

Historical Context

Today's reality in Jerusalem is rooted in the historical developments of the not so distant past. Many people attribute the problem in Palestine to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, while those with a better understanding of the context might say it all started with the 1948 Nakba (see below). However, the story for the Palestinians starts long before that. It starts with the birth of the Zionist movement in Europe in the late 19th century. The Zionist movement's project was to establish a "Jewish national home" in Palestine through colonization -- the occupation of Palestinian land and the expulsion of its owners, replacing one people with another.

The historical review below puts today's Jerusalem story in the right context, as a direct result of systematic and strategic colonization of a people and their land. The reality of systematic displacement faced today by Palestinians in Jerusalem is based on strategic actions in the past, but is also part of long-term plans for the future.

Zionist Immigration

Zionist immigration from Europe to Palestine started in 1882,¹ with the first wave of "Aliyah" (Hebrew for *Ascent*, as in ascension to the Holy Land). There were five waves of immigration between 1882 and 1948². With each wave, the colonial threat posed by the Zionist movement became clearer to the Palestinian people. Namely, the theft of Palestinian land and the construction of colonies to house the growing number of Zionist settlers, and the creation of a Jewish market and economy as part of the building of a Zionist state.³ As a result, confrontations escalated between the Palestinian people and the Zionist colonizers. Palestinian resistance to the Zionist immigration dates back to 1891, when a number of the Palestinian leaders in Jerusalem sent a memorandum of protest to the Ottoman Grand Vizier (or prime minister) demanding he prevent Zionist immigration and theft of Palestinian land. The following years saw many Palestinian attacks on newly established Zionist colonies.

¹ Al Nahal, Mohammed. "British Mandate policy on the Arab territories of Palestine". Occupied Palestine publications, Beirut,1981.

² Ibid.

³Halevi, Nadav. "A Brief Economic History of Modern Israel." EH.Net Encyclopedia, edited by Robert Whaples. March 16, 2008. URL [A Brief Economic History of Modern Israel](#)

The British Colonization

In 1916 towards the end of WWI, France and Britain signed the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which carved the modern Middle East out of the crumbling Ottoman Empire, creating smaller states placed under Paris and London's control. British colonial troops arrived to Palestine the next year, and on November 2 the Balfour Declaration was made. The declaration, which announced Britain's support for "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people," made in a letter written by Britain's then-Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour to Baron Rothschild, a leader of the British Zionist movement. It was endorsed by Britain's then-Prime Minister David Lloyd George, a Christian Zionist.⁴ This translated into huge British support of the Zionist project in Palestine: economically, politically and militarily.⁵

Palestinian Revolts against British Colonial Rule

In February 1920, approximately 1,500 people took to the streets of Jerusalem⁶ after British General Louis Bols declared the enforcement of the Balfour Declaration.

In 1929, the Al-Buraq Revolt started in Jerusalem and spread to other parts of Palestine after a group of rabbis urged Jewish immigrants to gather and perform public prayer at the Buraq Wall, referred to by the international community as the "Western Wall" and by Jewish people as the "Wailing Wall." The aim after the call was to seize the wall, and declare it as a sacred place for Jews. The wall forms the western part of the barrier surrounding the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound and has a great significance in Islam. Its importance is derived from its connection to the story of al-Israa wa al-Miraj (prophet Muhammad's ascension).

Palestinians were outraged, especially because the wall is property of the Islamic *Waqf* (religious endowment) and clashes quickly erupted. These confrontations swiftly turned into an uprising that spread across the country. Fighting between Palestinians and Zionists backed by British occupation forces continued for two weeks. It ended with a massive wave of arrests by British colonial authorities against Palestinian youth in Safad, where 25 were sentenced to death. After mounting pressure on the British High Commissioner, Britain was forced to decrease the number of sentences to three executions — Muhammad Jamjoun, Fouad Hijazi and Atta al-Zeer, who later became symbols for the Palestinian struggle.⁷

⁴ Lloyd George. (2013). [Blog]. Retrieved from [Biography: David Lloyd George...](#)

⁵Simons, A. (2018). The Balfour Declaration: Empire, the Mandate, and Resistance in Palestine. Retrieved from [The Balfour Declaration: Empire, the Mandate, and Resistance in Palestine](#)

⁶ The history of Palestinian revolts. (2003). Retrieved from [The history of Palestinian revolts | News News](#)

⁷The road to the 1936 revolt. Retrieved from [the road to the 1936 revolt](#)

During these years, the resistance took on social and political forms as well. The Palestinians established organizations and political parties and organized conferences in resistance to the waves of Zionist immigration. Rallies were staged frequently, even after the British authorities banned Palestinian demonstrations and protests.⁸

In the 1930s, the Nazi's came to power in Germany and Jewish immigration from Germany spiked. These settler-immigrants stole more Palestinian land with the support of the British authorities, who helped the arriving colonists gain property and economic power. Palestinian armed resistance targeted both Zionist and British forces, whom the Palestinians considered responsible for the Zionist immigration. Increasing Zionist immigration and its British colonial support fed Palestinian mobilization and in 1936 sparked the Great Palestinian Revolt. In the face of the continued uprising, the British declared martial law, dissolving the Arab High Committee, arresting Palestinian leaders and exiling others. Five thousand Palestinians were killed and almost 15,000 were wounded in the revolt, which lasted from 1936 to 1939.⁹



□ Palestinian Districts
under British
Colonial Rule

⁸ Abdul'Ati, M. The Palestinian Resistance: The Revolution of Human and Stone. (Arabic) Retrieved from [المقاومة الفلسطينية.. ثورة الإنسان والحجر](#)

⁹ Kanafani, G. (1972). *The 1936-39 revolt in Palestine* (1st ed., p. 55). New York: Committee for Democratic Palestine.

1947 UN Partition Plan

Known also as Resolution 181 and passed by the UN General Assembly on November 29, 1947, the partition plan was a suggestion to divide Palestine into two entities: 56% of the land becoming the Jewish State, 43% would become the Arab Palestinian State, and the remaining 1%, namely Jerusalem (as well as Bethlehem) would become an “internationally mandated” area¹⁰.

The Palestinian people were aware that the establishment of a Jewish state would come at their expense and naturally rejected the partition plan. Though mistakenly portrayed as an objection based on the “unfair” division of the land between the Palestinians and the colonizing immigrants, their actual objection was a refusal to give up on any part of their homeland. Even at that point, they feared the plan would support a colonialist project aimed at occupying all of Palestine and displacing its people.



¹⁰UN Partition Plan, 1947. Retrieved from [un partition plan, 1947](#)

1948 Nakba

Arabic for *catastrophe*, the term Nakba is used to describe the genocide, ethnic cleansing and forced displacement of the Palestinian people during the years 1947-49. At least 750,000 Palestinians from a 1.9 million population were made refugees both within and beyond the borders of Palestine. Zionist forces occupied more than 78 percent of Palestine, ethnically cleansed and destroyed about 530 villages and cities, and killed about 15,000 Palestinians in a series of mass atrocities, including more than 70 massacres.¹¹

On May 14, 1948, the Zionist state of Israel declared its independence. The Palestinian people commemorate the Nakba each year on May 15th. Nevertheless, the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from their homeland is still ongoing, and so too is the Nakba.

Though the story of the Nakba is often told with a sole focus on the suffering of the Palestinian people, an integral and often overlooked element is that of Palestinian resistance to the colonization.

In December 1947, one month after the partition plan was adopted by the UN General Assembly, Palestinian volunteers established the Army of the Holy War (*Jaysh al-Jihad al-Muqaddas*) in Hebron.¹² It was led by Abdelqader al-Husseini, who went on to become the leader of the Palestinian resistance. Similar groups were formed in other Palestinian cities, such as Haifa, Nazareth and Jenin. Arab volunteers joined these resistance forces in Palestine, including volunteers from Egypt's Islamic Brotherhood.



- Palestinian territories
- 1948 Occupied Lands

¹¹ The Nakba did not start or end in 1948. (2017). Retrieved from [The Nakba did not start or end in 1948](#)

¹² Al-Aref, A. (1951) The Palestinian Nakba and The Lost Paradise (Arabic), Beirut. Al-Huda Publishers, p. 73.

Arab countries officially took the decision to send military aid and forces to help defend Palestine following a meeting of the Arab League. The Salvation Army (*Jaysh al-Inqadh*) was promised as support for the Palestinian people, however, it was poorly equipped¹³ and failed to prevent the Nakba.

Jerusalem 1948 - 1967

During the first years of the Nakba, the Zionist militias ethnically cleansed the western side of Jerusalem. Villages like Qalonia and Beit Mahsir were destroyed, and neighborhoods like Al-Baqaa, Al-Talbiya and Al-Qatamon were ethnically cleansed of their residents. In total, 60,000 Palestinians were expelled from the western side of the city of Jerusalem and the 38 villages west of it.¹⁴

This side was declared as the capital of the newly born Zionist state, but never recognized as such by international community. Nonetheless, the international community immediately normalized the Zionist state and recognized it on 78% of historic Palestine.

Between 1948 and 1967, the eastern part of Jerusalem, as a part of the West Bank, fell under Jordanian control and the Gaza Strip fell under Egyptian control.

On June 5th, 1967, the Six-Day War broke out between Israel on one side, and Syria, Jordan and Egypt on the other. A seemingly impossible war to win for a new state against three large Arab countries, Israel prevailed with the help of US military support. In just days, Israel occupied the rest of Palestine -- taking the West Bank from Jordan, and the Gaza Strip from Egypt.



Entirely Occupied Palestine

¹³ *ibid*, pages 54-55

¹⁴ Mattar, I. (1983). From Palestinian to Israeli: Jerusalem 1948-1982. *Journal Of Palestine Studies*, 12 (No. 4)(48), 58.

It also occupied the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula and the Syrian Golan Heights.¹⁵

Following the Six-Day War, and as soon as Israel controlled the Jerusalem area, it demolished the ancient Al-Magharbeh (Moroccan) Quarter in the old city. If during your visit to the Old City you find your way to the Al-Buraq Wall (or the Western Wall) and see the Jewish worshippers in the yard, remember that prior to 1967 dozens of Palestinian homes once stood here. The quarter had been a Muslim *waqf* (religious endowment) since 1193.¹⁶ It was also home to 1,000 Palestinian residents. They were displaced to the Shuafat Refugee Camp and elsewhere in Jerusalem.¹⁷ Israeli officials took advantage of the war to clear the area and open the space in front Al-Buraq Wall.

Similarly, 4,000 Palestinians were evicted from the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem, but their houses were not demolished as the displaced residents were later replaced by Zionist settlers.

By the end of the 1967 war, 66,000 Palestinian residents remained in Jerusalem.¹⁸ They have since grown to an estimated 330,000 within the city's municipal boundaries as of 2018.¹⁹ For these Palestinians, Jerusalem has been a home from which they face the constant threat of expulsion.

The Jerusalem Reality: Annexation and Displacement

After the occupation of the eastern side of Jerusalem in 1967, Israeli authorities began designing and implementing their long term plans for the city. Unlike the rest of the West Bank, ruled by military occupation, the plans for Jerusalem were annexation of the land and displacement of its Palestinian residents.

The occupation's vision for Jerusalem is expressed in its different master plans, laws and actions. Immediately after the 1967 war ended, Israel took three important steps regarding Jerusalem. First, it expanded Jerusalem's municipal boundaries by 71.4 square kilometers²⁰ to include the majority of the eastern side. But in drawing these lines, an Israeli committee carefully limited the inclusion of built-up Palestinian areas to reduce the demographic weight of non-Jews absorbed in the city. The new boundaries were guided by the desire to control the key defensive hilltops, communication lines and valleys, and by the decision not to include too

¹⁵ The Sinai Peninsula was later on almost fully returned to Egypt following the peace treaty with Israel in 1978, and the Syrian Golan Heights remain up till today under Israeli occupation.

¹⁶ Khalidi, R. (2010) *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*. New York: Columbia University Press.

¹⁷ Abowd, T. (2000). The Moroccan Quarter: A History of the Present. *Journal Of Palestine Studies*, 7, 9.

¹⁸ Abd al-Fattah, A. 1967 in Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza, *Ida2at Online Journal*, accessed at: [في القدس والضفة الغربية وعزة: وقائع نكبة 1967 أخرى - إضاءات](#)

¹⁹ Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, May 2018

²⁰ Rempel, T. "Dispossession and Restitution in 1948 Jerusalem," in S. Tamari (ed.), *supra*, p. 213, 216-217. ([Palestinians in Jerusalem](#))

many Arab residents in the annexed area, and to include open areas for the development of Jewish colonies. This expansion brought the entire Jerusalem municipal area to a total of 108 square kilometers.²¹

Second, it carried out a census and forced a special legal status on the Palestinian residents of the city misleadingly giving them “permanent residency.”²² Third, it began implementing domestic law in the eastern side of the city, unlike the rest of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip where the martial law was applied. The occupation authorities then declared Jerusalem the “unified capital of Israel,” and have since celebrated its “unification” every year.

These measures laid the foundation for the systematic displacement to follow. By expanding the municipal boundaries and applying Israeli law in the eastern side of the city, it became easier for the occupation authorities to design plans and policies that “legally” displace Palestinians from Jerusalem.

On this website, you can read about the policies of systematic displacement used to empty Jerusalem of its Palestinian residents. These include the revocation of their legal status, the dispossession of their land and properties, home demolitions, suffocating their economy and controlling their education.

²¹ In the Seam Zone Walaja’s Fate Between Jerusalem and Nowhere, Ruba Saleh, Jerusalem Quarterly 49 ([In the Seam Zone](#))

²² See: Legal Issues.