestinian war and the two-state solution. Conflict theory exposes structural inequalities; realism explains strategic behaviour and security concerns; liberal peace theory provides the normative basis for diplomatic solutions; and constructivism highlights the

¹¹Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 268.

¹²Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, 201.

¹³Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 89.

role of identity and narratives. Together, these theories illuminate why the two-state solution has endured as an ideal yet struggled as a practical reality.

Historical Background

The history of Israel and Palestine is deeply rooted in antiquity and shaped by successive waves of conquest, migration, religious development, and colonial intervention. The land historically known as Palestine occupies a central place in the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, making it one of the most contested territories in the world. Ancient Israelite kingdoms emerged in the region around the second millennium BCE, followed by periods of Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman rule. After the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE and the suppression of Jewish revolts, large numbers of Jews were dispersed across the Mediterranean and Middle East, initiating the Jewish diaspora.¹⁴

From the seventh century onward, Palestine came under Islamic rule following Arab conquests, and over time developed a predominantly Arab and Muslim population, alongside Christian and Jewish minorities. For centuries, the region was governed by various Islamic empires, most notably the Ottoman Empire, which ruled Palestine from 1517 until the end of the First World War. Under Ottoman administration, Palestine was not a distinct political entity but was integrated into larger provincial structures, and its population lived largely in agrarian communities with strong local identities.¹⁵

The modern roots of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict emerged in the late nineteenth century with the rise of Zionism, a political movement advocating the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine as a response to anti-Semitism in Europe. Jewish migration to Palestine increased significantly during this period, altering the demographic balance and heightening tensions with the indigenous Arab population. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I and the establishment of the British Mandate over Palestine further internationalised the conflict. Britain's

¹⁴Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 9-15.

¹⁵Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 54.

contradictory commitments, most notably the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which supported a Jewish national home, and promises made to Arab leaders, exacerbated mutual suspicions.¹⁶

In 1947, the United Nations proposed the partition of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states. While Jewish leaders accepted the plan, Arab leaders rejected it, viewing it as unjust. The declaration of the State of Israel in 1948 triggered the first Arab-Israeli war, resulting in Israel's territorial expansion and the displacement of over 700,000 Palestinians, an event known as the Nakba (catastrophe) in Palestinian historical memory.¹⁷ The failure to establish a Palestinian state at this juncture laid the foundation for decades of conflict. Subsequent wars, particularly the 1967 Six-Day War, dramatically reshaped the region. Israel occupied the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and other Arab territories, bringing millions of Palestinians under military occupation. These developments entrenched the conflict and shifted international discourse toward the idea of a two-state solution based on Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories and Palestinian self-determination.¹⁸

Geography of Israel and Palestine

Geographically, Israel, Palestine and Arabs are located in the eastern Mediterranean region of Western Asia, serving as a land bridge between Africa, Asia, and Europe. The area is bounded by Lebanon to the north, Syria and Jordan to the east, Egypt to the southwest, and the Mediterranean Sea to the west. Despite its relatively small size, the region exhibits remarkable geographical diversity, which has played a significant role in its historical and strategic importance. Israel occupies a narrow strip of land stretching from the Mediterranean coastline eastward to the Jordan River Valley. The country's geography includes fertile coastal plains, the central highlands, the arid Negev Desert in the south, and the Jordan Rift Valley, one of the lowest land points on earth. This varied terrain has influenced settlement patterns, agricultural practices, and military strategy throughout history.¹⁹

¹⁶Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, 27-30.

¹⁷Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, 118.

¹⁸United Nations Security Council, Resolution 242.

¹⁹Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 11.

The Palestinian territories are geographically fragmented, comprising primarily the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. The West Bank is characterised by hilly terrain and fertile valleys, making it historically suitable for agriculture. East Jerusalem holds immense religious and political significance as a sacred city for Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. The Gaza Strip, a narrow coastal enclave along the Mediterranean Sea, is densely populated and geographically isolated, contributing to its severe socio-economic challenges.²⁰ Control over geographical features such as water resources, borders, and high ground has been central to the conflict. The Jordan River and underground aquifers are vital sources of freshwater, and disputes over access and control have exacerbated tensions between Israelis and Palestinians. Additionally, Israel's strategic concern with defensible borders has influenced settlement policies and military deployments, particularly in the West Bank.²¹ The fragmented geography of Palestinian territories poses significant challenges to the realization of a viable two-state structure. Discontinuous land, settlement expansion, and restricted movement complicate governance, economic integration, and territorial sovereignty. Thus, geography is not merely a physical backdrop but a core element shaping political negotiations, security concerns, and the prospects for peace.

Causes and Dynamics of the Conflict

The Israeli, Palestinian and Arab war is a complex and protracted conflict driven by a combination of historical, political, territorial, religious, socio-economic, and international factors. Its persistence is not the result of a single cause but rather the interaction of multiple forces that have evolved over time. Understanding the causes and dynamics of the conflict is essential to appreciating why peace initiatives, particularly the two-state structure, have repeatedly failed to produce a lasting resolution. One of the primary causes of the Israeli-Palestinian war lies in the historical processes that unfolded during the late Ottoman and British Mandate periods. The rise of Zionism in late nineteenth-century Europe, which sought to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine, coincided with the growth of Arab nationalism among the indigenous Palestinian

²⁰Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 72.

²¹Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, 189.

population. These competing national movements laid the foundation for conflict, as both groups claimed the same territory on historical, religious, and political grounds.²²

British colonial policies during the Mandate period (1920-1948) significantly exacerbated tensions. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 expressed British support for a Jewish national home in Palestine while simultaneously promising not to prejudice the rights of existing non-Jewish communities. In practice, British administration failed to reconcile these conflicting commitments, leading to increased Jewish immigration, land acquisition, and growing Palestinian resistance.²³ The inability of colonial authorities to manage these tensions culminated in widespread violence and ultimately the partition proposal of 1947. The declaration of the State of Israel in 1948 and the ensuing Arab-Israeli war marked a turning point in the conflict. Israel's victory resulted in significant territorial expansion and the displacement of over 700,000 Palestinians, creating a refugee crisis that remains unresolved. This event, known as the Nakba, is central to Palestinian historical consciousness and continues to shape attitudes toward Israel and peace negotiations.²⁴

Territorial disputes constitute a core cause of the Israeli-Palestinian war. The boundaries of Israel and a prospective Palestinian state have remained contested since 1948. The 1967 Six-Day War further intensified these disputes, as Israel occupied the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, bringing millions of Palestinians under military occupation.²⁵ The occupation transformed the nature of the conflict from an inter-state war to an asymmetrical struggle between a powerful state and a stateless population. Israeli settlement construction in the occupied territories has fragmented Palestinian land and undermined the territorial contiguity required for a viable Palestinian state. Palestinians view settlements as illegal under international law, while many Israelis regard them as essential for security or rooted in historical and religious claims.²⁶ Politically, the absence of a sovereign Palestinian state has entrenched instability. The Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) initially pursued armed struggle, while later adopting diplomatic

²²Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 87.

²³Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, 29-31.

²⁴Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, 121.

²⁵Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 384.

²⁶Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 144.

engagement following the Oslo Accords. However, internal divisions, particularly between Fatah and Hamas, have weakened Palestinian negotiating capacity and complicated peace efforts.²⁷

Religion and identity play a significant role in shaping the conflict's dynamics. Jerusalem, home to sacred sites for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, symbolises the deep intertwining of religious belief and political claims. Competing narratives regarding historical entitlement and divine promise have hardened positions and reduced the scope for compromise.²⁸ National identity is equally central. For Israelis, the state represents refuge, survival, and self-determination following centuries of persecution, including the Holocaust. For Palestinians, the loss of land and displacement represent a profound injustice and denial of their own right to self-determination. These mutually exclusive narratives perpetuate mistrust and fuel cycles of violence.²⁹

Socio-economic disparities have reinforced the conflict's dynamics. Prolonged occupation, movement restrictions, and control over resources have severely constrained Palestinian economic development, leading to high levels of unemployment, poverty, and aid dependency. These conditions have contributed to social frustration and periodic uprisings, such as the First and Second Intifadas.³⁰ Conversely, Israel's relatively advanced economy and military superiority have entrenched asymmetry in power relations. This imbalance affects negotiation processes, often enabling Israel to dictate terms while Palestinians negotiate from a position of weakness. Economic hardship thus becomes both a cause and consequence of ongoing conflict.

International involvement has significantly shaped the Israeli-Palestinian war. The United States has played a dominant mediating role but is widely perceived as biased toward Israel, undermining its credibility among Palestinians. Regional actors, including Arab states and Iran, have influenced the conflict through diplomatic, financial, and military support to various parties.³¹ The United Nations and other international organisations have repeatedly affirmed Palestinian rights and the illegality of occupation, yet enforcement mechanisms remain weak. This gap

²⁷Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 310.

²⁸Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 92.

²⁹Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, 6.

³⁰Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, 214.

³¹Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby*, 35.

between international norms and political realities has sustained the conflict and diminished faith in global governance structures.³²

The Israeli-Palestinian war is characterised by recurring cycles of violence and failed negotiations. Periods of dialogue are often interrupted by outbreaks of armed confrontation, which further entrench hostility and erode trust. Security concerns, retaliation, and civilian casualties reinforce hardline positions on both sides, making compromise politically costly.³³ These dynamics illustrate that the conflict is not static but continuously reshaped by events on the ground, leadership changes, regional instability, and global politics. The persistence of violence reflects the unresolved structural causes of the conflict.

The Two-State Structure

The two-state structure between Israel and Palestine represents the most widely endorsed framework for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict within international diplomacy. At its core, the two-state solution proposes the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state existing peacefully alongside the State of Israel, with both entities enjoying mutual recognition, secure borders, and political legitimacy. This framework is grounded in principles of self-determination, international law, and conflict resolution, and it has shaped peace negotiations for several decades.

The origins of the two-state structure can be traced to the United Nations Partition Plan of 1947, which proposed dividing Mandatory Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states, with Jerusalem under international administration. Although the plan was never fully implemented due to the outbreak of war in 1948, it laid the conceptual foundation for territorial partition as a means of reconciling competing national claims.³⁴ Following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the establishment of Israel, the question of Palestinian statehood remained unresolved. The idea of two states re-emerged prominently after the 1967 Six-Day War, when Israel occupied the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 called for

³²United Nations, various resolutions on Palestinian rights.

³³Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 267.

³⁴Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 189.

Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and the recognition of all states' right to live in peace, implicitly reinforcing the two-state logic.³⁵ The two-state structure is premised on the belief that peace can only be achieved if both Israelis and Palestinians exercise their right to self-determination within clearly defined territorial boundaries. It seeks to balance Israeli security concerns with Palestinian aspirations for independence and sovereignty.

International law forms a central pillar of the two-state structure. The framework derives its legitimacy from UN resolutions, the Geneva Conventions, and the principles of territorial integrity and the non-acquisition of land by force. The international community widely recognises East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip as occupied territories, intended to form the territorial basis of a future Palestinian state.³⁶ The Oslo Accords of the 1990s represented the most significant practical attempt to operationalise the two-state solution. These agreements established the Palestinian Authority and introduced limited Palestinian self-governance, with the expectation that final-status negotiations would address core issues such as borders, Jerusalem, refugees, and security.³⁷ While Oslo did not create a Palestinian state, it institutionalised the two-state framework as the central reference point for negotiations.

Territory is a defining element of the two-state solution. The proposed Palestinian state is generally envisioned to consist of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital. However, Israeli settlement expansion in the West Bank has fragmented Palestinian territory, undermining geographical contiguity and complicating the feasibility of a viable state.³⁸ Border delineation remains contentious, particularly regarding land swaps, settlement blocs, and control of strategic areas such as the Jordan Valley. Israel emphasises defensible borders and security depth, while Palestinians stress territorial continuity and sovereignty. These competing priorities have repeatedly stalled negotiations and eroded confidence in the two-state framework.

Two of the most sensitive issues within the two-state structure are Jerusalem and Palestinian refugees. Jerusalem holds profound religious, historical, and political significance for

³⁵United Nations Security Council, Resolution 242.

³⁶Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 412.

³⁷Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 21.

³⁸Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, 201.

Jews, Muslims, and Christians alike. The two-state solution traditionally envisions Jerusalem as a shared or divided capital, yet unilateral actions and symbolic claims have made compromise increasingly difficult.³⁹ The refugee issue, stemming from the displacement of Palestinians in 1948 and 1967, poses another major challenge. Palestinians assert a right of return based on international law and historical justice, while Israel views large-scale return as a demographic threat. The two-state framework generally proposes a negotiated settlement involving limited return, compensation, and resettlement, though consensus remains elusive.⁴⁰

Challenges

Despite broad international support, the two-state structure faces significant obstacles. Continued occupation, settlement expansion, and restrictions on Palestinian movement have weakened trust in negotiations. Internally, Palestinian political fragmentation, particularly the divide between Fatah and Hamas, has undermined unified leadership and negotiating capacity.⁴¹ Power asymmetry between Israel and the Palestinians further complicates implementation. Israel's military, economic, and diplomatic dominance allows it to shape realities on the ground, while Palestinians often lack leverage in negotiations. Additionally, inconsistent and sometimes partisan international mediation has limited the effectiveness of peace efforts.⁴²

Despite these challenges, the two-state structure remains central to international discourse because it is perceived as the most practical solution that aligns with international law and self-determination norms. Advocates argue that abandoning the two-state framework risks entrenching permanent conflict, inequality, or alternative arrangements that may be less stable or equitable. However, critics contend that ongoing territorial fragmentation and political realities have rendered the two-state solution increasingly unviable, prompting debates about alternative frameworks such as confederation or a single democratic state. Nonetheless, the two-state structure continues to serve as a benchmark against which other proposals are evaluated.⁴³

³⁹Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 90.

⁴⁰Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, 154.

⁴¹Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 315.

⁴²Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby*, 28.

⁴³Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 280.

Why the Two-State Solution Remains Central to Peace

Despite its challenges, the two-state model remains the only internationally endorsed framework capable of balancing competing national aspirations. Alternative proposals such as a one-state arrangement, confederation, or long-term autonomy under Israeli security oversight have gained attention but face significant political, demographic, and ideological barriers. A two-state structure provides a clear territorial division, mutual recognition, and the legal finality needed for long-term stability.

The key strengths of the two-state solution include:

1. **International Legitimacy:** It is rooted in UN Security Council Resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), and 1515 (2003), all of which affirm the principle of land for peace.
2. **Historical Precedent:** The 1993-1995 Oslo Accords, although ultimately unsuccessful, demonstrated that negotiated territorial compromise is possible.
3. **Regional Consensus:** The Arab Peace Initiative (2002) offers full normalisation between Israel and Arab states in exchange for withdrawal to the 1967 borders and the establishment of a Palestinian state.
4. **Practicality:** Most international actors agree that two sovereign entities are more governable and more compatible with international law than a single bi-national state.⁴⁴

Settlement Expansion

Israel's ongoing settlement growth in the West Bank complicates the territorial contiguity of a future Palestinian state. On the other hand, the Internal Palestinian Political Division, viz Hamas controls of Gaza while Fatah governs the West Bank, complicates unified state-building. Security Concerns: Israel insists on long-term demilitarisation and control of certain border conditions, which Palestinians consider erosions of sovereignty. Furthermore, the status of Jerusalem is contested; both sides claim Jerusalem as their capital, making the city one of the most contentious final-status issues.

⁴⁴I. Lustick, *Paradigm Lost: From Two-State Solution to One-State Reality* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 32-36.

The persistence of these obstacles explains why diplomatic initiatives repeatedly stall. Nevertheless, the two-state structure remains the only framework capable of reconciling competing narratives without dismantling the national identities of either Israelis or Palestinians. Given the failure of past negotiations, experts have proposed a revised model built on phased recognition, international guarantees, and mutually agreed benchmarks. This framework would proceed in three stages:

Stage One: De-escalation and Humanitarian Reconstruction. This stage focuses on stabilising Gaza, ensuring humanitarian access, implementing ceasefire arrangements, and establishing an internationally supervised reconstruction authority. International actors, particularly the EU, the United States, Egypt, and Qatar, would coordinate these efforts.

Stage Two: Institutional Reform and Political Reconciliation, Palestinian political unification under a technocratic or unity government is essential for credible negotiations. Simultaneously, Israel would need to halt settlement expansion and ease restrictions on movement in the West Bank, demonstrating political commitment to a negotiated outcome.

Stage Three: Final Status Negotiations. Actual negotiations would address borders, security arrangements, Jerusalem, refugees, water resources, and economic relations. International guarantees, possibly through a UN-mandated peacekeeping force, would ensure compliance during the transition period. This phased model does not eliminate ideological differences, but it introduces structured incentives and monitoring mechanisms that were absent in earlier diplomatic efforts.⁴⁵

Socio-Economic and Humanitarian Implications of the Wars

The protracted Israel-Palestinian conflict has generated profound socio-economic and humanitarian consequences that extend far beyond the immediate theatre of violence. Decades of hostilities, military occupation, displacement, and periodic escalations have entrenched structural poverty, weakened institutions, and produced one of the most enduring humanitarian crises in the

⁴⁵D. H. Allin, *The Middle East: Ten Years after the Gulf War* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2001), 18-24.

contemporary international system. While both Israeli and Palestinian societies bear costs, the scale, intensity, and persistence of socio-economic and humanitarian challenges are disproportionately borne by the Palestinian population, particularly in the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank.

One of the most visible socio-economic consequences of the conflict is the systematic disruption of economic activity. Restrictions on movement, closure of borders, checkpoints, and the separation barrier have fragmented Palestinian markets and undermined productive capacity. Agriculture, manufacturing, and trade, once central to the Palestinian economy, have suffered a severe decline due to land confiscation, limited access to water resources, and export restrictions.⁴⁶ These constraints have led to chronic unemployment, especially among youth, and fostered economic dependence on foreign aid and remittances. Poverty levels in the Palestinian territories have risen sharply during periods of intensified conflict. According to the World Bank, repeated cycles of violence have eroded household assets and reduced income-generating opportunities, pushing large segments of the population below the poverty line.⁴⁷ In Gaza, where a land, sea, and air blockade has been in place since 2007, economic collapse has been especially acute, with unemployment rates among the highest in the world. The inability to import essential raw materials or export finished goods has rendered the local economy largely non-functional.⁴⁸ The Israeli economy, while significantly more resilient, has also faced socio-economic repercussions. Increased defence spending diverts resources from social services such as housing, education, and welfare. Periodic escalations disrupt tourism, foreign investment, and labour markets, particularly in border communities.⁴⁹ Moreover, prolonged militarisation has contributed to social inequality within Israel, disproportionately affecting marginalised groups.

The conflict has severely undermined human capital development. In Palestinian areas, schools and universities are frequently damaged or destroyed during military operations, while

⁴⁶S. Roy, *The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-Development* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2016), 63.

⁴⁷World Bank, *Economic Monitoring Report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2022), 12.

⁴⁸UNCTAD, *Economic Costs of the Israeli Occupation for the Palestinian People* (New York: United Nations, 2020), 7.

⁴⁹B'Tselem, *The Economic Impact of Israel's Security Policies* (Jerusalem: B'Tselem, 2018).

curfews and security restrictions disrupt academic calendars. Students often experience prolonged interruptions to learning, leading to high dropout rates and reduced educational attainment.⁵⁰ Over time, this erosion of education undermines workforce skills and perpetuates cycles of poverty and dependency. Psychological trauma among children further compounds these challenges. Exposure to violence, displacement, and insecurity affects cognitive development and academic performance, limiting long-term socio-economic prospects.⁵¹ In Israel, while educational institutions are more stable, repeated security threats and mandatory military service also shape youth experiences and labour market outcomes.

Humanitarian conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories represent one of the most pressing dimensions of the conflict. Recurrent military confrontations have resulted in extensive civilian casualties, mass displacement, and widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure, including homes, hospitals, water systems, and electricity networks. Humanitarian agencies consistently report shortages of clean water, electricity, and medical supplies, particularly in Gaza.⁵² Access to healthcare remains a critical concern. Hospitals in Gaza and parts of the West Bank face chronic shortages of equipment, fuel, and specialised personnel. Patients requiring advanced treatment often need permits to travel, which are frequently delayed or denied, resulting in preventable deaths and deteriorating health outcomes.⁵³ Public health crises, including malnutrition and the spread of preventable diseases, are exacerbated by overcrowding and inadequate sanitation. Displacement is another enduring humanitarian consequence. Thousands of Palestinians have been repeatedly displaced due to demolitions, military operations, and settlement expansion. This instability disrupts social networks, erodes livelihoods, and increases vulnerability, particularly among women, children, and older people.⁵⁴

⁵⁰UNESCO, *Education under Occupation: Palestinian Education in Crisis* (Paris: UNESCO, 2014), 45.

⁵¹B. K. Barber, *Adolescents and War: How Youth Deal with Political Violence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 92.

⁵²OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), *Humanitarian Needs Overview: Occupied Palestinian Territory* (New York: United Nations, 2021).

⁵³Amnesty International, *Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories: The Humanitarian Impact of the Conflict* (London: Amnesty International, 2019).

⁵⁴UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees and the Humanitarian Challenge* (Amman: UNRWA, 2020).

The socio-economic and humanitarian impacts of the conflict are deeply gendered. Women often bear the burden of caregiving in contexts of poverty, injury, and psychological trauma, while facing limited access to employment and social services. At the same time, conflict-related stress has contributed to rising levels of domestic violence and social fragmentation.⁵⁵ Youth radicalisation and social alienation also represent significant long-term consequences. Prolonged exposure to violence and lack of economic opportunities reinforces frustration and hopelessness, increasing susceptibility to extremist narratives and undermining prospects for sustainable peace.⁵⁶ Beyond Israel, Palestine and Arabs, the conflict generates broader regional socio-economic and humanitarian repercussions. Refugee flows strain host countries, while instability undermines regional cooperation and development. Internationally, sustained humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian territories represents a significant financial burden, reflecting the failure to achieve a durable political settlement.

Conclusion

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains one of the most protracted and complex struggles in contemporary international relations, shaped by competing nationalisms, historical grievances, territorial disputes, and deep-rooted security concerns. Over decades, cycles of violence, failed negotiations, and unilateral actions have entrenched mistrust and hardened positions on both sides, exacting immense human, economic, and social costs, particularly for the Palestinian population living under occupation and blockade, and for Israeli society living with persistent insecurity.

Within this context, the Two-State Structure has emerged as the most widely endorsed framework for resolving the conflict. It is grounded in international law, United Nations resolutions, and the principle of self-determination, and it envisions Israel and an independent Palestinian state coexisting peacefully within secure and recognised borders. Despite its broad international support, the practical realisation of the two-state solution has been severely

⁵⁵UN Women, gender-related humanitarian impacts.

⁵⁶Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilisation* (London: Sage, 1996), 171.

undermined by continued settlement expansion, territorial fragmentation, internal political divisions, security dilemmas, and the absence of sustained, credible mediation.

Nevertheless, the Two-State Structure remains the most viable and pragmatic pathway to a just and lasting peace. It offers a framework capable of addressing core issues such as borders, refugees, Jerusalem, and security while preserving the national aspirations and identities of both Israelis and Palestinians and abandoning this framework without a credible alternative risk perpetuating instability, deepening humanitarian crises, and normalising a conflict that undermines regional and global peace.

Recommendations

- i. The United Nations, the European Union, and neutral states should lead a reinvigorated peace process that ensures equal representation and credibility.
- ii. Israel should halt further settlement construction in the West Bank and ensure compliance with international law.
- iii. Internal political divisions between Fatah and Hamas have weakened the Palestinian negotiating position. A unified Palestinian leadership, committed to non-violence and negotiation, is critical for credible participation in peace talks.
- iv. Both parties must engage in confidence-building initiatives that reduce the risk of escalation and foster mutual trust.
- v. Negotiations must prioritise the resolution of key contentious issues. Jerusalem's status should be negotiated with sensitivity to its religious and political significance.
- vi. International donors and regional partners should provide targeted support to foster economic self-reliance and improve living conditions, particularly in Gaza, to prevent humanitarian crises from undermining political solutions.⁵⁷

⁵⁷UNCTAD, *Economic Costs of the Israeli Occupation*, 9; Roy, *The Gaza Strip*, 71.

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