



Israeli police detain Palestinians taking part in a protest against the separation wall after Friday prayers in Bil'in west of Ramallah on the West Bank on 19 February.

'WE WANT A DIVORCE'

A wave of deadly knife attacks by Palestinians against Israelis is currently making headlines around the world. As the possibility of a two-state solution seems increasingly unlikely, can campaigns like Israel Apartheid Week, which starts on 1 March in South Africa, and the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement contribute to positive change?

By Jana Marais

ISRAEL, THE WEST BANK AND GAZA



THE WEST BANK



Border
 - - - International border
 - - - Green Line
 - - - Israeli unilaterally declared municipal area of Jerusalem

(In 1967, Israel occupied the West Bank and unilaterally annexed to its territory 70.5km² of the occupied area.)

Barrier
 - - - Construction/Under construction
 - - - Planned

Oslo Agreement
 ■ Area (A), (B)
 ■ Area C & Nature reserves

Area A: Full Palestinian civil and security control
 Area B: Full Palestinian civil control and joint Israeli-Palestinian security control
 Area C: Full Israeli control over security, planning and construction. This constitutes 60% of the total land area of the West Bank.

SOURCE: United Nations

Economic indicators

Population

Israel: 8.2m
 West Bank & Gaza: 4.3m
 South Africa: 54m

Population growth

Israel: 1.9%
 West Bank & Gaza: 3%
 SA: 1.6%

GDP

Israel: \$305.7bn
 West Bank & Gaza: \$12.7bn
 SA: \$350.1bn

GDP growth in 2015

Israel: 2.5%
 West Bank & Gaza: 2.9%
 SA: 1.3%

Unemployment rate

Israel: 5.1% (January 2016)
 West Bank & Gaza: 27% (2014; Gaza's rate alone was 43%)
 SA: 25.5% (October 2015)

Gross national income (GNI) per capita

Israel: \$35 520
 West Bank & Gaza: \$3 060
 SA: \$6 800

Life expectancy at birth

Israel: 82 years (2013)
 West Bank & Gaza: 73 years (2013)
 SA: 57 years (2013)

Surface area (km²)

Israel: 22 070
 West Bank & Gaza: 6 020
 SA: 1.2m

Population density (people per km² of land area)

Israel: 379.6
 West Bank & Gaza: 713.4
 SA: 44.5

Foreign direct investment, net inflows

Israel: \$6.7bn
 West Bank & Gaza: \$126.5m
 SA: \$5.7bn

Personal remittances, received

Israel: \$858.9m
 West Bank & Gaza: \$2.18bn
 SA: \$913.4m

All data is for 2014 unless otherwise indicated.

SOURCES: World Bank; Trading Economics

There's a fundamental difference between Apartheid South Africa and the Israel/Palestine "situation" of today: in SA, negotiators were seeking a marriage; in the Middle East, they want a divorce, says Khaled Abu Toameh, an Arab-Israeli journalist and lecturer who started his career as a reporter for the Palestine Liberation Organisation's (PLO) newspaper in the days when Yasser Arafat was its firebrand leader.

Yet agreeing to the terms of a divorce seems increasingly unlikely as Israel continues to build settlements in the West Bank, which belongs to Palestine in terms of international agreements, along with the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. In fact, about 60% of the land area of the West Bank is inaccessible to Palestinians, according to the World Bank. More than half a million Israeli settlers live in 237 settlements in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, according to Human Rights Watch.

Knife attacks carried out by young Palestinians, which have led to at least 27 Israeli and 100 Palestinian deaths since September 2015, have been adding fuel to Israel's right-wing ruling coalition, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the helm. **The attacks are seen to be in retaliation for Israeli's expansion of its illegal settlements in the West Bank**, which many Palestinians see as an indication that there is no commitment to a two-state solution, and that Israel is actually annexing, rather than occupying, their land.

Netanyahu told the Israeli parliament in February that he supports a two-state solution, but said the situation is not yet right for peace talks and that Israel could never agree to a security separation.

Security fears

While Israel's political landscape is much more diverse than the headlines may suggest – the main opposition party has been making proposals for a separation, which it believes is in Israel's best interest – security is a major rallying point for Israelis, who have seen more than their fair share of wars, most recently the 2014 conflict with Hamas in Gaza, which left more than 2 200 Gazans, and 70 Israelis, including 64 soldiers, dead.

Israel's neighbours don't inspire confidence either: with a Syrian civil war waging on its north-east border, fears about the rise of the Islamic State in the Sinai on the west, a long history of conflict in

Lebanon, and chaos in Libya and Iraq, Israelis may be more comfortable with its country of walls, fences, checkpoints, restricted movement and compulsory military service for men (three years) and women (two years) than citizens in other democracies of the world.

Many Israelis are also uncomfortable with the recent lifting of sanctions against Iran, a sworn enemy that funds Hamas and Hezbollah.

Husam Zomlot, ambassador at large for the Palestinian Authority (PA), which was established as an interim self-government body to govern the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank after the 1993 Oslo agreement, condemned Hamas's action in the Gaza Strip in 2014, describing the shooting of missiles at Israel as "stupid and suicidal", and "a call for mayhem".

"We have committed so many mistakes. We have depleted our own political capital. But Israel has continued to surround Gaza, preventing Gazans from going anywhere for nine years now. So if you were sitting on that side of the fence, you'd be thinking: 'How do I shake the system?'"

Zomlot says while he understands the Israeli narrative from a security point of view, security will remain a problem as long as Israel is "freakishly controlling another nation, so long as you are freakishly stealing their resources, denying their very basic rights. [...] Once they end the occupation and go back to their homes, then they have a right to complain.

They have no right to complain as long as they are in full control of the West Bank."

The case against BDS

Critics of campaigns like Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) often describe these as anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist. Opponents to sanctions argue that Israel is unfairly targeted, while other controversial occupations, for example China in Tibet and Morocco in Western Sahara, are not getting the same

level of international attention.

The BDS campaign (see box below), the most prominent movement calling for a boycott of Israeli goods, has received several setbacks in recent weeks, with the British government saying earlier this month that local authorities and public sector organisations in Britain that ban Israeli suppliers could face severe penalties.

"If you were sitting on that side of the fence, you'd be thinking: 'How do I shake the system?'"

On 22 February, the Canadian parliament overwhelmingly voted in favour of a motion to "condemn any and all attempts by Canadian organisations, groups or individuals to promote the BDS movement, both here at home and abroad". The anti-BDS motion states that the BDS movement "promotes the demonisation and delegitimisation of the state of Israel".

Another argument is that movements like BDS actually hurt Palestinians, as tens of thousands (see sidebar) rely on the settlement business in the West Bank to work. A high-profile example is SodaStream, which moved its factory from the West Bank to Be'er Sheva in Israel proper, leading to more than 500

Palestinians losing their jobs. SodaStream has since struggled to extend work permits for its 74 remaining Palestinian workers who commute to the new factory daily.

Bassem Eid, a Palestinian human rights activist who has faced fierce criticism from BDS supporters, says one of the reasons why BDS hasn't succeeded is the high discrepancy in average salaries for Palestinian workers in Israel (about \$2 000 a month) and in Palestine (around \$400 a month).

"The priority of the Palestinian people is jobs, education, healthcare. Nobody is even talking about our own state; we have lost trust in our own leadership," Eid said. Given the lack of unity among Palestinians and a divided leadership (Fatah is the main member of the PA, and has its own history of conflict with Hamas, which rules Gaza), the focus should be on building economic prosperity, which would contribute to stability, Eid argues.

Abu Toameh says BDS is more about being anti-Israel than being pro-Palestine. "Negative attacks don't help at all. It pushes Israelis' backs against the wall, and it strengthens the right wing. Why aren't they rather pushing for joint industrial zones, or more Israel/Palestine co-operation?"

The case for sanctions

Focusing on the economy without fixing the politics will do little to solve the conflict, says the PA's Zomlot.

"How do you build an economy if you have no control over your land, over your borders, over your resources? How do you build an economy without some control over your interest rate and your currency?" [...] I find it extremely difficult to think about

serious economic transformation without resolving the political issues; without agreeing that this is yours, this is mine. And then we can start looking at joint activities [with Israel]," says Zomlot.

He has reason to complain: the World Bank estimated in 2013 that Israeli restrictions on Palestinians cost the Palestinian economy \$3.4bn annually – equal to roughly one-third of Palestine's GDP. Gaza, which has one of the highest unemployment rates in the world and is often described as the world's largest open-air prison, is completely cut off from the West Bank.

Customs revenue collected by Israel on behalf of the PA, which is supposed to be paid over monthly, accounts for about 70% of the PA's revenue. Yet last year, Israel withheld payment for at least nine months, according to a September 2015 report by the World Bank.

"Israel collects our money at the borders, and uses it as a political tool," Zomlot says.

He believes campaigns like BDS are a legitimate tool and "vital" to increasing pressure on Israel to reach a two-state solution. "We're not boycotting Israel; we are boycotting Israel's greed, we're boycotting Israel's expansion."

Zomlot says sanctions had a positive impact in Iran. **"Iranians were given a choice by the world: you can choose either nuclear or prosperity, but you can't have both. Of course people will choose prosperity. Israel hasn't been given that choice yet."**

Palestine will continue with its fight to seek recognition as an independent state, Zomlot says. "Our strategy is to make Israeli society uncomfortable, to create a sense of crisis, to create a sense of urgency that doesn't exist, and to do it bloodlessly and non-violently."

Whether it will bring the parties closer to the negotiation table and a possible solution, is a different matter. Abu Toameh believes any peace processes will fail. On the one hand, "there is a lack of education for peace with Israel, and there's an absence of courageous Palestinian leaders with the mandate to make concessions in negotiations with Israel". On the other hand, Israel can't say they support a two-state solution and continue to build in the settlements, he says.

"This conflict isn't about money, it's about land. [...] If there was space, we would've solved this a long time ago." ■

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The writer travelled to Israel and Ramallah as a guest of the South African Zionist Federation.

Products from the West Bank

In many parts of the world, including SA, products imported from the West Bank, East Jerusalem or Gaza must be labelled as such, and not as Israeli products.

More than half a million Israeli settlers currently live in 237 settlements in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, according to a new report by Human Rights Watch (HRW). These settlements are unlawful under international law and "are part and parcel of Israeli policies that dispossess, discriminate against, and abuse the human rights of Palestinians", HRW said.

In SA, regulations around the labelling of products from the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, as well as products containing materials imported from these areas, were introduced in 2013 following lobbying by BDS. Labels have to show the product is imported from, or contains material from these areas – for example: the West Bank, Israeli goods.

The EU, Israel's largest trading partner, introduced new labelling guidelines for products produced in illegal Israeli settlements in November 2015, which now have to say, for example "product of West Bank (Israeli settlement)". Goods from Palestinian-owned businesses can say "product of Palestine".

Since 2005, EU regulations mandate that goods produced in the settlements may not benefit from the EU's free trade agreement with Israel, and import duties are therefore applicable.

US customs regulations have required since 1997 that goods originating in the West Bank and Gaza should be labelled as such, although these regulations have not been enforced, according to HRW. The US Customs and Border Protection Service reissued a statement on 23 January on the country's labelling policy, saying it received a number of complaints that products from the West Bank are mislabelled.

How big is the settlement business?

There are about 1 000 companies operating in 16 to 20 settlement industrial zones; 9 300 hectares of settlement agricultural land; and 11 licensed settlement quarries, according to a new Human Rights Watch (HRW) report. Companies servicing and financing settlements should also be seen as settlement business, it said.

Settlement businesses produce the following:

- Israeli-administered quarries and crushers in the West Bank produce 10m to 12m tons of stone annually, of which 94% is transferred to Israel. Taxes and royalties are paid to the Israeli government and settlement municipalities;
- Exports of industrial goods manufactured in Israeli settlements, including East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, totalled

more than \$600m in 2013, according to the Israeli finance ministry – this is about 0.5% of total Israeli Industrial exports; and ■ Produce from Israeli settlements account for 1.5% of Israel's global agricultural exports.

The value of exports is substantially higher when taking into account goods partially produced in or including inputs from settlements, HRW said. An estimated 26 300 Palestinians worked in Israeli settlements in the fourth quarter of 2015, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. The number of people from the West Bank employed in Israel and Israeli settlements in the fourth quarter was 115 200, of which 33 400 worked without any permit, it said.

SOURCE: Occupation, Inc.: How settlement businesses contribute to Israel's violations of Palestinian rights, Human Rights Watch, January 2016; Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics

What is the BDS movement?

The global movement for a campaign of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel until it complies with international law was initiated by Palestinian civil society in 2005. BDS urges various forms of boycott (notably consumer, academic and cultural boycotts) against Israel until it:

- Ends its occupation and colonisation of all Arab lands occupied during the Six-Day War in June 1967 and dismantling the Wall, which currently exceeds 700km in length (see map);
- Recognises the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and
- Respects, protects and promotes the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties.

The United Nations (UN) sees Palestinian refugees as those people displaced by the 1948 Arab-Israeli war of independence, while Palestinians also want a right of return for those displaced by the Six-Day War in 1967.

The number of refugees eligible for UN services total about 5m. Nearly one-third of the registered Palestine refugees, more than 1.5m people, live in 58 recognised Palestine refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, according to the UN.

In South Africa, the BDS campaign has notably lobbied for the labelling of products from the occupied territories, and (unsuccessfully) urged consumers to boycott Woolworths for stocking Israeli products. Internationally, campaigns include calls to boycott British security firm G4S, which provides products and services to some Israeli prisons and checkpoints, Dead Sea minerals cosmetics company Ahava and SodaStream drinks machines. SodaStream moved its West Bank factory to Be'er Sheva, the largest city in the Negev desert in Israel's south, last year.

SOURCES: www.bdsmovement.net; United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA)