

Understand Israel & the Palestinian Territories

ISRAEL & THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES TODAY.....344

Issues of the day that are making local headlines.

HISTORY346

A brief look at empires, kings and conflicts from ancient times to the modern era.

PEOPLE OF ISRAEL & THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES362

An overview of the country's diverse religious and ethnic groups.

HUMMUS & OLIVES: REGIONAL FOOD368

Israelis and Palestinians disagree about a lot of things, but not about food.

DAILY LIFE..... 373

Beyond politics, a look at the day-to-day lives of Israeli and Palestinian families.

GOVERNMENT & POLITICS 377

Politics has a huge impact on everyone's everyday lives.

RELIGION382

A rundown of the Holy Land's main religious traditions.

ARTS.....386

Despite – and because of – a complicated past and a disorienting present, Israeli and Palestinian artists are very creative.

ENVIRONMENT.....392

As populations and the economy grow, how are the animals and plants – and their habitats – faring?

Israel & the Palestinian Territories Today

There's no denying that Israel and the Palestinian Territories are currently in a very difficult time, as the Hamas–Israel war of 2014 left tensions running high. Attacks, riots and violent outbreaks across the region continue and the possibility of reconciliation seems low. However, many Israelis and Palestinians still hope for a more stable future and get on with their lives as peaceably as they can.

Best Non-Fiction

My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel (Ari Shavit, 2013) A penetrating personal look at Israel's existential fears.

The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood (Rashid Khalidi, 2007) Delves into Palestinian attempts to achieve independence and their failure.

Best Films

Sallah Shabbati (Ephraim Kishon, 1964) Satire about immigrant life in a 1950s transit camp.

Yossi & Jagger (Eytan Fox, 2002) Secret love between two IDF officers.
Omar (Hany Abu-Assad, 2013) Oscar-nominated thriller and love story set in the West Bank.

Best Documentaries

The Flat (2011) A filmmaker looks at his German-Jewish roots.

Strangers No More (2010) A South Tel Aviv elementary school takes in refugee children.

Precious Life (2010) A Gaza baby fights for medical treatment in Israel.

Top Football Teams

Maccabi Haifa Twelve-time Israeli champions.

Hapoel Ironi Kiryat Shmona Surprise Premier League powerhouse.

Palestine National Football Team Represents the Palestinian Territories internationally.

Prospects for Peace

The Hamas–Israel war ended with few real gains for either side. Although both parties claimed victory, the open-ended, Egyptian-sponsored ceasefire did little to solve the underlying causes of the conflict, including the partial Israeli and Egyptian blockade of Gaza, the continuing occupation, the statelessness of Palestinians and Hamas's implacable opposition to peace with Israel. Israel's economy suffered from the direct costs of the conflict and a significant drop in tourism, while Gazans' dire economic situation and living conditions were made worse than ever; they have many years of rebuilding ahead of them. With Israelis now feeling more vulnerable both militarily and in the court of world public opinion (and possibly, along with Hamas, in the International Criminal Court in the Hague), and Palestinian Islamists further radicalised by the death and destruction, moderates are facing an uphill battle.

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu publicly abandoned what had already been a questionable commitment to a two-state solution to the conflict during his most recent election campaign. His statements ruling out an eventual Palestinian state put him further at odds with the US and much of the international community.

Netanyahu, who won his fourth consecutive term in March 2015, also declared that his latest right-wing coalition government will continue to expand Jewish settlements.

The leadership of the Palestinian Authority, President Mahmoud Abbas and his prime minister, Rami Hamdallah, have a long record of support for a two-state solution, but have seemed reluctant to make any bold moves. Abbas has been putting his efforts into having the State of Palestine recognised by international bodies such as the United Nations, and has demanded that