

Ian is currently Senior Visiting Research Fellow, School of History at University of NSW. Introduced by John Warden, Ian’s fields of special interest pertinent to today’s address are United States relations with Israel and the Middle East, and the Arab – Israeli conflict. Since 1960 he has had considerable teaching experience both here and in the US, and has addressed numerous conferences and seminars.

In dealing with this subject, Ian admits that being neither Arab nor Jew poses certain limitations, however he endeavours to provide a broad humanitarian view from a detached perspective. He acknowledges that religion provides certain benefits, but also creates problems in dealing with those who do not share your view. He does not consider that armed force is the way to solve such problems.

It needs to be understood that there is no single Arab or Israeli view in the situation. There are various positions and counter positions within each side. Some lean to force to resolve, others to non-violent solutions.

The 2 broad narratives are –

- Israelis – view Israel as a Foundation democratic nation
- Arabs – view the current situation as a tragedy, with the creation of Israel a catastrophe inflicting displacement, and with them as victims.

They are both locked into their own views – Zionists see Israel as a safe haven, that they will never again allow persecution and discrimination. Arabs see themselves as a people rudely displaced by colonial powers. They are both unwilling to give up the past. Each blame the other for the current situation and that the other is unwilling to resolve. Each claim they are willing to solve but have no partner with which to negotiate.

The Arabs consider Israel’s Netanyahu will sabotage any move to resolve, so it seems an intractable situation with both sides continuing to look back and blame the other. However there are some hopeful signs with some Zionist historians saying we too have contributed, and some Arabs saying our own violence has contributed. Both agree that the children of the other are as valuable as their own children.

Ian then screened a number of maps showing the respective areas of each side at different stages following the wars since 1947 (including 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973). These maps also highlighted the relatively small size of the total area of Israel and the disputed lands involved.

Ian commented how division of countries had not generally been successful, citing examples including India/Pakistan Germany and Ireland. In this case the 1947 UN Partition Resolution included 3 main elements –

- That there be 2 countries – Jewish State and an Arab State
- That Jerusalem be under International control
- That there be economic co-operation between the 2 countries

The Jews accepted it but the Arabs didn’t.

Both sides want Jerusalem as their capital. It is central to the ethnicity and religion of both and is non-negotiable.

Huge development has occurred of recent years. But an example of the area’s problems is that a development application lodged by a Jew will get instant approval but not so with one lodged by an Arab.

Hebron houses Abraham’s tomb in the Jewish part of town. Both Jews and Arabs lived there peacefully until subdivision, now the dividing line is a mass of concrete security barriers, barbed wire, electronic fencing and ditches.

Ian advises us not to pay too much attention to media reports of a “turning point”. There are local conflicts within the overall international conflict. With Israel a UN creation, both call on UN to solve issues when it suits them, but neither will allow anything to deter them from their aims. A stand off will continue until both resolve it’s resulting in misery to both sides. There are behind the scenes actions to expand co-operation. Currently there is co-operation on services such as electricity supply, roads, and sewerage systems. Of the 5 wars, none lasted more than a few weeks and none was large by world standards time wise, although heavy military equipment was involved with a large effect on the locals

Question time included interesting comments on ability of both sides to control the more extreme zealots, also that Israel will not allow international opinion to affect it's attitude. Sadly it seems there is no solution in sight in the foreseeable future, although Ian considers a major conflict to be unlikely.

Rawdon Dalrymple very fittingly conveyed the appreciation of us all for Ian's thoroughly researched presentation of this ongoing complex situation.