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The Israeli-Palestinian conflict: reasons for its permanence, resolution processes and challenges for Africa

Introduction

Since ancient times¹, Israelis and Palestinians have been at loggerheads over territory issue. The current turning point dates back to "Mandatory Palestine", after the Great War (1914-1918). Mostly Arabs, the Palestinians, who had become "indigenous" in the meantime, demanded self-determination from the British, against the return of the Jews, who were eager to re-establish themselves on the land "promised" to their ancestors (Laurens, 1999). The October-November 2023 episode marked the umpteenth sequence in a conflict that has eluded appeasement (Laurens, 2015). How can this be explained and what is at stake for Africa? This paper analyses the foundations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, its evolution, attempts to resolve it, and the Outcome at stake for Africa.

¹ Around 1200 BC, a number of ethno-States emerged, including those of the Peleset and Philistines on the coast, the Israelites on the interior, etc. They were targeted for expansion by the Egyptians, Hyksos, Assyrians, Persians and Babylonians (destruction of Jerusalem and deportation of the Israelites in 586 BC), Romans, Byzantines and Arabs (638-1096), and after the Crusades, Mamelukes and Ottomans (from 1516).

A seven decades-old conflict

Scattered around the world, Jews longed for a national home. The expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula (15th century) and anti-Semitism in Europe in the 19th century (the Dreyfus affair) consolidated this desire. Theodor Herzl and the Zionists wanted to create their own state. Great Britain, which they approached, offered its East African protectorates in 1902, but the "Uganda Project" (1903) was rejected by the Zionists, who had set their sights on Palestine (Magnan, 2018). Their plans were overtaken by Great Britain. In 1915, France and Russia planned the occupation of Palestine, before the British and French overtook Russia with the Sykes-Picot agreement (1916). Subsequently, the British got the Arabs to revolt against the Ottomans (1916-1918). Following on from earlier initiatives, Arthur Balfour, the British Foreign Secretary, guaranteed the Jews a national home in Palestine on 2 November 1917. After the war, the sub-region came under his British mandate (Palestine and Transjordan) and French mandate (Lebanon and Syria) (Antonius, 2016:108). The Arabs wanted to be attached to Syria, but this was

ignored in the Paris negotiations, unlike the San Remo Conference (1920), which guaranteed the Balfour Declaration. From 1936 to 1939, they revolted against the mandate and Jewish immigration and demanded an independent Arab state. During the Second World War (1939-1945), many supported the Axis against the Mandate countries (Herf, 2016:113). With defeat, the Arabs set out to defend their own interests by creating the Arab League in 1945. The Jews also wanted to emancipate themselves from the great powers. They were pro-Allied, but restrictions on immigration and the Shoah strengthened their plans for a State. In 1944, the Irgun launched attacks. London withdrew in February 1947 and approached the UN, which opted for the partition of the territory. On 29 November 1947, 56% of Mandate Palestine was devolved to the Jewish State (although Jews made up 32% of the population) and 44% to the Arab State. Excluded from the partition, Jerusalem was classified as an international territory to be administered by the UN (Lapidoth, 2001:214-215). The Israelis planned to form a state in "their" area. For the Arabs, a Jewish state on their land was out of the question. Thus began the wars between the two sides (see Table 1).

Table 1: Major phases in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from 1948 to the early 1980s

Phases	Motives	Outcome
Civil War (November 1947-May 1948)	Palestinians contest the partition	Post-partition status quo
1st Arab-Israeli War (15 May 1948-July 1949)	Arab countries protest against the Jewish State proclaimed on 14 May 1948 under the name of	-Truce (June-July 1948).

	Israel.	
Six-Day War (5-10 June 1967)	Israeli offensive after mobilization of Egyptian troops in Sinai and blockade of Tiran.	-Armistice between Israel and Arab countries (Egypt, Lebanon, West Bank, Syria) negotiated from February to July 1949.
Yom Kippur War (6-24 October 1973)	Egyptian plan to recapture Sinai and Syrian (and allied) plan to recapture the Golan Heights, Israeli counterattack (ally: USA)	- Occupations: Israel (+22% on 1947), Transjordan (West Bank), Egypt (Gaza Strip).

(Sources: Antonius, 2016:117; Encel, 2005:46; Fritsch, 1969:402-405. Summary: Pountounigni Njuh).

Consequently, the 1947 partition was the starting point for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It involved players with quite divergent priorities. The annexation of the West Bank indicates that Amman was motivated by irredentism. This is why, after the tragedy (Nakba) of 1948-1949, the Palestinians, around Yasser Arafat, took up their cause by creating Fatah in 1959. Established in Gaza in 1960, they went on to create the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and its armed wing in May 1964 (Lapidoth, 2001:216). They wanted to recover the land and restore their rights within the boundaries of Mandate Palestine. Launching sabotage and attacks in Israel from 1965, they took part in the 1967 war. Having resisted

Israel at Karamah (Jordan) in March 1968, Arafat was elected head of the PLO in 1969. But it was from this point on that the cause came up against the crumbling of Arab solidarity. In September 1967, the Arab countries had decided in Khartoum to perpetuate their struggle against Israel (no peace, no recognition, no negotiation), to defend the Palestinians, to use oil as a diplomatic weapon and to strengthen their military cooperation. But given the influence of the PLO and protests against its collaboration with American intelligence, King Hussein expelled Arafat in 1971 (Rondot, 1980:100-101). Egypt entered into dialogue with Israel, which signed agreements in 1974 (withdrawal from the Suez Canal) and 1975 (withdrawal from Sinai). The Camp David Agreement (1978) led to the Israeli-Egyptian Peace Treaty of 1979. In Lebanon, where Arafat had relocated, the civil war (1975-1989) exposed the PLO to Israel's operations Litani and Peace for Galilee. But Syria, its main supporter, signed a unilateral truce with Israel to occupy part of Lebanon.

Apart from the 1973 crisis, which helped the PLO obtain observer status at the UN (1974), Arab solidarity began to erode in the late 1970s. At the same time, Israel consolidated its foothold and influence. With the Suez crisis (1956), it tilted towards the West, drawing closer to France and Britain. Despite the outcome of this crisis, they helped Israel to develop its nuclear programme, and the USA recognized Israel's right to have a nuclear arsenal in 1969. It was against this backdrop that Palestinians began to seek other forms of support. Inspired by the ideals advocated by the Iranian revolution of 1979 (cf. Haghghat, 1985:81-33), some of them, members of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), founded in Egypt in 1928 and established in Gaza in 1954, created the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and its armed wing in 1981. In 1987, the JIP formed an alliance with Hezbollah, founded in 1982 in Lebanon, and

both cooperated with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards (IRGC).

On 9 December 1987, the first Intifada was launched in Gaza. Arafat entered the fray by creating the United Intifada Command. But for Ahmed Yassine, a member of the MB, it was an attempt at caporalization that exposed the failure of the struggle over the years. So, on 10 December 1987, he created Hamas and its armed wing. After the decline of Arab solidarity, the PLO was now confronted with the rise of Islamism (Legrain, 1986). Arafat then thought of a more influential organization: the State. On 15 November 1988 in Algiers, he proclaimed the independence of the State of Palestine. The PLO had retreated from its original objectives, as the proclaimed State was exploring its limits in the 1947 partition and Arafat was open to a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

A fragile peace process

With the new approach, Washington lifted the boycott on the PLO. The same year (1988), Jordan withdrew its claim to the West Bank in favour of Israel via a peace agreement, albeit not implemented. In February 1989, the PLO became a permanent observer to the UN. The process continued with the Madrid Conference in October 1991. Shunned by Syria and Lebanon, Arafat began talks with Israel in 1992. This led to the Oslo Accords of September 1993: mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO; creation of a self-government and a Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) for a transitional period of five years (Lapidot, 2001:216). Oslo I Accord put an end to Intifada I for the PLO. Its implementation was also marked by the autonomy agreement of May 1994: the Israeli army evacuated 70% of Gaza and Jericho. In July 1994, in exchange for debt cancellation by Washington, Jordan signed a non-belligerency agreement with Israel, followed by a peace agreement in October 1994. This paved the way for the

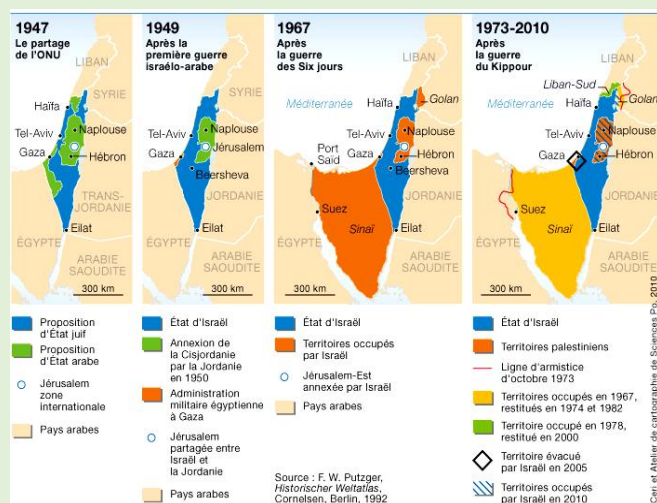
Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip (known as Oslo II) of September 1995. This led to the extension of the borders of Palestine and the Israeli army freed other West Bank towns (November-December 1995). The Palestinians thus opened a new chapter. In January 1996, Arafat was elected President of the Palestinian Authority and the PLO dropped its condemnation of Israel's right to exist from its charter.

The Zionists disavowed their government's retreat with the February 1994 bombing and the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995. Hamas, which criticized Fatah's collaboration, also committed suicide attacks (1994-1995). In 1996, Israelis elected a right-wing (Likud) PM, Benjamin Netanyahu, who, exploiting the loopholes in the peace agreements, claimed Israel's security before peace by maintaining Israeli control of the West Bank. the Palestinian Authority's powers were limited, unlike those of Israel; the Jewish settlements and remaining military bases were outside Palestinian control; Jerusalem, occupied since 1967, was ignored at every turn; without reciprocity, Israelis were allowed to travel on the roads of the divided Palestinian territory. It was with the Hebron Agreement (1997) and the Wye Plantation Agreement (1998) that Netanyahu mimed the pursuit of appeasement. But the Israelis ousted him in favour of Ehud Barak. To their surprise, the latter signed the Sharm el-Sheikh memorandum (1999) on new transfers of territory in the West Bank (15.1%) and the creation of a committee on the holy sites of Hebron. The opposition returned to the spotlight in September 2000 when it recognized the Temple Mount as a Jewish landmark. However, the Palestinians had built mosques there, and this led to the outbreak of the second Intifadat (Dieckhoff, 2017). Despite American mediation in July 2000 (Camp David II) and January 2001 (Taba), violence escalated, especially with the "Karine

A" affair (2002) in which Arafat was accused of buying heavy weapons.

The diplomatic Quartet (USA, Russia, UN, European Union) set up in June 2002 reopened the process with the Peace Plan of April 2003, calling for an end to violence and the consolidation of Palestinian institutions; rapprochement between Israel and Arab countries and recognition of the Palestinian State; an end to the 1967 occupations and a permanent security agreement between all the States in the sub-region. This plan encouraged a negotiated truce between Sharon and Mahmoud Abbas, appointed Prime Minister by Arafat, concerning the ongoing Intifada. It was also supported by the Geneva Initiative (2003). But marginalized since Oslo I, the JIP and Hamas continue to carry out attacks. The murder of the Hamas leader and his successor by Israel prompted the party to call a truce and inspired Ismaïl Haniyeh to conquer the institutions. It was in these circumstances that Israel began studying a disengagement plan for the Gaza Strip in June 2004. Arafat died in November 2004, and Mahmoud Abbas, elected President in January 2005, pursued appeasement through the Sharm-el-Sheikh meeting and the municipal elections of February-May 2005. Although Fatah won the majority of votes, Hamas gained ground in Gaza and in many West Bank towns (Heacock, 2005:94-95). The implementation of the Disengagement Plan (dismantling of 21 Jewish settlements, evacuation of the army and removal of Israeli flags) strengthened its foothold in Gaza at the end of 2005. Since then, the Israeli-Palestinian borders and areas of influence have remained more or less the same (map 1).

Map 1: Evolution of the Israeli-Palestinian borders between 1948 and 2005



(Source: Centre for International Studies - CERJ, 2010).

Putting an end to Intifada II, Hamas continued its political conquest by winning the majority of votes in the legislative elections of January 2006 and taking over the leadership of the PLC (Gresh, 2009 [2007]). Thus Abbas appointed Haniyeh to the premiership. As a result, Washington and Tel Aviv suspended their collaboration with the Palestinian Authority. The current profile of the conflict dates back to this turning point: a cause fractured by the Fatah-Hamas dissension, the murky game of certain powers and Israel, which frequently goes on the attack (Operation Summer Rains, the blockade on Gaza in June 2007 and the Gaza War of 2008-2009). Abbas attempted to regain control. But Hamas stepped aside and proclaimed a de facto president in Gaza in 2009. Consequently, Israelis brought Netanyahu back to power. Since then, apart from N. Bennett and Y. Lapid, he has usually been re-elected. In 2010-2011, he strengthened the country's defense (Iron Dome). Abbas tried a diplomatic offensive again ². But the Cairo (2011) and

² In 2012, it was granted membership of UNESCO (October) and non-member observer status at the UN (November 29). In 2015, the first embassy was opened in Stockholm (February), the country was admitted to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in April, and the agreement on the rights of the Catholic Church in Palestine in exchange for Vatican assistance in the peaceful settlement of the conflict

Doha (2012) agreements did little to sway Hamas. Galvanized by the visit of the Emir of Qatar in October 2012, the party once again gave priority to the struggle and refused to take part in the municipal elections in November 2012. The assassination of one of its military chiefs in 2012 prompted it to sign up to the 2014 national consensus. But the consensus was not implemented, and the party boycotted the 2017 and 2022 municipal elections, as well as the 2021 legislative and presidential elections.

These initiatives came up against the Intifada of the Knives in September 2015 and the recognition by the USA in late 2017 of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, to which it transferred its embassy in May 2018. The "March of Return" launched by the Palestinians in March 2018 was repressed by Israel. In June 2019, Washington initiated the Bahrain Conference. The resulting "Plan for the Century", proposed in January 2020, preserved the Israeli settlements on the West Bank, established Jerusalem as Israel's capital and promised \$50 billion in aid for the permanent establishment of the State of Palestine. The two-state solution with equal rights was thus undermined. Moreover, under the aegis of the USA, the Abraham Agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (August 2020) and between Israel and Bahrain (September 2020), extended to include Sudan (January 2021) and Morocco (November 2021), were ruining what remained of Arab solidarity (Velilla, 2020). Netanyahu targeted Palestinian families and mosques in East Jerusalem in April 2021. He repressed protests until the ceasefire in May 2021. Following the assassination of the JIP's military chief (August 2022), he authorized nine new settlements in the West Bank in February 2023. On 7 October 2023, Hamas, supported by the JIP, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the

was signed in June 2015. In September 2017, the country was admitted to Interpol.

Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFP), fired rockets into Israel. The violence between the two sides resulted in thousands of deaths.

Africa torn between challenges

On 22 November 2023, a ceasefire agreement was signed between Israel and Hamas. But sporadic violence was still making the situation more precarious. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to challenge the international community and Africa has its say. The Union of South Africa was among those who voted for partition in 1947 and recognized Israel in 1948 (Le Gouriellec, 2023). They kept working together, even when the international community condemned the Soweto massacre (June 1976). In contrast, Egypt sided with the Palestinians, especially during Nasser's reign. Its leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement rallied other countries on the continent, to the point where Khartoum (1967) was the place where the strategy for defending the cause was articulated. Most African countries felt concerned because of their sensitivity to decolonization. Decolonisation was one of the priorities of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), where the Nasser-Nkrumah connection also brought pan-Arabism and pan-Africanism together³. The challenge for Africa is therefore to demonstrate solidarity between peoples fighting for self-determination.

In the 1970s, the stakes shifted from this political reason to economic interests. This was in exchange for cheap oil and protection from the throes of the crisis, when the OAU met in Algiers in November 1973 to set up a cooperation committee with the Arab League, at a time when almost all its members were breaking with Israel⁴. This closeness was

illustrated by the fact that African countries represented 2/3 of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and more than 50% of the Arab League. Trade between Africa and Israel remains far lower (1.3% of exports in 2021) than that with Arab countries (5.3% of world exports in 2017) (Nezic, 2022; UNECA, 2017).

However, the weakening of Arab solidarity and the 'jihadisation' of the Palestinian cause (collusion between GIR-JIP-Hezbollah-Hamas) have been bucking this trend since the 1980s. Close to the USA, Zaire renewed its ties with Tel Aviv in 1982. Others followed, such as Liberia (1983), Côte d'Ivoire, Togo (1987), Kenya (1988), Central African Republic (1989). The spread of jihadism (see Pountounigni Njuh, 2020) made Israel an ally against this phenomenon. As a result, several African countries normalized relations with Israel throughout the 1990s⁵. Today, Israel is recognized by 46 members of the African Union (Le Gouriellec, 2022).

This is where the nexus of issues part away some African countries from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Stretched between the Arab countries and Israel, it is the theatre of diplomatic battle between the Arabs/Palestinians and the Israelis. Therefore, its voice is important in resolving the conflict. In 2012, the AU granted Palestine observer status; it did the same for Israel in 2021 (Le Gouriellec, 2022). Egypt, which traditionally acts as a mediator, is neither neutral towards the Palestinians (condemning Israeli strikes) nor towards Israel, with which it is cooperating to contain jihadist incursions and the influx of refugees into its territory (Winter, 2023). The recent sequence has also exposed the contrasts around the African voice. Indeed, reacting to the Hamas attacks on 7 October

³ This is the institutional pan-Africanism promoted by the States of the Monrovia group at the dawn of OAU's creation. Despite the Casablanca Group's doctrine, this version alienated itself from the visions of African-American leaders such as William E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey, who correlated pan-Africanism with the return of blacks to Africa ("black Zionism")

⁴ Some countries, such as Eswatini (formerly Swaziland), Lesotho and South Africa, still maintain relations with Israel.

⁵ While the end of apartheid has kept South Africa away, countries that have renewed their ties with Israel include Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon (which established a Rapid Intervention Battalion in 1999 thanks to ongoing cooperation with Tsahal), Cape Verde, Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Equatorial Guinea, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, Tanzania, Togo, Zimbabwe, etc.

2023, the AU recalled the denial of Palestinian rights and pleaded for de-escalation. But individual countries either supported this approach or remained neutral⁶, some of them siding with Israel⁷ and others with the Palestinians⁸.

Far from being passive, the unease revealed by these divergences is Africa's difficulty in being considered as an interlocutor on the international scene. It remains cautious in this conflict, where the great powers, as in other global issues, influence the dynamics and discourse. However, African countries are deeply concerned about restoring peace between Israelis and Palestinians. None of them voted against the UN resolution on the protection of civilians and compliance with legal and humanitarian obligations in relation to the crisis in Gaza on 27 October 2023. They were among the 120 in favour of it, apart from a few abstentions (Cape Verde, Cameroon, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Tunisia, Zambia) (United Nations, 2023). It is therefore an appeal to consider the law and peoples as the issue on which the balance, stability, peace, security and justice on the international scene depend.

Conclusion

Beyond the self-determination demanded by the Palestinians and the need for a Jewish homeland, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict also raises issues of resources (Antreasyan, 2013; Beschorner, 1992). It is a war caught between the fragility of the movement and the superimposition of the Israeli-Palestinian and

the Israeli-Arab causes. These biases prevent appeasement between the national stabilization project (a de jure State with territorial roots and elliptical powers) and the means of resolution (inter-State conflict coupled with asymmetrical conflicts). It also exposes the international system to destabilization, provoking an upsurge in transnational terrorism. The actions of certain powers are rekindling old anger (anti-American and anti-Western sentiment) and sowing the seeds of radicalization as the prospects for peace and justice recede.

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⁶ Angola, Egypt (active both for a ceasefire and the humanitarian response in Gaza), Guinea, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria, Uganda and Tanzania. The countries of the Sahel (except Mali, which supports Palestine) and the Horn of Africa, which are grappling with terrorism, have not reacted officially.

⁷ Botswana, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Rwanda, Senegal, South Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda and Zambia.

⁸ Algeria, Djibouti and South Africa (though also for de-escalation).

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