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THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PRIORITISING HUMAN SECURITY

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Starting from the premise that everyone has the right to live their lives in security and peace, the analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can bring a new perspective on the difficulties that stand in the way of achieving this. In order to assess the ongoing altercations, it is necessary to consider the multiple facets of these disputes, looking at both the historical and the current ongoing issues. The complexity of the conflict is reflected in the depth of the issue, manifesting itself on multiple dimensions such as contradictory territorial claims, humanitarian crises, and a complicated geopolitical context.

Palestine has been a disputed geographical area since ancient times, with both states affirming the biblical basis as the reasoning behind territorial claims. The region was part of the Persian Empire (539-332 BC), the Roman Empire (66 BC-313 BC) and in 1099 the city of Jerusalem was conquered by the Catholic Crusaders who established a Latin kingdom in

Palestine and the Eastern Mediterranean. Between 1291–1517 the Crusaders were defeated, the Mamluks taking over Palestine, Egypt and Syria. Subsequently, between 1517–1918 the Ottomans would come to rule for four hundred years, until it became part of the British Empire in the form of a Mandate until 1948 [1, p. 181] [2, pp. 59–60]. In the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, Britain established its interest in the territories of the Ottoman Empire, and so they came to administer the territory of Palestine in the form of a Mandate, a regime of military administration. There were multiple confrontations between the forces of order and the local, mostly Arab, population during this period [3, p. 155]. The publication of this agreement caused dismay among the Arabs [1, p. 187].

By exacerbating an already tense situation between the region's Arabs and the growing Jewish population, the mandate system established in the Palestine area contributed to intensifying the disagreements. At that time, Britain displayed a policy that can be seen as duplicitous, characterised as specific to that period. The state committed itself to the establishment of a “Jewish national home” through the Balfour Declaration of 1916. At the same time, the British Commissioner Mac Mahon held talks with the Sheikh of Mecca, Hussein, with the objective of positioning the Arabs against the Ottomans, the Sheikh wishing to create an independent Arab caliphate at the end of the war. The oscillation in Britain's policies is presented as the basis for the establishment of the Jewish state, but also as a determining factor in the conflict, through the increased flow of Jewish migrants to the area, which upset the Arab inhabitants [1, pp. 186–188].

Tragic events suffered by Jews during World War II, such as the Holocaust, accelerated the changes, and thus on November 29, 1947, UN Resolution 181 was introduced, partitioning the territory between Arabs and Jews [3, p. 155]. The tension in the relationship between the two sides was accentuated with the formation of the state of Israel, manifesting itself through multiple wars, most notably those of 1948, 1967 and 1973. The first Arab-Israeli war in 1948 was fought between Israel and five Arab states, which resulted in Israel acquiring almost all of Palestine, with Jordan occupying the West Bank and Egypt the Gaza Strip [2, p. 62].

The conflict resulted in the Nakba, the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes. Refugee figures vary, according to Israel, 520,000 people left the territory during the 1948 war. From a Palestinian perspective, the number is 900,000, and according to the UN's office for Palestinian refugee relief, there were more than 700,000 people – in total, half of Palestine's population was displaced. Different perspectives are also reported as to the rationale behind the

relocation, with some scholars arguing that they left their homes voluntarily, and others that they were largely driven out by the Israeli army [4, p. 83–84]. The variety of reported numbers raises questions, but it cannot be ignored that a major portion of Palestinians have been displaced, thus raising the major refugee issue.

The Six-Day War, fought between 5-10 June 1967, was fought between Israel and the coalition of Egypt, Jordan and Syria [3, p. 155]. It ended with Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and most of the Syrian Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula [2, p. 62]. In the autumn of 1967, UN Security Council Resolution 242 came out, introducing the concept of "territory for peace". This document provided for a return to the pre-war status quo, and Israel, in return for recognition of its right to exist, was required to return the captured territories: the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights. It also called for a "just solution of the refugee problem" [5, p. 75–76]. Tensions continued with the 1973 war where Egypt and Syria wanted to regain territories lost in the previous war [2, p. 62]. The outcome of the conflict was the Egypt-Israel peace treaty, and Israel would leave the Sinai Peninsula, the territory becoming demilitarized [5, p. 76]. The first Palestinian intifada took place between 1987-1993, characterized by public order disturbances such as protests and riots, mainly in the occupied regions. It was caused by the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza [2, p. 67]. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) will take over the West Bank and Gaza, but at the same time the Hamas organization will emerge becoming an opponent of the PLO. An important step forward in the peace process will follow, namely the adoption of the Oslo Accords between 1993 and 1995. Signed between Israel and the PLO, they became among the most significant attempts to settle the disagreements [5, p. 78]. The 1993 Oslo Agreement led, among other things, to the mutual acknowledgement of existence between the two states, with the Palestinian National Authority being formed and given responsibility for administering the agreed territories [3, p. 156]. In 1994 the "Agreement on the Gaza Strip and Jericho Area" and the "Agreement on Preparatory Transfer of Powers and Responsibilities" were signed, stipulating aspects such as the withdrawal of Israeli troops and the establishment of a legal framework for Palestinian institutions. Also, according to the agreement, Palestinian refugee issues as well as other complex issues such as Jerusalem, borders and Jewish settlements were to be addressed in the coming years [5, p. 79]. The next stage of the process was the signing of the Oslo II agreement in 1995. The accord established

Palestinian self-government zones in the West Bank and Gaza for a transitional period [5, p. 79].

The interim period of the Oslo agreements was partly also one of their flaws, as the document itself did not specify what its exact objectives were, thus the public was unaware of the good sides of the compromise made, with the Oslo interim stage agreements leading to extremism on both sides [6, p. 37–38]. The second intifada followed, in September 2000–2005, as a result of the precarious living conditions of Palestinians living in the territories under occupation [2, p. 67]. Hamas's political victory in the 2006 elections was also a significant moment, as they took over power of the Gaza Strip from Fatah in 2007, an event that marked a moment of increasing terrorist attacks by the organization against Israel [5, p. 80]. Tensions continued, manifesting through multiple conflicts, the most significant of which occurred in 2008, 2009, 2014 and 2021, as a result of which the situation continued to worsen, with Israel imposing a military blockade on the territory. The conditions imposed on the Palestinians have aggravated the humanitarian crisis, with figures showing that in 2022, 80% of the population in the Gaza Strip was relying on international aid. With the Hamas attacks on the 7th of October 2023, in addition to the casualties caused by the war itself, 2 million refugees have been displaced to southern Gaza, deprived of the resources necessary for survival [3, p. 156].

Traditionally, the concept of security has focused primarily on national security with an emphasis on the state and the military. In the traditional focus on state security, it has been observed over time that it has been carried out at the expense of human security, especially in cases where wars have been fought. This has given rise to multiple dilemmas regarding what should be prioritised. The field of human security has emerged as a result of the growing need to address the ethics of security and insecurity with people as the referent object. Human security has been conceptualized as "the idea that security analysis and policy, if they are to be legitimate and effective, must be oriented around individuals as the primary beneficiary and referent" [7, p. 33]. The following themes are identified as major human security issues concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: refugee issues, conflict related to water and resources, and the psychosocial effects of protracted wars and terrorism.

Regarding the phenomenon of terrorism, the term itself has been described as an ambiguous one, as there are numerous definitions of it. The subjectivity of this notion is highlighted, considering that the decision to designate a group/threat as terrorist is based on the level of sympathy

or opposition perceived towards the referent object. Globalisation has contributed to the intensification of this international phenomenon. It is considered important to analyze the causes behind the production of this extreme phenomenon, the emergence of which is driven also by the increased rate of population growth, poverty, but also by political factors such as religious, ethnic, territorial conflicts and access to resources, emerging as the main objective of terrorist violence – the struggle for power and justice [8, p. 9]. Political fragmentation is also present, through the fact that within both Palestine and Israel there are various political groups whose interests differ, and a change in leadership can produce a change in the perception of relations with neighbouring states. Also, both states perceive each other as posing an existential threat, with Israel perceiving the PLO in this way, thus justifying the need for the use of force to control the territories between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, and the Palestinians using all the military forces they possess to protect their territory [9, p. 8]. The volatility of this matter presents multiple dangers for the societies involved, highlighting the need to prioritise human security.

Other research reveals high levels of psychological distress among the population involved in the conflict, predominantly Palestinians but also among Israelis. Exposed populations have an increased risk of developing conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder as well as major depression [10, p. 17]. Environmental security issues are also a key element in accentuating the conflictual nature between the two sides. One of Israel's key reasons for retaining the occupied territories is the ability to access aquifers, which can hinder attempts made to find a solution for Palestine [11, p. 287]. The dispute over water is further intensified by Israel's control over resources, with Palestinians claiming that they are prevented from accessing water resources, Israel providing its residents in the occupied territories, including illegal settlements in the West Bank, with up to five times as much water as Palestinians [12, p. 54]. The illegality of these Israeli-controlled territories was also declared in 2016 by UN Security Council Resolution 2334, which reiterated the borders drawn in June 1967 [13].

In the light of the analysis of the historical background but while also viewing the conflict from a human security perspective, through the prism of all the related problems, such as the humanitarian crisis triggered by the refugees and the limited resources needed for life, it can be concluded that an equitable solution must be found as soon as possible.

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