

### **Name a contemporary conflict where religious beliefs play a role and explain the nature of the relationship between religion and the conflict**

Tribes and religious groups have a history of intolerance and prejudice to other groups. This intolerance often leads to conflicts that are justified in the name of religion and God. Often the religious group believes God has willed for them to carry out such conflicts. I will be discussing the ongoing Palestinian/Israeli conflict.

In the past, Palestine had been conquered by the Romans, Babylonians and Assyrians. During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century it was controlled by the Ottoman Empire. At the time it was 87% Muslim, 10% Christian and 3% Jewish. They all coexisted peacefully within the region. However as the idea of Zionism and Nationalism grew, tensions began to grow. The British Balfour Declaration during WWI also guaranteed the Israelis a homeland. This promise was fulfilled when the Ottoman Empire was defeated. The League of Nations gave the British a Mandate to govern Palestine. Just before the mandate's termination the British proposed a partitioning of the land was proposed – an Arab state and a Jewish state. The Arab leaders rejected the partitioning as 87% of the land was Muslim and only 3% were Jewish, therefore the proportion of land offered to such a small population was unfair. A day before the mandate expired, Israel decided to declare itself an independent state.

This declaration infuriated the Arab leaders and they sought to regain the territory and give it back to its rightful owners. They attacked the newly established so-called Jewish homeland starting the 1978 Arab-Israeli war / The Catastrophe. Israel defeated the Arabs. In 1949 Armistice Agreements established the borders between the two states. Israel now controlled 78% of historic Palestine.

In 1967 tensions increased yet again between the Arabs and Israelis. These tensions led to the Six Day War from June 5-10 1967. Egypt, Jordan and Syria fought Israel. They were defeated. Israel began occupying the Gaza Strip, West Bank, Sinai Peninsula and Golan Heights.

Another Arab-Israeli war in 1973 broke out (Yom Kippur). UN peacekeepers were deployed and a peace treaty was reached in 1979. However only the Sinai Peninsula was returned. The ongoing occupation of Gaza, West Bank and Golan Heights is the reason many Arab leaders refuse to recognise the Israeli state today.

Many wars including two Intifadas have happened since. Many peace treaties have also failed such as the Oslo Accords. Today Palestine has non-member observer state status in the UN represented by the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, however it isn't recognised by Israel or the US.

The ongoing war is a conflict over land and could be resolved through the application of international law. Recently, since 2014 Israeli-Gaza Conflict that left 2000 Palestinians dead, many people have called for Israel to be trialled in the International Court for War Crimes. This year, Palestine have formally joined the International Court making this form of resolution more possible than ever. Palestine also plans to take legal action against the illegal Israeli settlements.

Even though land is the main source of the conflict, religion fuels the conflict. Religion fuels the conflict by using faith-based values to sanctify aggression. The element of religious belief makes someone not want to deter from religious belief. Islamic groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad use the Qur'an to justify the perpetuating conflict, by stating that Jihad war is justified when it is self-defence.

The Jewish Israeli Defence Force believe that the Holy Land was given a gift from God to His chosen people, The Jews. The Holy Land is also important to Muslims, it is the direction Muhammad and his followers prayed before praying towards Mecca and Muhammad ascended to heaven from there.

Some commentators observe how religion is a barrier to resolving the conflict. Extremist activities such as that of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad that are motivated by religious ideology or extremist Zionists that are motivated by political ideology, frustrate political negotiations and sway public to oppose any peace negotiations.

For many, it is almost impossible to separate the idea of Islam and Palestine, Jew and Israel. There are things that make it even harder to separate the two. For example, any Jew in the world can claim an Israeli passport. There is a large Israeli community in America and US gives more than \$3billion a year in aid to Israel. Also the majority of countries that support Palestine are Muslim further implicate this idea.

The wars fought were largely Muslim countries versus a Jewish Israel also. These factors inextricably link religion and state. The two states that are fighting each other. This support of countries beyond the territory in dispute make it seem like not only are two states at war, but also two religions.

Overall, Islam and Judaism play a role in the on-going conflict as it allows both sides to justify aggression against the other.