



## What Events Lead to the Current Situation in Israel and Palestine?

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**Mikhaila Peterson:** We should start with just a brief background of the history of the Israeli and Palestine conflict and what led to today.

**Norman Finkelstein:** Obviously, when you try to give a background story of a conflict, the question is always, where do you begin? Because depending on where you begin, it can be seen as a partisan issue. I will take where we begin at, 1948, the indigenous population of Palestine numbered about 1,300,000. The, what were called back then the Zionist settlers, namely Jews who came to Palestine roughly from the beginning of the 20th century on, they numbered roughly 600,000. By 1947, there was an irreconcilable conflict between the indigenous Arab population and the Zionist Jewish settlers. That conflict was then thrown into the hands of the newly created United Nations, and the UN designated responsibility was to try to work out a resolution, a settlement of the conflict, not necessarily applying the highest principles of justice, but trying to combine as in most conflicts, principles of justice with practicality, what's possible. The United Nations General Assembly, in what's called the UN Resolution 181, divided Palestine or proposed that Palestine be divided into two states. An Arab state which would comprise approximately 44% of Palestine and a Jewish state, which would comprise approximately 56% of Palestine. The Arab side did not accept that recommendation, for two main reasons. One, they were the indigenous population and therefore their rights should have priority; or their desires and aspirations should have priority. And number two, because the division did not remotely correlate with the demographic balance in Palestine. The 600,000 Jews were allocated 56%. The Palestinian Arabs were allocated 44%. A conflict then ensued in what's called the first Arab-Israeli war, in which neighbouring Arab states also intervened. By the end of the war, Israel had absorbed not the 56% that was allocated it in the Partition Resolution 181, but they absorbed 80% of

Palestine. Two areas were not absorbed by Israel. Number one, the Gaza Strip, which came under Egyptian administrative control, and the West, what came to be called the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which came under Jordanian control.

In the course of Israel's creation in 1948, it expelled about 90% of the indigenous population within the borders that became Israel. Of those 90%, roughly 750,000 Palestinians who were expelled from the area that became Israel, of those 750,000, about 250 to 290,000, they fled to Gaza. And they are the origins of the Gaza population today. The population of Gaza at the time was about 80,000, so now that population of Gaza was swamped by the refugees who were expelled in 1948. Without wanting to anticipate too much of what's going to come in a few moments, so those refugees and their descendants now constitute, now, meaning today, they constitute approximately 70% of the population of Gaza. So when we hear today about the population of Gaza, roughly now 2.2 million people, of those 2.2 million people, approximately 70% constitute refugees and their descendants. Now, to go back to where we were in the very condensed historical record, in 1967, there was another war between Israel and the neighbouring Arab states. And the course of that war – two things happened. It was the second, if the term can be used, it was the second great expulsion. About 300,000 Palestinians were expelled from the areas that Israel now conquered. And the areas Israel now conquered, were the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. So the bottom line is, in 1900, Palestine, the population was about 90% Palestinian Arab. In 1947, the population was about 1,300,000 Palestinian Arabs and 600,000 Jews. And in 1947, before the popular partition plan, Israelis owned about 6% of the land in Palestine. The partition resolution awarded the newly created state of Israel 56% of Palestine. By the end of the war of 1948 Israel controlled 80% of Palestine. After the June 1967 war, Israel now controlled all of Palestine. The whole of Palestine has now come under Israeli control.

Under international law, because these territories were conquered by Israel in the course of the war, under international law, they were not part of Israel as a legal fact. They, under international law, are called occupied territories. And the abbreviation that eventually came to be used was OPT, Occupied Palestinian Territories, in addition to the West Bank and Gaza. In the course of the 1967 war, Israel also occupied the Syrian Golan Heights and the Egyptian Sinai. Once again, the question of how to resolve this seemingly intractable problem was thrown into the court of the United Nations, and there were very protracted deliberations, both in the General Assembly and subsequently in the Security Council. And the proposal put forth by the Security Council, it was embodied in probably the most famous resolution in the United Nations history. It's called UN Resolution 242. And the essence of UN Resolution 242 is very simple. It's based on UN principles, international law, principles and the principles of the UN Charter. Those principles are, number one, which is spelled out in the preamble to UN Resolution 242, the first principle is: It's inadmissible to conquer territory by war. It's inadmissible to conquer territory by war. Israel acquired the West Bank, Gaza, the Egyptian Sinai, the Syrian Golan Heights in the course of a war and therefore, according to international law and UN principles, Israel had no title to those territories. That was the first

prong of UN Resolution 242. The second prong was that, Israel as a state had the right under the UN charter to live at peace with its neighbours. And therefore the Arab states, the neighbouring Arab states and any other parties to the conflict have the legal obligation to accept Israel as a state in the region. That came to be called the Land For Peace, Land for Peace solution to the conflict. Namely, Israel had to relinquish control of the West Bank and Gaza – now I'm talking strictly about the Palestinian-Israeli dimension, because there is, of course, still the Egyptian dimension with the Sinai desert, the Syrian dimension with the Golan Heights, but from here on, I'm going to put them to the side because obviously we're talking about this topic now in light of the most recent events.

So right at this point, I'm going to hone in just on that Palestine Israel dimension of the conflict. Having said that, the terms of UN Resolution 242 were very straightforward. Number one, Israel had to withdraw from all the Palestinian territories it acquired during the 1967 war. What I referred to a moment ago as the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the OPT, and in turn the Palestinians were obliged to recognise Israel as a legal state, a member of the United Nations. And as a member of the United Nations here, referring to the state of Israel, it had all the rights and responsibilities, all the rights and all the duties of any other member state. And that was, strange as it may sound to you, it's already more than 50 years later, half a century, it's more than a half century later, those have remained the turns for settling the conflict. And now the question becomes which side has been the obstacle to the settlement of the conflict? It could be one side, it could be the other side. And of course, it could be both sides.

On the Palestinian side, the leadership that emerged to represent the Palestinians soon after the June 1967 war, the leadership was called the Palestine Liberation Organisation or the PLO. And that was led by a fellow who may be familiar to your listeners, namely Yasser Arafat. Beginning in the mid-1970s – so once again, we're talking about a half century ago – beginning in the mid 1970s, the Palestinians accepted the terms of UN Resolution 242. Those terms I spelled out to you a moment ago. For withdrawal, in exchange for full recognition, the Palestinians accepted those terms. Israel did not. Israel was not prepared to relinquish control over the territories or at any rate, parts of the territories that they had conquered in the 1967 war. Their attitude after 1967 was the same as their attitude after 1948. You recall I said, the UN Resolution 181, allocated 56% of Palestine to the Israelis. They conquered 80% and by holding fast to that 80%, the international community eventually acquiesced, accepted, the Israeli fait accompli. So the expectation of the Israelis after 1967 was, if we hold fast, we can retain control over the whole of what they call, the Israelis call, the land of Israel, namely the West Bank and so forth. So Israel was determined not to relinquish control over a large part of the territory, let alone recognise a Palestinian state living side by side with it. From 1982, what one very good Israeli or local scientist, Avner Yaniv – by 1982, Israel faced a very big problem Avner Yaniv called it the Palestinian Peace Offensive. Namely the PLO, was determined with the support of the international community to gain recognition, support and eventually the application of pressure to force Israel to accept the terms of international law

and the UN Charter. Israel, faced with the escalating pressure on it, then provoked the Palestinians or attempted to provoke the Palestinians into a war, what was called the 1982 Lebanon war, sometimes it is called the first Lebanon War. And at that point the Palestinian leadership was headquartered – mostly refugees, not entirely refugees, excuse me – headquartered in Lebanon. Israel launched the war. And in the course of the war, Israel killed roughly 15 to 20,000 Palestinians and Lebanese, overwhelmingly civilians.

It's worth noting for your listeners, Israeli death toll, back in 1982 was actually much higher than any of the recent Israeli assaults on Gaza or any of the recent Israeli conflicts, armed conflicts with its neighbours. After the 1982 war, the Palestinians were defeated. In the course of that war, as I said, about 20,000 Palestinians and Israelis were killed, overwhelmingly civilians and the PLO went into exile in Tunisia. At this point, the Palestinians in the West Bank in Gaza who were under occupation realised that nothing is going to happen externally in order to adapt their aspirations to statehood, independence, self-determination. And so in 1987, the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank went into a civil revolt; overwhelmingly non-violent. It was called, for your listeners, who are not old enough to remember, it came to be called the First Intifada. A civil, non-violent, civil revolt. I happened to be there during the civil revolt. I lived in a Palestinian Christian village outside Bethlehem called Beit Sahour and I lived in a Palestinian refugee camp or right across the street from a Palestinian refugee camp in Hebron, called Fawwar Camp. And that First Intifada, Israel exerted a huge amount of violent force and that too suffered a defeat. And that defeat climaxed in what came to be called the Oslo Accord.

So your listeners, I think at this point I've gotten the key dates and numbers. We all remember when conversation comes up, UN Resolution 181, that's 1947, UN Resolution 242, 1967, and they'll now remember another term that constantly comes up, namely the Oslo Accord. Now, under the terms of the Oslo Accords, it was signed between the Israeli prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, and the head of the PLO, Yasser Arafat, and it was presided over by US President Bill Clinton. Some of your listeners and viewers will recall what's come to be called the great handshake on the White House lawn when President Clinton is flanked by the Israeli and Palestinian leaders. The essence of the Oslo Accord, there was a written accord, but then there is a political reality. The Palestinians, as a result, of that accord were not granted a state or even the right to a state. What they were granted was a five year interim period. That was the climax in 1993, in the course of which some sort of settlement would be worked out. And in return the Palestinians gave Israel that full recognition. So as your listeners by now, I think gather, the Palestinian responsibility under UN Resolution 242 was fulfilled to allow Palestinians to exercise their right of self-determination and statehood in the 20% of Palestine that remained, namely the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Gaza. Well, the Palestinians never got that from Oslo. In fact, they didn't get anything from Oslo. In fact, they got the reverse. Because in the course of those years, from 1993 on, Israel started to annex territories in the West Bank by creating another term which will now enlighten your listeners by creating Jewish settlements in the West Bank. And the settlements came to

occupy more and more territory in the West Bank. And Israel confiscated more and more land in the West Bank until about half of the West Bank was now under Israeli control, effectively annexed to Israel. And so nothing came of that Oslo Accord on the Palestinian side.

And then in September 2000, for reasons which time will not allow me, a new uprising occurred in the occupied Palestinian territories, what came to be called the Second Intifada. And the Second Intifada began just as the First Intifada in 1987. It was overwhelmingly non-violent, but Israel, fearful of a second protracted civil revolt, akin to the First Intifada, they then exerted maximum amount of violent force to repress it; to use the cliché, to nip it in the bud. So just in the first few days of that Second Intifada, just in the first few days, Israel fired approximately 1 million rounds of ammunition to repress that second non-violent civil revolt. And that second non-violent civil revolt then quickly spun out of control, and that became quite violent on both sides. The kill ratio, the first three weeks of the Second Intifada was about 20 Palestinians to each Israeli – 20 to 1. As it happened, I lived there at the time, not a long period, though I was there and on one of my visits I did meet with the then head of Hamas. His name was Dr. Rantisi. Now, I want to be careful, my memory is not perfect on these things, though it's pretty good. I don't know if he was the fall ahead or he was one of the leaders. He was eventually assassinated by the Israelis. I mean, I did meet with him, as with all those leaders, at the time, I don't want to speak about later. A very simple life, very humble guy. He would say his kitchen or his home look like what we would say the United States, a tenement from the 1930s. And when I talked to him about the situation that had already gotten quite violent on both sides, I do remember when I asked him about what was going on, I said, Do you think this is the right strategy, your strategy? And he said to me when the First Intifada began, the ratio of Palestinians to Israelis killed was 20 to one. And then he said, Now it's – I think. I could be wrong. I try to be very... I'm a stickler for facts. I think he said, Now it's down to 6 to 1. And I remember thinking at the time and commenting to Palestinian friends, I thought to myself this wasn't really a political strategy. It was just an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. He was calculating the efficacy of the strategy he chose or Hamas chose just in terms of trying to establish an equality, not of human life, but that equality of death or corpses.

I, of course, can understand that. It's not for no reason that we have that saying an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, is still part of our moral vocabulary, even though many people repudiate it still rings wildly, resonates for a large number of people. And so I didn't think then it was political. It was a kind of moral calculus. In any event, Israel once again exerted massive death and destruction on the Palestinians, destroying huge amounts of land and homes, incarcerating thousands of Palestinians, in fact carrying out a pattern of systematic, massive torture of Palestinian detainees; somewhere on the order of tens of thousands were being systematically and methodically tortured by the Israeli prison guards and professional torturers. And by 2006, 2005, we will say, the Second Intifada had been defeated.

Come 2006, there were elections held in the West Bank and Gaza. Israel had set up in the occupied Palestinian territories after the September 1993, Oslo Accord, they had set up an

Palestinian administrative government in the OPT. It came to be called the PA, the Palestinian Authority. You will recall, earlier I referred to the PLO, the Palestine Liberation Organisation. The PLO pretty much now disappeared from the sea and it was replaced by what came to be called the Palestinian Authority. And elections were held. And surprisingly for everybody Hamas agreed to participate in the elections. And surprisingly to everybody they won. Because the Palestinian Authority administrative unit set up by Israel was very corrupt and self-serving. And so the Palestinians, hoping for a government that represented them and not individuals simply cashing in on their new status of executor of Israeli policy – they came to be called Israel's subcontractors. Hamas won. And that's where the story really begins, which I try to bring up to the present in now.

The United States had urged Palestinians, including Hamas to participate in the election. But the United States and Israel, were not pleased with the outcome. Former President Jimmy Carter was in the occupied territories to monitor the elections, and he pronounced them, and now I'm quoting him: "completely honest and fair elections". When Hamas won, Israel immediately imposed a brutal economic blockade on Gaza. That blockade was then supported by the United States and the European Union. Palestinians were never given the chance, Hamas was never given the chance. The moment the results came in, the screws were turned, in that expectation that the Palestinians, knowing that the screws would not be unturned, until they disposed of Hamas and reinstated the Palestinian Authority under the control of the preferred authorities of the United States or the preferred figures of the United States. In fact, Hillary Clinton at the time, she was the senator from New York, said: "We made a big mistake, by not rigging the election". That's what she said. "We made a big mistake by not rigging the election". So the Palestinians right now are faced with a brutal blockade. Gaza is five miles wide and 25 miles long. Or at least it was that until today, when it seems it's going to be cut in half again. But I will get to that in a moment. What does five miles by 25 miles mean? I'll just give you my personal mental image of what that means. I jog five miles along the Coney Island seashore every morning. So it's the distance a person nearing 70, he jogs in the morning at the beach. What's the length of Gaza? It's less than a marathon. A marathon is 26.2 miles and Gaza's or, you know, five miles, it's about the size of a marathon, Gaza, just a little less. And in that territory, there are 2.1 million people, or 2.2, give or take on the action. That makes Gaza among the most densely populated places on God's earth. It's more populated than Tokyo. I don't want to anticipate too much.

Now, Israel says it's going to take control of the northern half of Gaza. Which means among the most densely populated places on God's earth, will now be twice as densely populated after the current blood letting. And nobody is allowed, nobody for 20 years, nobody with the rarest of exceptions, nobody was allowed in and nobody was allowed out. So for the purposes of what today's conversation means, most of those Palestinians who crashed through the gates of Gaza, it was their first time ever leaving Gaza. And they're in their 20s. They had never seen anything, except via the web. They had never seen anything of the outside world. They had been confined in the space for 20 years. That's not hyperbole. That's not an exaggeration.

About half of Gaza, half the population for the past 20 years has been unemployed. That figure or that percentage rises to 60% when you look at the youth. So now your audience should ponder. Here is a population, where a large part, that's been left for 20 years to just pace back and forth in an area that's among the densest, most densely populated in the world with nothing whatsoever else to look forward to. That's a fact. You get up each morning, there is no work, nowhere to go, you can't even try your luck immigrating. See what happens, come to the United States, come to France. No, can't leave. That's why David Cameron, the former British conservative, Prime Minister, described Gaza as an open air prison. Baruch Kimmerling, a respected Israeli sociologist at the Hebrew University, described Gaza as the world's largest concentration camp. The largest concentration camp ever. Most of the water in Gaza is undrinkable, non potable. A half of Gaza by international humanitarian agencies, it's labelled severely insecure. Now collect all these facts with one other fact. Every listener should remember, as Israel is now proceeding to annihilate, by their own admission, will annihilate all human lives, or breathing lives, in the northern sector of Gaza, that half of Gaza comprises children. One half of Gaza are children. If you can imagine the accumulated rage, the accumulated anger at being trapped and born into the largest concentration camp ever. And then after 20 years, they have that moment where they can exact revenge, on October 7th.

But that's still not the full picture. In fact, as ghastly as that picture is, it doesn't even begin to touch the surface of reality. Because periodically Israel launches these high tech massacres on Gaza. And in the course of which they kill very large numbers of civilians. In operation Cast Lead, from December 26th, 2008 through January 17th, 2009, they killed about 1400 Palestinians, 350 of them children and demolished, levelled, flattened 6000 homes. That was called Operation Cast Lead. I'll skip a large number of other operations because time doesn't allow it. I will only say that try as I may, I can never remember the names of even half of those murderous high tech destructions visited on Gaza. What Amnesty International calls – it's not my title, bear in mind after Operation Cast Lead they issued a mammoth report titled *22 Days of Deaths and Destruction*. In 2014, July, August, 2014, Israel initiated Operation Protective Edge. In the course of Protective Edge, it killed about 550 Palestinian children. It demolished 18,000 homes. The head of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Peter Maurer, is his name, for those of you listeners who wanted to check what I'm saying now, it's the ICRC, International Committee of the Red Cross, Peter Maurer, he went to Gaza after Operation Protective Edge, as the Israelis called it and he said, quote, "In all of my life I have never witnessed destruction on the scale that I've now observed in Gaza". That's quite a statement. Just as Baruch Kimmerling, describing Gaza as the largest concentration camp ever, is quite a statement, but from a very responsible sociologist. Peter Maurer, describing the structure as the most – the magnitude of the destruction. Remember the job of the president of the ICRC is to visit war zones. So he must have visited an awful lot. And he said he had never seen the magnitude of destruction in Gaza.

Which means and here, for the first time, the first time, with everything I just told you, I'm happy to present the documentation, that every word I said, I wrote a book called *Gaza An Inquest into Its Martyrdom*, which nobody has ever faulted for the lack of not just documentation, but voluminous documentation. From reading through thousands and thousands and thousands of pages of human rights reports. I started in 1982, it's 40 years later and I don't say it with pride, indeed, I say it with a little bit of embarrassment, that's all I did in my life; document what happened there. So I'm quite confident that every claim I just made can be documented not by one source, but by luminous sources. With that as a side note, let me get to my one point of speculation. Every one of those youths who crashed through the gates of Gaza, I would bet every dollar I own, every dollar, that everyone, because they knew they weren't going to come back, there was nowhere to hide in Israel, even if they'd manage to escape, were going to be tracked down. They knew that. They knew it was going to be their last day on God's earth. And the night before they left Gaza, I would guess, every one of them kissed their mother goodbye, kissed their father goodbye and inside of them, inside of them, they vowed to revenge, not only the life of misery, agony, anguish and torment, that they experienced from the day of their birth because they were born into that concentration camp, but they also vowed to revenge the death of their brother, their sister, their niece, their nephew, all those persons who perished, whose bodies were incinerated, mangled and destroyed during Israel's operations, as they like to call it, in Gaza.

So and this is where I'll leave off, am I shocked by what happened on October 7th? I cannot say I was. I cannot. I was shocked by the ingenuity displayed by the people of Gaza. Gaza was probably the most surveilled place on earth. Israel has a very sophisticated, not just external security system, but also internal. There are many collaborators with Israel inside Gaza, many. And that the people in Gaza eluded it, it's rather impressive. Israelis are now stunned. How could that have happened? So that part surprised me. However, even as I was surprised, I don't want to claim to be any kind of clairvoyant. Was I surprised by the magnitude of the deaths? Yes, for sure. Was I surprised on reflection at the vengeance that inspired those killings? No, I can't say so. And I will leave you with one last thought and then you take over, I've taken more than probably what might be called a generous amount of time. I want to be clear about this, I hope your program has a wide reach and we have an opportunity to discuss these things. And let me just tell you something personal, which I've not said to anybody. This is a very hard week for me. I'm good at assembling facts, I'm good at putting them in a logical, coherent order. I can't say, I have the greatest moral judgement. It's not bad, but moral judgement is like any other faculty and requires study, reflection, you know, it means knowing the whole of moral philosophy. And I'm not competent in that area. And most of my adult life, I was a kind of a you might call acolyte, disciple of Noam Chomsky. I think it's fair to say he was for 40 years a very close friend of mine. For reasons which I can't get into now, he wasn't available for moral judgement. Not the facts, the facts I feel confident about, but the moral judgement. How does one, if I can use the expression position oneself morally in light of what happened on October 7th? I really didn't know. I was very confused when people asked me, How were you doing? I would say, well, physically I'm



very tired, but morally I'm much more tired. I'm struggling with it. So I went back to American history. I went back to American history. I wanted to see what was just briefly for your listeners, because I don't know whether it's an American audience or an international audience, so in the American context, we had slave revolts. And the slave revolts were quite bloody.

So, for example, the best known slave revolt in the US or the largest was Nat Turner in 1831, the Nat Turner Rebellion. Now, Nat Turner was Black, obviously, he was a religious fanatic. He was a zealot. He was convinced that this rebellion was inspired by God and all of his actions were sanctioned, approved by God. He gave the order to his confederates to kill all white people. Kill all white people in your path. And a lot of white people were killed. Scores of white people were killed. By current terminology, we call them innocents, who were killed. I wanted to know, how did the abolitionists, those who oppose slavery, what kind of narrow judgement did they render on Nat Turner? And so I went back. One of the greatest of the abolitionists, white, was a fellow named Garrison William Lloyd Garrison. He was the editor of a newspaper called The Liberator. And I went to see, what did he write? And I have to say to you, it was very consoling to me. Because he did what I did after Gaza. Number one, he said, I told you so. We warned you and warned you and warned you and warned you. We, meaning the abolitionist. This is going to happen. Number two, he denounced all the hypocrites, the pious, self-righteous hypocrites, who were denouncing what happened in Nat Turner's rebellion. And number three, and I hope your listeners will pay close attention, number three, even though he said what happened during the Turner revolt was horrible, it was very clear, he never once condemned the slave revolt. He did not. He did not. I posted on my Substack, I posted on my Twitter account, the full statement by William Lloyd Garrison. He did not. And the Nat Turner Rebellion, and I described it just a moment ago quite accurately, it now occupies an honoured place in American history. It does. And William Lloyd Garrison is a revered figure. There were three, there were basically William Lloyd Garrison, Charles Sumner, Freddie Stevens and Gerrit Smith; there are a few. Well, he's one of the revered figures of the abolitionist movement to end slavery. So I felt assured, even in the absence of my mentor, Professor Chomsky, I felt confident that I had applied, even though my moral faculty is not finely at all, I applied the right judgement in this situation. I've gotten some very ugly, terrible backlash. Some people who meant a lot to me in life. However, if the judgement is the right, I won't retreat.

**END**

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