

Mina Rosner Essay Competition

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Free Palestine?

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been an ongoing dilemma since the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948. The conflict is extremely complex with many elements involved. Regardless of whether a person supports the existence of the State of Israel, or supports the Palestinian cause, it is important to acknowledge that the blame ought to be shared between both nations for the lack of a resolution. The cliché ‘it takes two to tango’ is clearly demonstrated in this conflict. Both the Israelis and the Palestinians have committed human rights violations. It is important to recognize that Palestinian propaganda portrays Israel as the perpetrator of violence and brutality, which in many instances is factually false or fabricated. Although, this does not excuse Israel from genuine criticism about their violations of Palestinian human rights in the West Bank or Gaza.

Currently, Israel has a military occupation over the West Bank. Israel also enforces measures to separate itself from the West Bank, using a separation barrier. There are also dozens of checkpoints that are intended to keep Israeli citizens safe from terrorist attacks. These checkpoints have other adverse consequences for the Palestinian people. They have significantly restricted movement of people and goods to and from the West Bank. It is predicted that the GDP in the West Bank has dropped by eight percent between 1994-2015, due to checkpoints and the separation barrier. Israel should, therefore, be held responsible for significantly restricting economic growth in the West Bank. Sarit Arbell, a spokeswoman from the Israeli organization, *Checkpoint Watch*, explains, “The State of Israel imposes on Palestinian towns and villages deep inside Palestinian territory, prevents them from living a normal everyday life, humiliating them on a daily basis and intensifying despair and extremism.” It is estimated that eighty percent of Palestinians who live in the West Bank live below the poverty line. Israel is essentially limiting Palestinian social and economic development. This said, there are other reasons for the high rates of poverty in the West Bank and singularly blaming Israel would be unfair and inaccurate.

The Palestinian Authority or (PA), and Hamas are both corrupt and choose to direct the hundreds of millions of dollars of their funding from nations such as the United States, towards acts of terrorism against the State of Israel. This is exemplified by the tunnels dug into Israel in an effort to murder Israeli civilians orchestrated by Hamas. These funds were originally intended to improve the standard of living for those in the West Bank and Gaza. Israel has actually directed funds to the PA to build schools although this money was used to obtain weaponry to

attack Israel, which was then hidden in schools to prevent Israel from destroying it. This demonstrates that Palestinian leaders encourage and finance human rights violations at the cost of their people's well-being.

Another example of a human rights issue are Israeli settlements. Israeli settlements are Israeli civilian communities that account for hundreds of thousands of Israelis. Approximately 120-140 Israeli settlements are located on disputed territories which are considered a violation of Palestinian human rights. These settlements have significantly contributed to the lack of resolution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Many argue that these settlements are a clear violation of international law. Israel has separated the West Bank into three sections, Areas A, B, and C. The most problematic of the three areas is Area C, which makes up approximately 60% of the West Bank. This is where the majority of settlements are located, according to the Cable News Network (CNN). An example of how an illegal settlement violates Palestinian human rights is represented in the challenges Palestinians face in creating their own state, due to the infringement of these settlements. Palestinians accuse Israelis of creating large and intrusive settlements in their land illegally, without considering the negative consequences to Palestinian civilians who are being harmed by their existence. Settlements are also one of the largest obstacles in the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians and Binyamin Netanyahu, the President of Israel, has recently stated that Israel will continue to build settlements. In addition to human rights violations initiated by Israelis, Palestinians also have internal violations.

It is important to make a distinction between the genuine suffering of the Palestinian people, and the propaganda broadcasted to fuel anti-Semitism and spread hatred against the State of Israel. An example of such propaganda is when news corporations broadcast biased headlines such as "86 Palestinians dead and hundreds injured in peaceful protests while no Israeli casualties." This headline denies facts of violent protest and is a clear example of Palestinian propaganda. These headlines are also often broadcasted without providing any context and displays Israel as a perpetrator of violence against the Palestinians. An example debunking such propaganda was demonstrated in a video which was played on the Israeli news channel, Israel Today. The video showed Palestinians practicing being injured by Israeli soldiers. Another example of Palestinian propaganda is the comparison between how the Nazis treated the Jews, and how the Israelis treat the Palestinians. This comparison is factually false and undermines the suffering Jews endured in the Shoah, in an attempt to exaggerate Palestinian suffering and demonize Israel. It is apparent that there is genuine Palestinian suffering, but this does not justify the terrorism and human rights violations that the Palestinians commit against Israel.

The 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict, otherwise known as Operation Protective Edge, was a clear demonstration of the Palestinians committing terrorist attacks against the State of Israel. According to Israeli border Security, “ Hamas, along with other Palestinian groups in Gaza, fired approximately 4,500 missiles at Israel.” These attacks were intended to kill Israeli civilians. Another example of a human rights violation is when Palestinians use their children as human shields while engaging in acts of terror. One may argue that the Palestinian people are oppressed by Israel and do not have a means to self-determination through diplomacy. As a result, they resort to violence as they feel there are no other alternatives to resist Israeli occupation. It is said that, “ One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter.” Those who support Palestinian acts of terror characterize them as legitimate acts of resistance against an oppressive occupying force. One may agree or disagree with this argument, but one cannot deny that the result of a violent resistance is violence and death.

Hamas and the Palestinian Authority also commit human rights violations against their own people. According to the Palestinian Center of Human Rights (PCHR), “ Torture in Palestinian prisons has become systematically institutionalised. The Palestine Authority is widely involved in torture and extra judicial killings of political activists in their prisons.” There is also minimal freedom of speech for Palestinians. This is shown when journalists are tortured as a result of publicly criticizing the leadership. The authorities later deny the allegations of committing such human rights violations. Hamas authorities have sentenced 88 people to death since taking control of Gaza in 2007, according to the PCHR. Capital punishment is also commonly practiced in Gaza, despite the European Union’s objections of it being inhumane and cruel while not deterring criminal behaviour. Recently, individuals were forced by Hamas to close down their businesses and protest at the border between Israel and Gaza. If a person refused to protest, their family’s safety was threatened, or they were beaten.

The Israeli Government and the Palestinian leadership are both responsible for human rights violations against their own people and each other. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is complex, although sometimes complicated problems are best solved with simple solutions. It behooves the leaders of both the Israelis and the Palestinians to stop participating in this twisted dance and take the lead to seek a solution to bring peace and end this conflict.

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