

Palestine: How a country can (nearly) disappear

Throughout history, it has happened many times that countries disappear or undergo major changes. States such as Yugoslavia, Austria-Hungary, and Czechoslovakia once existed but eventually broke apart into multiple new countries. In earlier periods of history, even vast empires such as the Roman Empire and the Persian Empire disappeared entirely.

In the modern era, countries are less likely to vanish completely; instead, they are usually divided or reorganized. Examples include Sudan and South Sudan, or Samoa and American Samoa.

However, today there is one territory that is often described as facing enormous pressure and an uncertain future: Palestine.

How did this situation come about? And what role does Israel play in it?

These are the questions we will explore in this article.



wikipedia.org

Flag Palestine. Source:

History Palestine

To understand how the situation surrounding Palestine came into existence, we first need to look back through history. The region is located in the Middle East and borders Israel, Jordan, and Egypt. Today, Palestine consists primarily of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, but historically the area was much larger and far more complex.



The name “Palestine” has existed for thousands of years. It comes from the Latin term *Palaestina*, which itself was derived from the Greek name for the region. In Arabic, the area is known as *Filastin*, a name that is likely connected to the Philistines.

The Philistines were a seafaring people who settled in the region of Canaan around the 13th century BCE. Canaan covered parts of modern-day Israel and Palestine, including important cities such as Jericho and Jerusalem. During this period, the Philistines frequently came into conflict with the Israelites, a Semitic people who also established themselves in the region.

Around 700 years later, approximately 600 BCE, the area was conquered by the Babylonian Empire. Many inhabitants of Canaan—including both Philistines and Israelites—were deported. This period became known as the Babylonian Exile.

Over time, Philistine culture gradually disappeared from history, while the region itself continued to come under the influence of various successive empires.



Babylonian Exile in Palestina. Source: wikipedia.org

After the period of the Babylonian Empire, the region came under the control of the Roman Empire. The area that would later become known as Palestine became part of this vast empire (and later the Byzantine Empire).

Within the Roman Empire, tensions developed between the Jewish population and the Roman authorities. The Roman Empire was largely polytheistic, while Judaism was strictly monotheistic. These religious and political differences eventually led to several uprisings.



The most famous of these was the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132–136 CE), led by Simon bar Kokhba. The goal of the rebellion was to drive out the Romans and establish an independent Jewish state.

The revolt also had religious consequences. Within early Christianity, the distance between Christianity and Judaism grew further, as many Christians viewed Jesus Christ as the only Messiah and did not recognize Simon bar Kokhba as one.

The rebellion was eventually brutally suppressed by the Romans. Afterwards, Emperor Hadrian introduced major changes: he merged the province of Judea with Syria and renamed the region *Syria Palaestina*. This name change is often interpreted as an attempt to reduce the Jewish identity associated with the region.

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the area remained part of the Byzantine Empire. In the centuries that followed, control of the region changed hands several times, until it was eventually conquered by the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century. The Ottomans ruled the area until 1917.

Throughout this long period, various populations lived alongside one another, including Jews and Arabs. Although “Palestine” was not an official state name under Ottoman administration, the term was still used to describe the region, and its inhabitants were often referred to as Palestinians.

Conflict with Israel

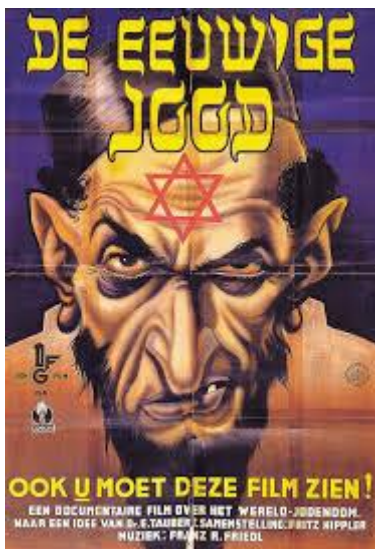
Now that we have discussed most of the early history of Palestine, we will focus on the more recent developments. The current conflict between Israel and Palestine is sometimes compared to the ancient conflicts between the Israelites and the Philistines, although the modern situation is far more complex and takes place on a completely different scale and within a very different historical context.

Throughout history, the Jewish population has faced persecution and discrimination. During the time of the Roman Empire, Jews often formed a minority group and regularly came into conflict with ruling powers. In the Middle Ages, Jews in Europe were excluded from certain professions



and guilds, and during epidemics such as the plague, they were wrongly blamed for spreading disease.

This centuries-long history of antisemitism reached its darkest point during the Holocaust, carried out by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime during the Second World War. Millions of Jews were systematically persecuted and murdered.



Poster of the German film the Eternal Jew made in 1940 in the Hitler era.

Source: IDFA.nl

After the Holocaust, the idea grew within the international community and among Jewish movements that a Jewish state should be established: a place where Jews could live safely without persecution. This idea was connected to Zionism, a movement that had already emerged before the Second World War.

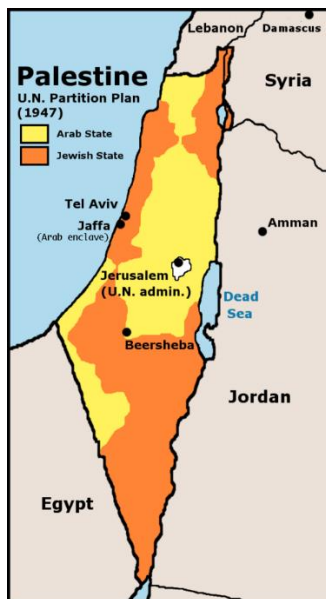
What is interesting is that Palestine was not the only region considered for such a state. Throughout history, plans were proposed to establish Jewish settlements or a Jewish homeland in places such as Uganda, Cyprus, and the Sinai Peninsula. However, these proposals were ultimately never realized.

The focus eventually shifted toward Palestine, partly because of the historical and religious connection that the Jewish people have with the region, dating back to the time of the Israelites.

In November 1947, the United Nations adopted Resolution 181. This plan proposed dividing the British Mandate of Palestine into two separate states: a Jewish state and an Arab state.



Because Jerusalem held great religious and historical significance for both communities, the city was proposed to be placed under international administration in order to prevent conflicts over control of the city.



The partition plan Palestina-Israel from 1947. Source: wikipedia.org

But when looking at the world map today, it becomes clear that Palestine no longer controls the territory that was originally proposed in the UN partition plan. What happened during these nearly 80 years? Here is a summary of the events, explained as neutrally as possible.



Current size of Palestine in 2026. Source: wikipedia.org

- The Arab League had already advocated in 1946 for a single united state in Palestine instead of a partition.
- Many Arabs living in Palestine considered the partition plan unfair and rejected it.



- Zionist movements welcomed the partition plan, as they saw it as an important step toward establishing their own state.
- In 1947, the Arab League called on the Palestinian population to resist the partition plan. Support was provided in the form of weapons, troops, and financial assistance.
- On May 14, 1948, the State of Israel was declared, based on the partition plan outlined in UN Resolution 181.
- Arab states such as Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia rejected this decision, leading to the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.
- During this war, Israel expanded its territory. Jordan gained control of the West Bank, while Egypt took control of the Gaza Strip.
- During the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel captured these territories and placed them under military administration.
- During the 1972 Munich Olympics, 11 Israeli athletes were killed by the Palestinian militant organization Black September.
- In 1974, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was recognized as the representative of the Palestinian people.
- On November 15, 1988, the PLO declared the State of Palestine in Algiers and claimed sovereignty over the occupied territories.
- In 1993, the Oslo Accords were signed, granting the Palestinian territories limited self-government under the leadership of Yasser Arafat.
- In 1995, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by Yigal Amir, an extremist opposed to the Oslo Accords.
- In 2005, Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip and dismantled Israeli settlements there.
- In 2006, Hamas won the elections. In 2007, Hamas took control of Gaza, after which Israel and Egypt imposed a blockade.
- In October 2023, Hamas launched an attack on Israeli territory, killing hundreds of people. This led to a major escalation of the conflict.
- Israel responded with military operations in Gaza and the West Bank, resulting in thousands of casualties.
- In 2025, attempts were made to reach a ceasefire, including mediation efforts by the United States.
- In March 2025, the Israeli government under Benjamin Netanyahu introduced new counterterrorism legislation concerning the death penalty (applicable only to Palestinians), which received significant international criticism.



Conclusion

As each day passes, it seems that Palestine comes under increasing pressure. The region that was once home to some of the earliest urban communities, such as Jericho, and is often considered one of the cradles of human civilization, now finds itself in an extremely complex and fragile situation.

Both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank face severe challenges, with political tensions, economic difficulties, and violence playing a major role in everyday life.

The world is constantly changing. Just as empires and countries from the past — such as the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia — disappeared or transformed, the situation surrounding Palestine also continues to shift. The difference, however, is that those states continue to exist in different forms, while Palestinian territory has become increasingly fragmented since the UN partition plan of 1947.

With recent political developments and ongoing tensions between Israel and Palestine, a lasting solution still appears to be far away.

Regardless of which perspective one takes on this conflict, one thing remains clear: it would represent a significant historical and human loss if a region with such deep cultural and historical roots were to disappear further or lose its identity.

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