This Conflict Israel-ly Bad News for Gaza

Israel is a first-world country located in the Middle East that borders Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria (NationsOnline, n.d.). It has 3 official languages: English, Hebrew, and Arabic.

Israel’s population was 8.172 million in 2017 and experiences a growth rate of approximately 1.92% each year (Trading Economics, n.d.). It is linked to 2 disputed territories: West Bank and Gaza. All of these areas together take up 8,522 mi² of space, which is about the size of New Jersey. (NationsOnline, n.d.)

Although Israel is located in a desert, receives only about 2-6 inches of rainfall each year, is below the UN definition for water quality, and only 20% of its land is arable, the country is able to use agrotechnology in order to produce 95% of its own food requirements (FactsAboutIsrael, n.d.). 24.7% of Israel, or 5339 acres, are used for agriculture (FactsAboutIsrael, n.d.). Over 80% of Israel’s agriculture is based on kibbutzim and moshavim, which are communities that work together to maintain a piece of land and then trade as a unit with the outside world (FactsAboutIsrael, n.d.). Israel mainly exports almonds, dates, avocados, pomegranates, and olive oil, and is a world-leader in agricultural technologies (FactsAboutIsrael, n.d.). Some of these technologies include microirrigation,
algoculture, water conservation techniques, brackish-water aquaculture fed by underground aquifers, and the development of new strains of potatoes that can grow in a desert climate and be irrigated with saltwater (FactsAboutIsrael, n.d.). Israel also reuses 80% of its water and conserves through methods such as drip irrigation, which has made it a water surplus nation (FactsAboutIsrael, n.d.).

“Now, Rachel,” you’re probably thinking as you read this paper, “if everything is so great in Israel, why did you choose this as a topic? What’s the point of writing about a country that’s already solved its main food-related issues?” To this I respond, “I chose Israel not only because I am Jewish, but also because of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. This dispute has created such deep rifts so that pro-Palestinian countries and even Gaza - which is currently occupied by the Israeli army - are suffering from the same issues Israel has already solved.”

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict dates back to the end of WWI, when the Ottoman Empire fell and the British had control of Palestine (Green, 2015). England had previously promised modern-day Israel to both the Zionists (a group that wanted a Jewish country that would offer a haven from international anti-semitism in the biblical Jewish homeland) and the Palestinians (the mainly Muslim Arabs who already lived on that land and considered it their home) (Vox, 2016). England, using the same “divide and rule” tactics that still
problems in India, set in a rift between the Zionists and Palestinians (Green, 2015). As Jews began moving to Israel by the thousands, the Palestinians became angry that they were being forced out of their homes (Green, 2015). After some violence, the British placed limits on Jewish immigration and promised the Palestinians a country in ten years; this angered both sides (Green, 2015). But then the Holocaust happened, and mass amounts of Jewish refugees fled their home countries, bringing an influx of refugees to Palestine (Vox, 2016). After WWII ended, the British handed their colony to the UN, which voted to split the territory into two roughly equal masses that jigsawed together, with Jerusalem as an international zone (Green, 2015). After this decision, the Arab-Israeli War broke out, in which Israel seized 33% more land than the UN decreed (Green, 2015). The Arab-Israeli war also displaced over 700,000 Palestinians, whose descendants number about 7 million today, and established the borders of the West Bank and Gaza that are still held today (Vox, 2016). The Six Day War led to Israel briefly occupying a larger territory; Israel retained its occupation of Palestinian territories (Vox, 2016). The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) governed the Palestinian areas (and still runs the West Bank) as well as led the resistance against Israel (Vox, 2016). Israeli citizens spread into and colonized the West Bank illegally, which further
infuriated the Palestinians (Green, 2015). Then there was the First Intifada, a
peaceful-turned-violent protest of Israel, which ended with Israelis brutally ending the
conflict and led to the formation of the Palestinian Authority, the Oslo Accords, and
HAMAS, a democratically elected “terrorist” organization that currently runs Gaza and wants
Israel to not exist, whatever the cost (Vox, 2016). Palestinians, losing hope that they will have
their own state, rose up in the Second Intifada, which was much more violent than the first
(Vox, 2016). After the Palestinians were suppressed, Israel felt that it would probably not be
at peace nor recognized for a long time, and built walls around Palestinian areas, but so that
the Israeli settlements in their area were on the Israeli side (Green, 2015). Ever since then,
HAMAS and Israel have been basically at war because neither government will recognize the
other’s right to exist (Green, 2015).

Gaza is a strip of land adjacent to the Mediterranean Sea and Egypt, and is about 360 km²,
slightly more than twice the size of Washington, DC (World Factbook, 2020). Since Gaza
was physically separated from Israel in 2005, it has been suffering from poverty and lack of
resources. While most of Israel has access to clean water due to the country’s extensive
desalination and conservation, only 10% of households in Gaza have access to clean water (Medeazza, 2019). Most of the homes in Gaza have a toilet; however, sewage treatment plants can’t handle the surplus of raw sewage because only 4-5 hours of electricity are supplied daily in Gaza (Medeazza, 2019). In Gaza, military checkpoints may not allow Palestinians into Israel, limiting job availability and access to healthcare (WHO, 2011/Gisha, 2019). Gaza’s unemployment rate reached 52 percent in 2018; 74.5 percent of women in Gaza are unemployed (Gisha, 2019). Of the jobs available, about 34% pay irregularly or have cut checks (Gisha, 2019).

I know, I know. This is a paper about food security. So here’s a kicker: In 2018, about 1.3 million people, or over 68 per cent of households in Gaza, were severely or moderately food insecure (OCHA, 2018). This is despite the fact that 69 percent of Gaza households already receive food assistance (OCHA, 2018). The main cause of this food insecurity is poverty (OCHA, 2018). Another cause is the strict barriers; many farmers are unable to access their crops because it is on the other side of the wall (PulitzerCenter, 2019).

Now, the obvious solution would be to solve the Israeli Palestinian Conflict so that Gaza
could reopen its borders with Israel and people could find jobs, healthcare, food, and all that jazz outside of Gaza. The most popular proposed overall solutions are the UN-approved two-state solution, which would split the territory into two equivalent pieces of land and two different countries, and the one-state solution, which would have Jews and Palestinians living in the area together peacefully. (Beauchamp, 2018). However, with Israelis and Palestinians unable or unwilling to negotiate, it makes more sense to lessen the conflict and lift Gaza out of poverty rather than attempt to solve it outright.

One of the most visible reminders and perpetuators of the Israeli Palestinian Conflict is the militarized barrier separating Gaza from Israel. Walls historically and currently have made conflicts worse (Dear, 2016). The Berlin Wall, for example, was built to separate the socialist East Germany and the capitalist West Germany at the start of the Cold War (History.com, 2009). This wall trapped the suffering citizens that wish to leave or find opportunity elsewhere (History.com, 2009). This can be seen in Israel right now; the Gazans are being physically divided in the midst of a conflict, and it is trapping the Palestinians in a bad situation. A less strict border that allowed Gazans to get jobs in Israel would bring down unemployment and poverty in Gaza. Granted, there is the withstanding issue of HAMAS, which is the reason the barrier was originally built. I think that the Israelis that
currently

patrol borders could be better put to work in a TSA-style checkpoint between Gaza and Israel. There could be metal detectors and bag checks. Since it is very hard to check a car for bombs and other dangers, and since the roads in Gaza are still in poor shape, commuting Gazans could keep their cars outside of the border and within the walls of Gaza there could be a “taxi” service. The taxis could transport people to the border and drive people back to their homes. These taxis could have government-regulated rates to make sure the commuters are not exploited. This would not only keep border security relatively intact but also employ more Gazans and allow the money from jobs in Israel to percolate through Gazan communities.

Israel should also focus more on counteracting the underlying causes of terrorism and HAMAS’s rise to power. Violence against innocent citizens only further divides Israelis and Palestinians, and gives HAMAS more support as people turn further against Israel. HAMAS won the 2006 election in Gaza because the Gazans were weakened by conflict and saw a party that worked independently of the government to help the needy and fight back against Israel (Recknagel and O’Rourke, 2006). HAMAS appeals to Gazans by creating opportunities and constructing hospitals, for example (Kean, 2019). If Israel remedies the issues and works
against issues which create appeal for HAMAS, it will no longer have that appeal. Israel
should dedicate its resources to helping the poor citizens, supporting businesses, doing youth
outreach. By working to help needy Gazans and replace the hate against Israel with
tolerance,

Israel will be able to shake HAMAS’s foundation. Israel could also show itself more
positively by creating jobs for Gazans. The citizens could be employed by Israeli
companies
in expanding agrotechnology in Gaza, which would also help to make more food
available,

further directly counteracting food insecurity. Organizations such as the UN and Heifer
International could also help with both aid and creating more income opportunities in
Gaza.

Another step forward would be to counteract this internalized bias towards Israelis
by

Palestinians and vice versa. Whitney Houston once said, “I believe the children are
the

future”. In 1865 when the Civil War ended, Jim Crow laws which
restricted

African-Americans were implemented (History.com, 2019). These laws restricted where
African-Americans could live or work, kept them from voting, and segregated
everything

from water fountains to prostitutes (History.com, 2019). One of the main ways that

segregation and prejudice were combatted was the desegregation of schools
(History.com,
2019). Having people of different origins and school teaches acceptance and counteracts racism (“The Importance…”, 2019). Gazans and Israelis currently face a similar situation to African-Americans and whites in the Jim Crow era. The Israelis have restricted the rights of Palestinians similarly to how whites once made policies against African-Americans. By sending children from Gaza and Israel to the same schools, we can teach them that there is no reason to hate the other. These more open-minded youth will grow up and be able to communicate and negotiate better than their parents, and they could bring the peace we wish for now.

I know that it seems simplistic to try to solve the mighty Israeli-Palestinian Conflict with TSA checkpoints and sending children to different schools. But the advanced solutions aren’t working. So I say we should start simplistic, and work our way up. The priority should be on helping people on a small scale rather than solving the conflict outright. If the UN worked on helping food security in Gaza rather than negotiating its existence, things maybe wouldn't be so bad. And maybe, just maybe, UN officials could come up with a better solution than a high school student.

References


