



# COMMUN IV

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## UNSC: Israel/ Palestine

BACKGROUND  
GUIDE

Alex Ding '20,  
Chair

Amelia Orwant '20,  
Co-chair

## A Letter from Your Chair

Dear delegates,

My name is Alex Ding, I'm a junior at Commonwealth, and for the second year in a row, I will be your chair in the Security Council for COMMUN. I, along with my co-chair Amelia Orwant, have put in a great deal of work into this conference, and we are very excited to meet you all on conference day. The Security Council is, despite its small size, the single most powerful committee in the United Nations, so in the world of MUN, it is where the best delegates of each conference gather and meet other talented young minds. I expect you all to be knowledgeable about the topic and ready to speak in public. Remember, you are the voice of your represented country's political opinions, not of yourself. It certainly is a lot of pressure, but the more work you put in it, the more fun it would be for both you and your fellow delegates. I am happy to answer any questions you might have about the conference. Whether you are lost with your research or don't know what to expect, feel free to email me at [alding@commschool.org](mailto:alding@commschool.org).

This year, we as a committee will be discussing the Israel-Palestine conflict. It is one of the most controversial topics in modern history that continues to affect our politics today. Tracing its origins to World War II, this issue is more relevant now than ever, as the armed conflicts in the Gaza Strip threaten the fragile peace with yet another potential war. It is not just a regional conflict, but a divisive issue forcing other nations to one side or another: in such a nuanced environment, inaction towards one side might as well be interpreted as action towards the other. The United Nations, tasked to preserve peace over the world, is obliged to address and de-escalate the conflict. Delegates, it is up to you to strike compromises and peacefully resolve this international crisis.

Best of luck to you all,  
Your chair, Alex Ding

## **Security Council**

The Security Council (SC) is a group within the UN that works towards the UN's goals of international peace and security. Unlike other committees, the SC is able to use many unique powers that allow it to enforce its decisions. The SC may decide what measure to employ in carrying out its decisions. These measures may even include interruption of economic relations, breaking of diplomatic relations, and, if necessary, using the armed forces of Member States. More importantly, any decision made in the SC is legally binding to all UN Member States, meaning that they have to follow the passed decisions.

The SC consists of 15 UN Member States - five permanent Members and ten non permanent Members. The permanent members are: France, China, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Every year, five non permanent Members are elected for a term of two years, which allows ten non permanent members to be on the SC at a time. The current ten non permanent Members are: Bolivia, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Sweden.

Each member has one vote. To pass a decision, nine votes are needed. Non-procedural decisions, the decisions about substantive matters rather than just procedure, require the abstention or favor of all five permanent Members. This practice is widely regarded as veto power since a single member state can stop the entire decision from passing just by casting one vote against it. Vetoes are used only when a resolution completely conflicts with a country's position. You should try to write resolutions that do not require a last minute veto and take into account everybody's prospective. Additionally, the SC may invite UN Members not in the SC whose interests are affected to participate in SC discussions, though they are not able to vote. In this particular conference, the SC invites Syria, Egypt, and Palestine.

## **Background**

Beginning in the late nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth century, large amounts of Jews began immigrating to the area of historic Palestine, a place of extreme religious significance to Judaism. During the beginning of the twentieth century, Arabs and Jews had a friendly relationship in the area, but by the 1930s, violence between the groups had become a semi-regular occurrence. The British controlled the area under the Palestinian Mandate. With the rise of Jewish Zionism, the movement to establish a Jewish nation in modern day Israel, in reaction to the Holocaust, and British extraction from the Palestinian Mandate, the United

Nations General Assembly Resolution 181 laid out a plan to partition the region into an Arab State and a Jewish State, while Jerusalem was designated as an international city administered by the UN. In 1948, Israel declared itself an independent state, beginning its war of independence against its Arab neighbors. While Israel would eventually win the war and solidify their existence, the process forced approximately 700,000 Palestinians to flee their homes, many of whose ancestors had lived in the area for hundreds of years. To this day, one of the largest issues of debate is whether these Palestinians and their descendants have a right of return to live in their ancestral lands in the modern state of Israel.



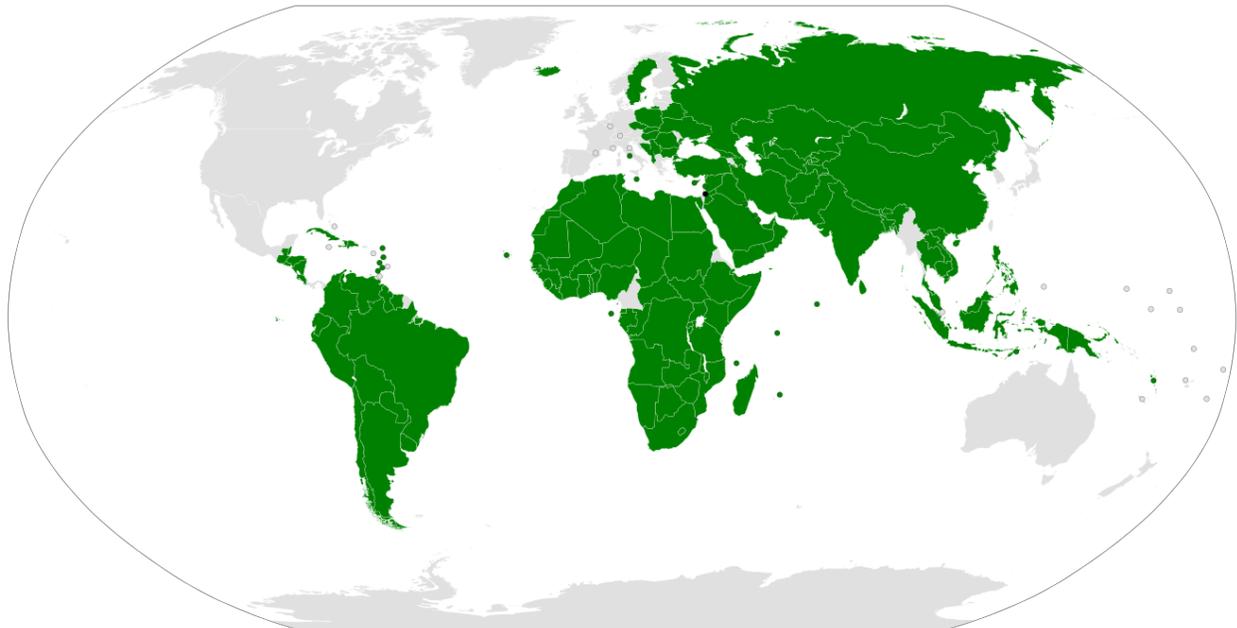
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<sup>1</sup><https://static01.nyt.com/images/2011/11/28/learning/Nov29LN/Nov29LN-articleInline.jpg>



While Israel had established itself as a sovereign country and had a clear governmental structure and legitimacy among its people, the same could not be said for the Palestinians. Without a state or even well defined borders, the Palestinians went decades without clear leadership, and even to this day do not have a sovereign state. It was not until the founding of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964 that some form of government emerged. Originally founded with the goal to liberate Palestine through force, the PLO was viewed as a terrorist organization by both the United States and Israel until 1993. Today, it is recognized as the representative of the Palestinian people, and it has observer status in the United Nations. Though its status is disputed, it is recognized by 137 out of the 193 UN member states, while

states with strong ties to NATO generally do not recognize PLO as a state.



- Countries that have recognized the State of Palestine
- Countries that have not recognized the State Of Palestine<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, the Palestinians in Gaza Strip are under the *de facto* government of Hamas, a Sunni-Islamist organization that took over control of the area in 2007. Frequent violent conflicts have been breaking out on the border, from gunfights to missiles launched on both sides, and recent development is only taking a turn for the worse. On November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018, an Israeli commando raid was discovered, making it the first known Israeli ground invasion since 2014, and tension only escalated since, and, if not handled with care, the situation could devolve into war. Delegates are highly encouraged to keep up with the development of the current situation, as it is extremely pertinent to the current debate.

## History

In 1967, Israel launched a preemptive strike to be known as the Six Day War, claiming large portions of land, including the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights from Egypt and Syria, respectively, while simultaneously embarrassing them. At the time, the Security Council passed a resolution ordering Israel to withdraw their military from the occupied lands. Israel's

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[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_recognition\\_of\\_the\\_State\\_of\\_Palestine#/media/File:Palestine\\_recognition\\_only.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_recognition_of_the_State_of_Palestine#/media/File:Palestine_recognition_only.svg)

borders prior to the war, as well as the borders of the Palestinian areas, are commonly known as the 1967 borders and are frequently used in peace negotiations. In 1978, with US mediation, Israel and Egypt signed the Camp David Accords, which returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in return for peace. Egypt became the first Arab country to sign a peace agreement with Israel, leading to its expulsion from the Arab League.

In 1987, discontent among Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip would lead to the First Intifada: a series of massive protests, violence, and demonstrations. To many Israelis, it served as a motivating factor to seek a peace with their neighbors. Several years after the violence of the First Intifada, Israeli Prime Minister and the PLO signed the Oslo Accords, recognized Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state in change for Israel to steadily cede land back to Palestine in return for peace--a strategy known as Land for Peace. The assassination of the Israeli Prime Minister by a radical orthodox Jew, however, heavily strained the peace processes, and attempts to revive the effort were largely unsuccessful. The Second Intifada, starting with a clash between Palestinian civilians and the Israeli Defense Force in Jerusalem, claimed the lives of over 4,000 people (3,000 Palestinian and 1,000 Israeli) and continued to reverse the peace efforts.

With the takeover of a right wing party, Israel began to create settlements in the regions which had been occupied and claimed by the state during the Six Day War, including the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza Strip, West Bank, and Golan Heights. The Israel-Egypt peace agreement of 1979 discontinued the Sinai settlements, and in 2005, the Israeli government likewise evacuated the Gaza Strip. But settlements in the West Bank and Golan Heights still exist to this day, souring Israeli relations with Egypt and Syria, and with the election of Prime Minister Netanyahu at 2009, new outposts and settlements continued to be built and legalized in the West Bank, rendering 60% of the West Bank off limits to Palestinian construction.

Israeli settlement policy began with the implication of annexing portions of the occupied territories. On a global scale, the expansion of Israeli settlements into occupied territory is largely recognized as a violation of international law. While the Israeli government has occasionally put temporary halts on expanding settlements, the settlements have nonetheless naturally grown. Today, over 350,000 Israelis live in West Bank settlements. The Israeli withdrawals from the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip represented a fraction of the current number of settlers in the West Bank, leading to a challenge if a peace plan expects Israel to give up many of its settlements.

The expansion of Israeli settlements have created significant barriers to reaching peace with the Palestinians. To many, the continued increase in number of settlements is seen as evidence that the Israeli government is not truly looking to compromise with the Palestinians. While the goal for a two-state solution has been popularly held for several decades, and continues to be the most popular solution today, more and more experts are seeing Israeli settlements as an almost impossible barrier to overcome. In order for the West Bank to become under Palestinian control, many of the settlements would need to as well, but Israel neither has the capability to easily take in 700,000 people nor is it willing to let its citizens in currently occupied territory fall under Palestinian control and security.



## Debate Topics

Over the past several decades, numerous attempts at reaching peace and a permanent solution between Israel and Palestine have been made. Evidently, none of these attempts have been successful. The reason for this is surprisingly simple: the current situation in Palestine is one of the most vexing challenges of our time. Both sides believe that they have a strong claim to

<sup>4</sup> Picture: [https://farm6.staticflickr.com/5574/14924511545\\_a9911aae4a\\_o.png](https://farm6.staticflickr.com/5574/14924511545_a9911aae4a_o.png)

the entire land, and neither side has been particularly willing to give up too much due to the fear of getting the bad end of an incredibly important deal.

To help the delegates to deconstruct and begin addressing such a complex topic, a list of key issues is provided below. The list is certainly not exhaustive, but these points of conflict are great starting places for research and potential solutions. Think about what position your country would take on each of these issues and what compromises it could make.

## **Jerusalem**

The aforementioned United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181 envisioned all of Jerusalem as becoming an international city to administered by the United Nations due to its joint religious significance. Under this model, neither Israel nor a Palestinian state would have control over Jerusalem, although their citizens would be allowed to access the city in order to visit the important religious sites. Citizens living in Jerusalem would not necessarily need to be Israeli or Palestinian citizens, and would instead be living in an international city. Despite this plan, both Israel and Palestine have asserted claims over Jerusalem. The city itself is of incredible religious importance to both Judaism and Islam—as well as Christianity—and it is literally in the middle of the dispute between Israel and Palestine. Currently, Israel maintains complete control over West Jerusalem, and beginning with the Six Day War, Israel began occupying East Jerusalem, which the United Nations still views today as occupied Palestinian territory. In 1980, Israel declared the whole of Jerusalem as its capital, a very contentious claim. While most countries do not recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the United States, under President Trump, moved its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, officially recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital. The move was highly contentious, attracting widespread criticisms from both its allies and the UN, but a few countries with strong ties to Israel followed suit. Numerous different attempts at reaching agreement over Jerusalem have been made. Likely the simplest solution, the United States proposed at both the Camp David Accords and the Taba Summits for the Jewish parts of Jerusalem to be given to Israel (mostly West Jerusalem), and the Arab parts of Jerusalem would be given to a Palestinian State, with archaeological work on the Temple Mount being shared by the two states. Both Israel and Palestine agreed to the idea of this, at least at the point in time of the summits, although, as the larger deals themselves all fell through, it was never realized.

## **Israeli Settlements**

The Israeli settlements in the West Bank are one of the largest complicating factors towards reaching peace between the two parties. Additionally, the current situation involving the settlements is one of the largest differences between peace processes today as opposed to several decades ago. The population of Israelis living in West Bank settlements is currently over 350,000, not including East Jerusalem, and that number is increasing everyday. Israel's current Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has stated on numerous occasions his intent to keep Israel's settlements and reaching a two state solution, a claim which many see as contradictory. Israeli Settlements bring issue to peace negotiations because they make it harder to achieve a real two state solution where both Palestine and Israel have their own independent states. For Palestine to have sovereignty over the West Bank, it would require giving Palestine control over all Israeli settlements, something that Israel has not seemed willing to do. There are, however, proposals to get around this problem. The first and most common proposal involves land swaps, where Israel gives a future Palestinian state land from its territory in exchange for being able to keep and maintain sovereignty over many of its settlements. The settlements not included in the land swaps would be evacuated, and the people would return to Israel or a valid Israeli settlement. However, during the Second Intifada, Israel began the construction of the Israeli West Bank barrier, isolating the Palestinians population in West Bank from the rest of Israel. Though it was originally constructed under the name of temporary security measure, it has been rapidly expanded and speculated as the future *de facto* political barrier between Israel and Palestine. In the eyes of the Palestinians, it is a disguised annexation of Palestinian land and a "racial segregation wall." Both the UN and the International Court of Justice have declared this wall illegal by international laws.

## **Right of Return**

The armed conflicts between Israel and its Arab neighbors saw Israel forcing huge numbers of Palestinians out of their home to become refugees in other countries. The 1948 War of Independence and the 1967 Six Day War resulted in the displacement of 700,000 and between 350,000 to 400,000 Palestinians, respectively. As of 2010, there are around five million Palestinian refugees, most of which are descendants of the earlier generation of refugees. There is virtually no debate that what happened to the families of these refugees was undeserved. For most of them, they had been forced to flee homes that their ancestors had lived in for hundreds of

years, and they have never been able to return. Because of this injustice, many Arabs have called for a right of return for the refugees to go back to their ancestral homes. Israel has denied this request, and it is commonly seen as unrealistic today, with the Arab peace Initiative of 2002 requesting a “just resolution” to the Palestinian refugee problem.

Still, millions of refugees have been living in refugee camps for most of their lives, having no real home to return to and no clear future to dream of. This life is not very sustainable, and it is certainly not an ideal solution. A comprehensive resolution to the Israel-Palestine issue should address the future of these refugees. They are, after all, refugees, and there should be a way to give them the opportunity to find a home, even if it is a new home and not their first choice.

## **Security**

Both Israelis and Palestinians have suffered atrocious attacks and harm from members of the opposing group, and providing security for their people is a priority for both governments. In Israel, attempts to protect their people has led to harsher treatment of Palestinians, and it has also gotten in the way of peace processes at times. During periods over the past decades, many Israelis and Palestinians lived lives not knowing if there was a suicide bomber on the bus they were on or if their house may be bulldozed for unspecified reason. For a resolution to truly be made, a society must be created that will allow both peoples to live in peace.

One of the largest hesitations for Israel allowing Palestine to become an independent state is a question of security. If the State of Palestine does come into existence, and it has sovereignty over itself as is required of any true state, then it becomes incredibly hard for Israel to prevent attacks on it from outside. Currently, Israel occupies virtually all of the territory that would become a Palestinian state according to the two state solution, and giving up that occupation would include losing control over what happens in that region. As Prime Minister Netanyahu has stated, his "view of a potential agreement is that the Palestinians have all the powers to govern themselves, but none of the powers to threaten us.”

In your resolution, be sure to address ways that violence would be both prevented and addressed if it occurs. Neither Israelis nor Palestinians deserve to live in fear, but it must be recognized that it is a very real possibility that isolated incidents of violence may occur. If Israel suspects that attacks on its people have come from Palestine, whether it was supported or not by

a state, would Israel have a right to invade another country? These questions, and many more, must be addressed before a resolution could be made.

## **Bloc Positions**

### **Israel**

Israel, under the Netanyahu government, supports a two state solution, at least when it comes to self-governing. That being said, there are certainly very important stipulations that must be met. The safety of the Israeli people are a top priority. Any agreement that would not allow Israel to defend itself will be unacceptable, and the state of Palestine must be committed to peace. Additionally, Israeli settlements are an important right of Israeli citizens. While compromises could be made for several of them, not all could feasibly be moved.

### **United States**

The United States is Israel's largest ally in the world. The United States has constantly supported Israel in the Security Council, vetoing resolutions that would require Israel to cede more to Palestine. During the Obama presidency, relations have been strained slightly, and Obama has put more pressure on Israel to reach an agreement on the two state solution by not vetoing a U.N. resolution condemning Israeli settlements as illegal. The Trump administration, too, has declared an open endorsement to the two-state solution, but the strong initiatives during the Obama administration has certainly lost its edge. That being said, the United States adamantly supports Israel's right to exist and defend themselves from attacks from neighboring terrorist groups.

### **Arab League**

The Arab League, and virtually all Arab states, are very sympathetic to the plight of the Palestinians. To them, the arabs lived in Palestine for thousands of years and Israel represents a newcomer that has ousted millions of people from their ancestral lands. Many Arab states do not currently recognize Israel as a state, and they see Israel's actions in its occupied territories as a disgrace and against international law and human rights.

## **European Union**

The states in the European Union tend to also favor a two state solution, although they are also more sympathetic to the unfortunate situation of many Arabs in Palestine. Many of Israel's actions, especially their continued settlement expansion, are egregious offences that seem to show a lack of willingness to truly attempt to reach compromise with the Palestinians.

Ultimately, these states simply wish for the area to be a place where both Arabs and Jews could peacefully coexist.

## **Questions to Consider**

What is the solution? A two state solution, a one state solution, something else?

What role should the international community have in creating peace between Israel and Palestine?

How can the settlement issue be overcome?

Any solution will have opponents, especially those on the extremes of both issues, how can it be ensured that this will not unravel the resolution?

If Israel or Palestine refuse to compromise, will there be any repercussions?

What rights do Palestinians living in areas occupied by Israel have?

What can be done to address the escalating tension and armed conflicts in the Gaza Strip?