

PRE'SIDENT FOR A DAY PALESTINE

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PRESIDENT FOR A DAY: PALESTINE

INTRODUCTION

The state of Israel was declared independent in the wake of World War II in 1948 and since then the dispute over the territory in the area has grown into what we now recognise as the Israel-Palestine conflict. The territories of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, although separated by Israel, is claimed by Palestinians as the future sovereign State of Palestine.

In the following document you will be able to read a short introduction to each of the main topics covered in the game President for a day: Palestine.

THE GAZA STRIP

The Gaza Strip is a piece of coastal land surrounded mostly by Israel and bordering Egypt to the south. It has since 2007 been governed by the political branch of Hamas and subsequently been placed under economical and political boycott by Israel and the US as Hamas is considered by most international authorities as a terrorist organisation. Since 2012 there has been a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Gaza.

ECONOMY

The economy of Gaza is dire as the existence of a Hamas government hurt the international relations which has repercussions to the economy of the area. The economical situation means that there is a chronic shortage to pay the public sector salaries leading to low health and education levels. Furthermore the lack of money also renders the Hamas rule unable to rebuild a territory ravaged by war.

A solution to the Gaza's financial problems are unlikely to be found in Egypt or the West Bank as both view Hamas as a threat and are intent to ignore and watch Hamas drown in their financial problems.

Donor funding has also been dropping since the Hamas government came to power and funding to the Palestinian areas has therefore mostly been for the West Bank. Until the Palestinian Authority returns to Gaza it is unlikely that donor funding will increase much.



Israel on the other hand has arrived at an appreciation of the need to strengthen the Gaza economy in order to lessen the likelihood of renewed conflict and has as a result slightly relaxed the naval blockade imposed on Gaza. At the same time they are extremely reluctant in any way to strengthen Hamas thus the strengthening of the Gaza economy will be done by means other than connecting Gaza and the West Bank.

In order to keep its ministries operating and providing basic services, Hamas has been collecting highly unpopular taxes, generating frustration in an impoverished population. They have also involved in the smuggling of goods as well as weapons through tunnels between Egypt and Gaza as well as Israel and Gaza. The tunnels between Egypt and Gaza has largely been shut down by the Egyptian government causing a financial crisis for Hamas as the tax revenues provided by the smuggled goods was a substantial income.

SECURITY AND STABILITY

The security and stability of Gaza is under a lot of strain due to the weak economy, which renders it impossible for Hamas to maintain and control the border controls thus impairing the mobility of the population and causing unrest.

As the economy of Gaza is in tatters, many boys and young men line up to join the al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military wing and one of the only growth sectors in Gaza. Many families risk their lives trying to escape through the help of Egyptian maritime smugglers while others risk death and imprisonment trying to cross the fortified borders into Israel in the hope of finding work.

Salafi-jihadi groups are increasingly gaining power and growing in Gaza and while they do not pose a threat to Hamas' rule they are hugely detrimental to the government by undermining the Gaza security. They have attacked hair salons and other symbols of Western influence as well as Hamas personnel and facilities.

The Salafi-jihadi groups also threaten the fragile ceasefire agreement between Hamas and Israel as their Gaza-based rocket launches cause Israeli retaliatory strikes at Hamas.

Hamas' failure to reconstruct Gaza after the war is also a constant source of instability in Gaza as a large part of the population, up to 100,000 people are still



in temporary accommodations. Gaza also has the highest unemployment rate of any economy in the world at 41.5 per cent overall and over 58 per cent for youths. A third of the agricultural area of was also destroyed in the war causing a food insecurity.

Electricity shortages are frequent with blackouts up to 12 to 16 hours per day, which in turn affect water supply, wastewater treatment, agriculture and health services.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The Hamas was democratically elected into power in 2007 but its rule has dented Gaza's relationship with a great number of International authorities as Hamas, or certainly the military branch of Hamas, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, are regarded by most foreign entities as a terrorist organisation.

As a result of the Hamas rule, Israel and Egypt has since 2007 instilled a land, air and sea blockade of the Gaza Strip, thus preventing the export and import of commercial and agricultural goods, crippling Gaza's economy as well as travelling. This blockade has had a massive impact on the health and well-being of civilians as the delivery of basic necessities such as food, medicine and fuel has been greatly hindered. Furthermore the blockade has also prevented the delivery of construction materials in order to rebuild the economy and infrastructure following the war between Gaza and Israel. As a result Gaza is hugely lacking an economy, adequate housing, health and education facilities as well as infrastructure resulting in a water crisis.

The Hamas rule has also meant that great percentage of donor aid provided for Palestinians is mostly directed at West Bank projects rather than Gaza projects as there is a reluctance to support the Hamas. In order for Gaza to receive a bigger share of the donor aid it is preferred by the donors that the Palestinian Authority have more of a presence in Gaza. As a consequence the war-torn and dilapidated Gaza is struggling to rebuild itself.

THE WEST BANK

The West Bank is a landlocked territory bordering Israel and Jordan and makes up most of the Palestinian territories. Parts of the West Bank has since the Oslo



accords in 1993 been under control by the Palestinian National Authority (PA or PNA) while the other parts of the West Bank are under Israeli control.

TERRITORIES AND BORDERS

The territories and borders of the West Bank are often discussed as to where and what they are. Most often what is referred to as the Green Line, the 1949 Armistice borders or the pre-1967 borders defines the West Bank area. This line was drawn up after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and does not mark any permanent border, though there are significant political, legal and administrative differences between territories within and outside the Green line. Since the Six-Day war in 1967, the majority of the territories within the Green line has been under Israeli-occupation and continues to be till now.



The Oslo Accords in 1993 are a set of agreements between the government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

They created the Palestinian Authority who now govern parts of the West Bank and previously also Gaza. The most important results of the Oslo accords concerns the borders of Israel and Palestine and the territories of the West Bank which are defined as Area A, B and C.

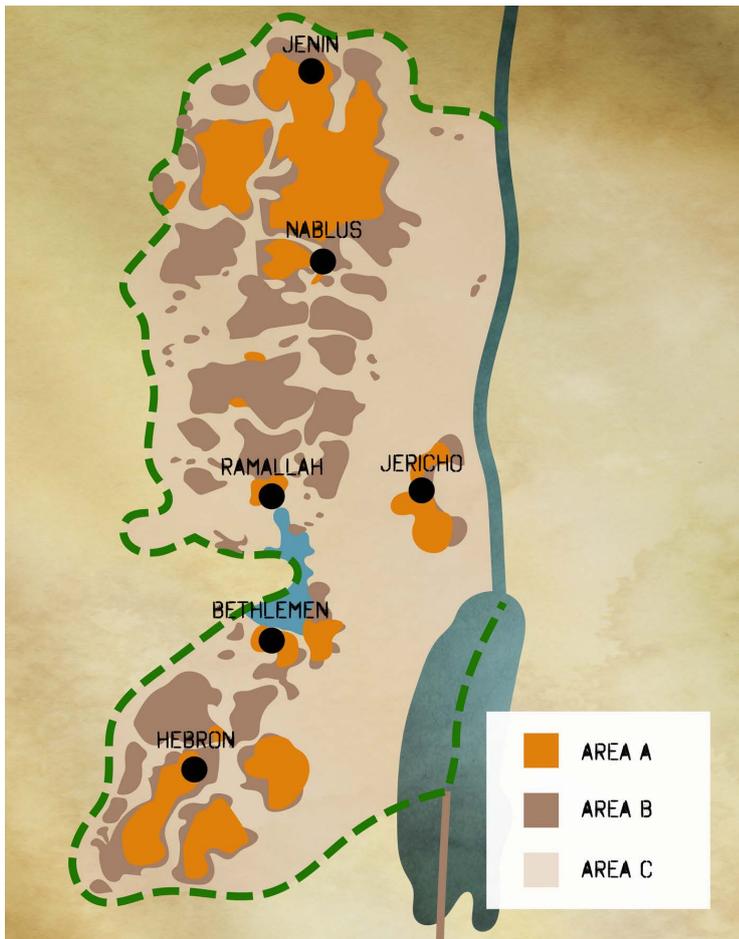
Area A comprises of approximately 18 per cent of the West Bank and under full control of the Palestinian Authorities. Area B represents about 22 percent of the West Bank are under Palestinian civil control while the Israeli army has security control of the territories. Area C, which is about 60 per cent of the West Bank, is under full Israeli control for security, planning and construction purposes. Area C is where all Israeli settlements are built, settlements which has been argued by



many International authorities as obstructing the peace process between Israel and Palestine.

AREA C

Area C, about 60 per cent of the West Bank is home to approximately 300,000 Palestinians in residential areas entirely located in Area C or as part of a larger



community located partly in Areas A or B.

There are also around 356,000 Israelis residing in settlements and settlement outposts in Area C. Both are considered to contravene International law while the outposts are also considered illegal under Israeli law.

SETTLEMENTS

The Israeli settlements are generally defined as physical and non-physical structures that constitute and support the establishment and expansion of Israeli residential communities beyond the

Green Line of 1949 in the Occupied Palestinian Territory of the West Bank.

The settlements have often been accused as being a method of seizing land from a possible future state of Palestine as building infrastructure, residential structures and sponsoring economic activities in the settlements has the effect of expanding settlements and driving out the Palestinian population close to those areas.

The residents of the settlements are roughly divided into three groups; those who live in settlements close to the metropolitan areas of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and have moved there on quality-of-life grounds as the metropolitan areas



are crowded and expensive to live in. The second group are the ultra-Orthodox Jews, who constitute over 25% of the settler population and live isolated from other Israelis. The third group are motivated by political and religious ideologies and often live in the central part of the West Bank, close to Palestinian communities.

The settlements and their associated restrictions, such as separation barriers and security checkpoints, often impede on Palestinian mobility as they sever territorial continuity between Palestinian communities. They also cut off Palestinian access and control to their natural resources such as water, mineral extraction and agriculture, thus hindering the Palestinians' ability to build an economy based on their natural resources.

On the other hand settlements also provide jobs for the Palestinian population as jobs are scarce in the Palestinian controlled areas and pay less. Though Palestinians who work in settlements receive no benefits such as work insurance, overtime or pension, the higher wages and no alternative causes many Palestinians to take jobs in settlements. Settlements can therefore be argued to have substantial mutual influence on the West Bank economy as they provide much needed work for Palestinians, while the Palestinians provide a cheap workforce in return.

The settlements are considered to be illegal by international law as the Fourth Geneva Convention states that the occupying power must not deport or transfer parts of its civilian population into the occupied territory. However Israel denied this claim partly because it does not view itself as an occupying power as the areas were taken over was a result of a war imposed on Israel and the areas are therefore disputed rather than occupied.

Some of the settlements however are also considered illegal by Israel as they were built on privately-owned Palestinian land without government consent or legal planning. Some of these settlements have either been retroactively deemed legal by the Israeli government or dismantled. Currently some 100 settlement outposts still exist.



PALESTINIAN-BUILT STRUCTURES IN AREA C

For the approximately 300,000 Palestinians living in Israeli-controlled Area C of the West Bank requiring building permits to build residential or livelihood structures is extremely difficult due to planning and zoning laws applied by Israeli authorities. Even the most basic structure such as a tent or a fence requires a building permit. This impedes on the development of infrastructure, adequate housing and economy of the Palestinian people living in Area C.

A World Bank report estimated that if businesses and farms were allowed to develop in Area C, it would add as much as 35 per cent to the Palestinian GDP as a great percentage of the land in Area C is agricultural and grazing land. Moreover as Area C constitute most of the West Bank any large-scale infrastructure projects (roads, water and electricity networks) require work in Area C which means that anything happening in Area C (or not) affects the entire West Bank population.

The Palestinians residents in Area C are therefore often left with no choice but to build without authorisation in order to meet their basic needs. Structures built without permits are regularly served with demolition orders and while only a minority of the orders are carried through, the Palestinians affected are left in a state of uncertainty. Where the orders are executed they create displacement and disruption in everyday life, poverty and increased aid dependency.

WATER RESOURCES

Water resources in the Israel-Palestine area are scarce and since the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel has taken over control of water resources throughout the West Bank. Though the 1995 Oslo II agreement has defined the Palestinian water rights and returned some of the West Bank resources to the Palestinian Authority, Israel still controls much of the water resources in the area, causing Palestinians both on the West Bank and Gaza to illegally drill for drinking water.

The situation in Gaza is at a point where the mismanagement of water resources and the lack of sanitation services means that most of the sewage is either returned raw to the sea, lagoons and valleys or seeping through the soil, ultimately reaching the coastal aquifer and polluting the source of drinking water. About 45 per cent of the water is contaminated and 95 per cent of Gaza's



population are relying on this water.

The situation in West Bank is not quite at the crisis level of Gaza but as Israel continues to have control over most of the water resources and lack of action and investment from the Palestinian governorate to build water management systems it could well be headed in the same direction. About 45 per cent of water for West Bank communities is provided by the Israeli Water Authority and settlement. The low availability and high cost of water have led to shortages and some West Bank communities to carry out unlicensed drilling for drinking water.

More damaging than the lack of water in the area is the lack of wastewater collection and treatment which has great negative results. The lack of treatment plants causes huge amounts of raw sewage to be discharged back into the environment, where it contaminates and pollutes agricultural land and the surrounding local area, causing water-related diseases amongst the population such as allergies, respiratory problems and skin diseases. The wastewater will eventually also seep through ground and contaminate the aquifer thus creating a greater crisis similar to the one in Gaza.

CONCLUSION

The Israel-Palestine conflict is deeply complicated with unique problems on both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and features not only issues between Palestine and Israel but also with the Palestinian governorates of Gaza and the West Bank. This was a brief overview on the main topics covered in the game, for more in depth reading and knowledge about the topics covered here you can have a look at the reference list.

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