Introduction

The Gaza Strip and the West Bank are territories that are otherwise known as the Palestinian territories or Occupied Palestinian Territories. The two areas have technically been occupied by the state of Israel since the conclusion of the Six-Day War in 1967, but the Gaza Strip and West Bank are controlled by Hamas and Fatah, respectively. Recently, the 2014 Fatah-Hamas Gaza Agreement called for the creation of a unity government. Over the years, the area has become a region of conflict between clashing groups.

It must be noted that the Palestinian education system, which has traditionally been one of the most respected in the Arab world, has deteriorated tremendously due to the past decades of conflict. Teachers require training, the number of students is increasing at a rapid pace, and the quality of education itself has rapidly declined. However there is also the opportunity to design an education system and a curriculum tailored to suit Palestine’s cultural, social and economic needs.

Definition of Key Terms

Sovereignty

A country’s independent authority and right to govern itself without any interference from outside sources or bodies. State sovereignty is sometimes viewed synonymously with independence, however, sovereignty can be transferred as a legal right whereas independence cannot.

Green Line

Green Line refers to the demarcation lines set out in the 1949 Armistice Agreements that are often used to define the boundaries between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The name derives from the green ink used to draw the line on the map while the armistice talks were going on. The Green Line is not and was not intended to be a border. Over the past forty-seven years, the political relevance of the Green Line has become a controversial issue in both intra-Israeli and intra-Palestinian politics.
Background

Historical Significance of the Territories

Following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, the 1949 Armistice Agreement gave control of the West Bank to Jordan and Gaza to Egypt. The area remained under these countries’ control until, as a result of the 6-Day War in 1967, Israel reoccupied the region. Israeli occupation and military control has remained since, during which the Palestinians of the region struggled achieve independence while clashing with Jewish settlers encroaching into Palestinian territories. This, along with the Arab-Israeli cultural divide and failed negotiations between the two parties, has led to an escalation of conflict in the region with at least 1,195 Israelis and 9,126 Palestinians killed since 2000.

Education in the Region

Currently, there is a critical crisis facing the education system in Palestine. As mentioned previously, there are a series of problems ranging from teacher training to educational facilities that currently need to be addressed. Funding is also a serious dilemma given that long-term revenue that can support the education system does not appear to be sufficient to meet neither present nor future needs. It is likely that external resources will be needed for temporary budget substitution as well as capital investment and project funding.

Key Issues

Quality of Education

Many factors have led to the decline in the quality of education. One reason is the loss of school time due to frequent school closures, curfews and other restrictions. In addition, the learning environments are generally in poor to very poor condition, due to a lack of financial resources for maintenance or construction. This is compounded by the ongoing conflict between the Israeli armed forces and Palestinian factions, and the deterioration of resources. Public schools are often without any specialized facilities such as science room, art rooms, or libraries and also lack science tools and other teaching equipment. Teachers have to rely primarily on the chalkboard and rote teaching since there are few tools which would allow teachers to use more creative methods. Furthermore, the teaching staff is, for a large part, not sufficiently qualified. There has been little to no internal teacher training to improve either subject knowledge or methods of teaching.

Access and Internal Efficiency

While education in Gaza and the West Bank is compulsory for all students, due to recent conflicts in the area, many students have dropped out of school out of fear for their safety. And while the United Nations runs schools in the region through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, many have been commandeered as improvised shelters for the thousands displaced by the conflict. This has further reduced the already limited number of schools available in the area. In addition, poor investment in the education system has created a poor learning environment for children in the region. Due to a significant lack of funds,
schools have also lost access to supplying basic educational tools and materials. The services available for students with special needs or facing psychological trauma have become inadequate in assisting those who need it. The inequity in resource allocation between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has become serious as well due to blockades from the Israeli authorities.

**Major Parties Involved**

**The Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education**

The Ministry first took responsibility for education in the West Bank and Gaza in 1994 and has the duty in maintaining an educational standard in the region. It also has the responsibility of finding and preparing teachers. It has centralized education in the region in regard to curriculum, textbooks, and regulations. The Ministry has shown clear support for outside intervention in supporting Palestinian education and stressed the need for assistance given the extenuating circumstances surrounding the situation.

**Israel**

Israel has maintained its blockade on goods intended for the Gaza Strip since 2007. While it has allowed limited humanitarian aid to enter the Gaza Strip, at various times, Israel has blocked goods important to providing an adequate education such as writing materials and stationary. Furthermore, because Israel does not permit the importation of steel, cement or glass, among other building materials into the area, it is difficult to build new educational facilities in the area. As a result, public services such as education have degraded in quality.

**Hamas**

While Hamas has recognized the need for outside support, it has been highly selective in what it accepts from both non-governmental organizations and the United Nations. The group believes it is essential that Palestinian education recognizes the ideology of the local population and that it addresses both Palestinian suffering and the right to combat Israel. It has frequently conflicted with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, which helps run a number of schools in the Gaza territory, on differing views on what a Palestinian education should entail.
Timeline of Events

National Curriculum Implementation – 2000
In past years, due to territorial occupation by Jordan and Egypt, different educational curriculums were used in the West Bank and Gaza. It was not until 2002 that a unified curriculum was put in place in both the West Bank and Gaza. By the end of the 2006 school year, all students were using Palestinian national textbooks and following the unified curriculum.

Israeli Blockade of the Gaza Strip - June 2007
After Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip, Israel sealed its borders with Gaza and has maintained the blockade to limit Palestinian rocket attacks. It has banned an array of materials from entering Gaza including resources essential in providing suitable education, such as construction materials, paper, and books.

Resolution 66/17 – January 26, 2012
It is a General Assembly resolution that affirms the illegitimacy of Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory. It also reaffirms the right for Palestinians to establish and create their own state.

Resolution 67/19 – November 29, 2012
It is a resolution that upgrades Palestine’s status from “observer entity” to “non-member observer state” in the United Nations. It essentially gives the state of Palestine recognition by the UN as a legitimate state. In addition, it gives Palestine the right to join treaties, specialized UN agencies, and the International Criminal Court.

2014 Fatah–Hamas Gaza Agreement – April 23, 2014
An agreement signed by representatives of Hamas and Fatah agreeing to form a unity government in charge of the Gaza Strip. It should be noted however that significant tensions still exist, despite the deal, between both these parties.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Primarily any attempts made in solving this issue have been done by outside groups and organizations. In particular, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency currently runs 253 schools in the Palestinian territories. However, given the region’s instability and unrest many of these schools have been converted into shelters for families. Furthermore, the Israeli blockade has restricted movement of goods to the region including resources need to provide education. And finally, there has been conflict between these groups and Hamas on the curriculum at these schools such as the inclusion of the Holocaust in school studies. Ultimately, previous attempts to solve this issue have been disrupted and hindered by the tensions in the Palestinian region.
Possible Solutions

Given the current state of education in these Palestinian regions, it is clear that outside support is needed to solve the situation. However in past cases, this type of aid has been restricted by both Israeli and Palestinian groups. Thus a solution for the issue of providing comprehensive education for children in the West Bank and Gaza would require a multitude of factors to be effective.

Firstly, restrictions placed by the Israeli blockade on Gaza would have to be lifted in order to rebuild educational facilities in the region and provide adequate education for children. Funds would be needed to provide these resources in the first place as neither UN agencies nor non-governmental organizations can be solely relied upon to rebuild Palestinian education. Countries would have to be solicited to help fund the resources required.

Secondly, conflicts with the curriculum with political groups that control the region must be resolved as well. Situations that occur, such as the one between the UNRWA and Hamas, must be resolved quickly to help set a solid foundation for education. Such commitment would also ease the process of implementing Palestinian curriculum in the West Bank and Gaza.

Finally, comprehensive education that is accessible to all children would require an easing of tensions between Israel and Hamas. This would allow children to go back to school, schools to receive much-needed supplies, and allow organizations to rebuild schools. In order to incentivize both parties to reconcile the situation, various methods can be used. Such methods can include incentives, such as loans or humanitarian aid, to more serious measures such as international condemnation.
Bibliography


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