

6. Israel-Palestine

Prelims Level: International Policies & Schemes

Mains Level: GS-II Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Context:

- Recently, the U.S. President unveiled the 'West Asia peace plan', which gives the Israelis - an expansive state with Jerusalem as its "undivided capital" and tight security control over a future Palestinian state. With his plan, Mr. Trump is actually pushing to revive the stalled two-state talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

What is the Israel-Palestine Conflict all about?

- **West Bank & Gaza Strip**
 - ✓ The West Bank is located to the west of the Jordan River. It is a landlocked territory, bordered by Jordan to the east and Israel to the south, west and north.
 - ✓ The Gaza Strip, on the other hand, is a small boot-shaped territory along the Mediterranean coast between Egypt and Israel.
- **Creation of Israel and Palestine:**
 - ✓ After World War I, both West Bank and the Gaza Strip became part of British-mandated Palestine.
 - ✓ But by the end of World War II, there was a strong demand from Jews fleeing Nazi Europe for a homeland within Palestine, an Arab-dominated region.
 - ✓ It also had to do with Jerusalem, considered a holy city by the Jews, which was inside the British-mandated Palestine.
 - ✓ Jerusalem has been at the centre of a religious dispute between the Arabs and Jews for centuries.
 - ✓ When the British mandate ended in 1947, the United Nations (UN) proposed an Arab-Jewish partition of Palestine — between Palestine and the new state of Israel.
 - ✓ This partition plan mandated 53 per cent of the land to the Jewish-majority state (Israel) and 47 per cent to the Palestinian-majority state (Palestine).
 - ✓ But the idea of creating a new-Jewish majority state didn't bode well for the Arab countries in the Middle East.
 - ✓ Jewish paramilitary groups, however, formed the state of Israel by force in 1948.



- This prompted a deadly war with its Arab neighbours — Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan in 1948. This was the first Arab-Israeli war.
- Israel won this war and ended up occupying more land than previously envisaged in the 1947 UN partition plan.
- By the end of the war in 1949, Israel had taken up 78 per cent of the historical Palestine.
- Palestinian territory shrank to 22 per cent of what it had earlier been.
- Meanwhile, the West Bank and East Jerusalem came under Jordan's rule while West Jerusalem went to Israel. The Gaza Strip was under Egyptian military rule after the 1949 war.

Six-Day War of 1967:

- In 1967, the Arab countries again refused to recognise Israel as a state, which led to another war — known as the Six-Day War.
- Israel won this war too and occupied even more parts of Palestine.
- The West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem — which houses the holy Old City — came under Israel's control. It also occupied Syrian Golan Heights and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula.
- With the exception of the Sinai Peninsula, all other parts remain occupied by Israel till date. Since 1967, a large part of the Palestinian population had been living under Israeli-occupied territories in both West Bank and the Gaza Strip.
- Also, post-1967, Israel started to build settlements for its Jewish community in the newly-occupied Palestinian territories, including in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Where Things Stand Now?

- Both the West Bank and Gaza Strip are home to a large number of Palestinian populations.
- Following the Oslo Accords between the Israeli government and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) during the 1990s, part of the West Bank came under the control of the Palestinian Authority.
- With varying levels of autonomy, the Palestinian Authority controls close to 40 per cent of West Bank today, while the rest is controlled by Israel.
- It is in the West Bank that 160-odd Israeli settlements and outposts now exist.
- The Gaza Strip, densely populated with Palestinians, had been under Israeli occupation since 1967, until Israel decided to “disengage” from the territory in 2005.
- A couple of years later in 2007, Hamas, an anti-Israel military group, took over Gaza Strip. The militia group is often involved in violent clashes with the Israeli Defence Forces.
- While Palestine has staked claim to both territories – West Bank and Gaza Strip – Israel’s objective has been to keep expanding Jewish settlements in these regions.
- There are approximately 2 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and 3 million in the West Bank, according to the Palestinian Authority’s Population Registry.

What’s the New Plan?

- The Trump plan seeks to address most of the contentious issues in the conflict.
- It takes note of issues such as the border of Israel, status of Palestinian refugees, Jewish settlements on the West Bank, land swap between Israel and Palestine, Israel’s security concerns and the status of the city of Jerusalem.
- However, the solutions Mr. Trump has proposed to almost all of these issues favour the Israeli positions. For example, Israel would be allowed to annex the Jewish settlements on the West Bank as well as the Jordan Valley.
- The Palestinian refugees, who were forced out from their homes during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war that followed the declaration of the state of Israel in the historic Palestine, would not be allowed to return. They could move to the future Palestinian state, be integrated into the host countries or settled in other regional countries.

India’s Stand: From the Past:

- India was one of the few countries to oppose the UN’s partition plan in November 1947, echoing its own experience during independence a Few Months Earlier.

- In the decades that followed, the Indian political leadership actively supported the Palestinian cause and withheld full diplomatic relations with Israel.
- India recognised Israel in 1950 but it is also the first non-Arab country to recognise Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) as the sole representative of the Palestinian. India is also one of the first countries to recognise the statehood of Palestine in 1988.
- In 2014, India favoured UNHRC's resolution to probe Israel's human rights violations in Gaza. Despite supporting the probe, India abstained from voting against Israel in UNHRC IN 2015.
- As a part of Link West Policy, India has de-hyphenated its relationship with Israel and Palestine in 2018 to treat both the countries mutually independent and exclusive.
- In June 2019, India voted in favour of a decision introduced by Israel in the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) that objected to granting consultative status to a Palestinian non-governmental organization
- So far India has tried to maintain the image of its historical moral supporter for Palestinian self-determination, and at the same time to engage in the military, economic, and other strategic relations with Israel.
 - ✓ The aim of this plan was to bring peace to one of the most troubled parts in the world. But it seems to have left the two sides as divided as they have been for more than 100 years.

