

2007 Model Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearings Simulation

Topic 1: Gaza vs. the West Bank: Examining U.S. Policy towards the Palestinian Authority

Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs

Chairman: John F. Kerry (D-MA)
Barbara Boxer (D-CA)
Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD)

Ranking Member: Norm Coleman (R-MN)
Chuck Hagel (R-NE)
Johnny Isakson (R-GA)

Introduction

The world's three major religions that originated in the Middle East—Islam, Christianity and Judaism—all lay religious and historical claims to a stretch of land that is approximately 10,000 square miles, or the size of Maryland. In 1948, the state of Israel was proclaimed, leading to the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, the first in a series of wars between the state of Israel and its Arab neighbors. Political tensions and war have continuously marked the region as the Israelis and the Palestinians have failed to agree to the terms of a just and comprehensive peace.

The United States was involved in the Middle East even before Israel announced its independence. U.S. foreign policy in the region has been driven by the principle that only when there is some measure of peace between Israel, the Palestinians and the neighboring Arab states can the Middle East as a whole ever achieve political stability. Unfortunately, this goal has remained elusive since Israel was created.

Today, the Palestinian leadership is divided, with the more religious and radical Hamas party governing the Gaza Strip and the more moderate and secular Fatah party governing the West Bank. Though the two areas are separated by the state of Israel, Palestinians consider them to constitute one Palestinian entity. The U.S. is now urging the economic and political isolation of the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip and a unilateral peace agreement between Israel and the Fatah-controlled West Bank.

Background

The start of the modern conflict between the Arabs and the Israelis dates back to the late 1800s, as the emergence of modern Zionism in response to European anti-Semitism encouraged the first large-scale migration of Jews to Palestine. Political and territorial tensions over Palestine increased after the fall of the Ottoman Empire in WWI and the subsequent colonial rule asserted over the region by British and French authorities. At the end of WWI, the League of Nations divided the Ottoman Empire between Great Britain and France, with Britain accepting the mandates for Palestine and Mesopotamia (now Iraq). Under the British Mandate, both the Arabs and the Jews continued to agitate for their own state and the right to self-determination. Violent clashes between the Jews and

Arabs continually broke out. The situation deteriorated further during WWII, which caused even further waves of Jewish migration from Europe to Palestine.

After WWII, as the mandate grew increasingly unpopular at home, Britain decided to terminate the mandate, asking the newly formed United Nations to step in and mediate the dispute. On November 29, 1947, the UN General Assembly voted to partition the Palestinian territories into two states, one Arab and one Jewish. The Arabs rejected the UN proposal and fighting once again broke out. On May 14, 1948, the day before the British Mandate was due to expire, the state of Israel declared itself an independent nation. Within days, soldiers from the neighboring countries of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq invaded Israel, launching the first in a series of Arab-Israeli wars and conflicts in the past sixty years.

The eventual armistice between Israel and the Arab states resulted in the Palestine territories being broken up and governed by neighboring nations. Jordan took control of the West Bank while Egypt asserted jurisdiction over the Gaza Strip. The remainder of Palestine was under the control of Israel. This political and territorial division led to hundreds of thousands of people, mostly Arab, to leave the newly independent Israel and flee to the Gaza Strip and West Bank. In the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Israel seized control of parts of the West Bank from Jordan, the Gaza Strip from Egypt and the Golan Heights from Syria. Another “conventional” war in 1973 and dozens of military incursions and violent clashes have continued to mark this region of the world.

The Rise of the Palestine Liberation Organization

In 1964, the Arab League proposed creating an organization to represent the Palestinian people and advocate on their behalf. In May 1964, the first Palestinian National Council met in Jerusalem and established the Palestine Liberation Organization, a multi-party confederation of organizations that share the goal of an independent Palestinian state. The PLO was initially controlled by the Egyptian government, but in the wake of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Yasser Arafat’s Fatah party gained control of the executive bodies of the PLO, and Yasser Arafat was elected Chairman of the PLO in 1969. In 1974, the PLO was recognized as the “sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people” and was granted observer status at the United Nations.

In 1993, after years of violent conflict with Israel, the PLO and Israel signed the Oslo Accords, an agreement that allowed for Palestinian self-rule in Gaza and the West Bank in exchange for the recognition of Israel’s right to exist. In 1994, the Palestinian National Authority (PA) was formed as an interim administrative organization to govern parts of the West Bank and the Gaze Strip. Although the Palestinian Authority is technically separate from the PLO, given the strength of the Fatah party, many of the same people who dominated the PLO rose to prominence in the PA with Yasser Arafat becoming its first President. After Arafat’s death in 2004, Mahmoud Abbas, also a member of the Fatah party, was elected as the Palestinian president in January 2005.

In January 2006, Palestinian Legislative Council elections were held (the first parliamentary elections since 1996). Opposition party Hamas won 74 out of 132 seats,

having convinced the public that it would rid the Fatah-controlled government of systemic corruption and do a better job of providing citizens with health and educational services.

Following the Hamas victory, both Hamas and Fatah agreed to enter into a unity government. However, Israel, the United States and the European Union, all of which consider Hamas a terrorist organization, refused to recognize the new government and moved to cut off aid. Subsequent disagreements between Fatah and Hamas over the composition of Palestinian Authority security forces (previously controlled by Fatah) led to intense fighting between the two groups, and on June 14, 2007, Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip. In turn, Abbas denounced the Hamas-led government and declared a state of emergency, setting up a new government in the West Bank. The split between these two political groups has left the Palestinian people with two political parties claiming to be their legitimate representative. The Fatah-led government in the West Bank is now once again receiving aid from the international community, which has simultaneously cut off diplomatic and economic relations with Hamas, leaving an already impoverished people further isolated and on the brink of economic collapse.

Purpose of the Hearing

The United States has been involved in this region of the world for many decades and is widely considered to be an uncritical ally of the Israeli government. While the U.S. has tried to forge a peace agreement between Israel and all its Arab neighbors, especially between Israel and the Palestinians, it is unlikely that the U.S. will negotiate openly with Hamas, despite the fact that its leaders were popularly elected in open and free elections by a majority of the Palestinian people. At the same time, with Fatah in control of the West Bank, there are now two political groups claiming to lead the Palestinian people. It is within this context that the U.S. must now decide the best approach to forge a lasting peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Questions

1. What role should the United States play in the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Authority following Hamas seizing control of the Gaza strip?
2. What **shared objectives** can the U.S. cite to rally support from the Palestinians, Israel and the international community?
3. Should U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East focus on promoting democratic institutions and processes or maintaining political stability? Are these goals mutually exclusive?
4. What are some of the possible consequences of the U.S. continuing to isolate Hamas and the Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip?
5. Can the United States be involved in the current Palestinian conflict without engaging the surrounding Arab nations?

Witnesses

Condoleezza Rice: *Secretary of State*

Ban Ki- Moon: *Secretary General*

Javier Solana: *European Union High representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy*

Sergei Lavrov: *Russian Federation Foreign Minister*

Tony Blair: *Special Envoy*

Dr. Heribert Adam: *Professor Emeritus, Simon Fraser University*

Steven A. Cook: *Douglas Dillon Fellow for the Council of Foreign Relations*

Nathan Brown: *Senior Associate of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*

Harvey Sicherman: *President, Foreign Policy Research Institute*

Hady Amr: *Brookings Institution*

Sufyan Alissa: *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*

Aaron David Miller: *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*

Peter Beinart: *Senior Fellow for U.S. Foreign Policy, Council on Foreign Relations*

Christopher H. Achen: *Associate Chair, Department of Politics, Princeton University*

Ellen Lust-Okar: *Associate Professor, Yale University*

Resources

Central Intelligence Agency, The World FactBook

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/is.html>

Center for Strategic and International Studies

http://www.csis.org/component/option,com_csis_pubs/task,view/id,3919/

Article on the dissolution of the Hamas-Fatah government:

<http://www.cbc.ca/world/story/2007/06/14/palestinians.html>

Foreign Policy in Focus:

“The U.S. Role in the Gaza Tragedy” <http://www.fpif.org/fpiftxt/4331>

“The Rise of Hamas” <http://www.fpif.org/fpif.txt/4333>
“Congressional Legislation Aimed at Isolating Hamas is Likely to Backfire”
<http://www.fpif.org/fpif.txt/3318>
“The Hamas Victory: Another Side to the Story” <http://www.fpif.org/fpif.txt/3107>
“ Hamas Wins the Palestinian Elections” <http://www.fpif.org/fpiftp/3095>
“The Peace movement Addresses Israeli-Palestine (finally)”
<http://www.fpif.org/fpif.txt/4305>

Brookings:

“A Rare Opening for the U.S. in Palestine”
http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2007/0227globaleconomics_pettyjohn.aspx
“Governing Gaza: Hamas’s Dilemma”
http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2007/0702middleeast_indyk.aspx
“Is Trusteeship for Palestine the Answer”
http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2007/0627middleeast_indyk.aspx
Upcoming Middle East Summit in Washington, D.C.:
<http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2007/1022middleeast.aspx>

The Heritage Foundation:

“ Hamas’s coup in Gaza Casts a Pall over Bush-Olmert Meeting”
<http://www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/wm1510.cfm>

Council of Foreign Relations:

“Gaza Isolated but Hamas Not Easily Contained”
<http://www.cfr.org/publication/13618/cordesman.html>

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy:

“For Mideast Talks to Work, Rice Must Move the Goalposts”
<http://washingtoninstitute.org/templateC06.php?CID=1104>
“ Hamas’s Authoritarian Regime in Gaza”
<http://washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2661>

The Foreign Policy Research Institute:

“Endgame for Palestine”
<http://www.fpri.org/enotes/200707.sicherman.endgamepalestine.html>

The New York Times:

Time Topics: Palestinians:
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/p/palestinians/index.html?inline=nyt-classifier> links to all current information of Palestine
“Palestinians Clash in West Bank”
<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/06/world/middleeast/06mideast.html?n=Top/Reference/Times%20Topics/Subjects/P/Palestinians>