**Historical background to the creation of Israel**

[Atle Hetland](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/atle-hetland)

November 02, 2023

[Opinions](https://www.nation.com.pk/opinions), [Columns](https://www.nation.com.pk/columns)

Knowledge of history will help us understand issues of the past and present. But knowledge alone will not solve today’s problems, but it will make us understand people’s positions a bit better on issues where there is disagreement. Sometimes conflicts go on for so long that people have forgotten what the reasons for them really were, including negative attitudes and opinions about others. But uneven access to resources, land and opportunities often remain as real reasons to protracted conflicts.
I believe we know too little about the history of the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, and the mistakes that were made when a true and viable Palestinian state was not created at the same time. In hindsight, it is easy to see the mistakes made by the UN, the UK, the USA, and the other winners of WWII. The decisions were supported by the zeitgeist and mindset of the time, although not all decisions were unanimous.
In 1948, the UN was young, having been founded by 51 member countries in San Francisco on 24 October 1945. Pakistan became a UN member on 30 September 1947. Today, the UN has 193 members. The Security Council, with veto power, remains the same today as at the time of the founding, made up of the largest winners of WWII, the USA, UK, France, China, and Russia (that time the Soviet Union).
The interests of the Palestinian people were not given the right attention after WWI. There was a rise in both Jewish and Arab nationalist movements, and several conflicts followed, including the major armed conflicts in 1936-1939 and 1944-1948. The UN Partition Plan of the Palestinian land into two states, one Jewish and one Arab, was passed by the UN on 29 November 1947, with 33 to 13 in favour, and 10 abstaining. On 14 May 1948, the Palestine War ended with the proclamation of the State of Israel. Alas, the land of Palestine was not clearly declared as a state. We should know that at the end of WWII, the USA, the UK, and other countries, were heavily involved in the Jewish refugee issue, including in sending Jews from Europe to Mandatory Palestine, mostly to objection from the Palestinians.
Today, most people believe the only way out of the everlasting conflicts and wars between Israel and Palestine, is a two-state solution. But we should also know that there were some voices in 1947 advocating a Federal State for both Jews and Arabs. The UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCP) had a few country members voting for a one-state solution, notably India, Iran and Yugoslavia. In hindsight, we would most likely say this would have been better, indeed in principle, since race, ethnicity and similar factors should not play a role when drawing a state’s borders.
When Mandatory Palestine was chosen by the international community as the land for the State of Israel, a Jewish homeland, other areas were also discussed, albeit perhaps not quite seriously, but Brazil, Madagascar, and other African countries were talked about. That time, most of Africa was still under colonial rule, hence decisions were dictatorial. The UN, with the UK ruling Mandatory Palestine, made the decision where to create the State of Israel. They took into consideration historic, religious and emotional reasons, noting that the area has been the homeland both for Jews and Palestinians for thousands of years, and it is the birthplace of Judaism and Christianity, and thus also Islam, the last Arbrahamic religion. The area, and therefore Israel, has special meanings to believers everywhere, not the least to charismatic Christians in USA. Jerusalem is a holy city to all.
As for foreign support for Israel and Palestine today, it is a fact that generally the USA and the West are strongly on the side of Israel, even after the 6-day war in 1967 when Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza, worsened later, building up to the terrible ongoing Israel-Palestine/Hamas War. The USA has special closeness to Israel, much as a foothold against other Arab states. However, USA also has close cooperation with Egypt, and in recent years more than before, with Saudi Arabia and other Arab states, but it is against Iran, and earlier also Iraq. A major proportion of USA’s development an military aid goes to Israel and Egypt, without which the security situation would have been different.
The Soviet Union and the Non-Aligned countries supported Palestine. Also in Europe and elsewhere in the West, there was support and activism on the side of Palestine, and at the same time, other groups and the establishment, were for Israel. When the Oslo Peace Accords of 1993 were presented, that was to some extent seen as radical and risky, as it could be interpreted as siding too much with the Palestinians. On the other hand, it was not much more than reviving what was the intention in 1948, alas not being followed up actively that time, and not after 1993.
If the Holocaust tragedy had not happened, there would have many tens of millions of Jews in Europe and elsewhere today, to everyone’s benefit. Then it is probably not likely that Israel would have been created, but a good number of Jews would have settled in Palestine, maybe in areas with some degree of self-rule. However, let me add here that this is hypothetical, as is also when some say that Israel should not exist. We have to debate within real-politic parameters and history cannot be changed.
I believe in the two-state solution as recommended in the Oslo Peace Accords of 1993 – and the UN when the State of Israel was created in 1948, parallel with a separate Palestinian State. Yet, had the decisions been made in 2023, not in 1948, I believe a Federal Israeli-Palestinian State would have been established, probably with provinces having a major degree of self-rule and autonomy. Such a state would have had Arab-Palestinian majority, but indeed included Jews. This type of state would be right in principle, but it is unrealistic in practise. Urgent efforts must be taken to implement a real two-state solution.