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Historical and Geographical Development of the Conflict Between the Zionist Entity and Arab Countries: A Cartographic and Remote Sensing Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the history of the Zionist entity and Arab countries conflict from 1897 till 2026. This study was based on using historical data, maps, satellite images, and GIS techniques to show the geographical development of the conflict. Results showed that the conflict caused big changes in the region. The 1948 war caused most of the Palestine land be controlled by the Zionist entity and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. The 1967 war caused the occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula, and Golan Heights. However, Egypt regained full control of Sinai Peninsula in 1982 and Jordan regained full control of Al-Baqoura and Al-Ghamr in 2019. This study showed that there were different phases of the occupation in south Lebanon and south Syria. In addition, it also showed how settlements have been continuously expanding and there have been geographical changes within the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Finally, the study showed how the concept of the so-called Greater State has been interpreted historically and geographically.

Keywords: Arab–Zionist Conflict; Historical Maps; Remote sensing; Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

التطور التاريخي والجغرافي للصراع بين الكيان الصهيوني والدول العربية: تحليل باستخدام الخرائط والاستشعار عن بعد

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الملخص

تناولت هذه الدراسة تاريخ الصراع بين الكيان الصهيوني والدول العربية في الفترة الممتدة من عام 1897 إلي2026. وقد اعتمدت الدراسة على استخدام البيانات التاريخية، والخرائط، وصور الأقمار الصناعية، وتقنيات نظم المعلومات الجغرافية لتوضيح التطور الجغرافي لهذا الصراع. وأظهرت النتائج أن الصراع أحدث تغييرات جوهرية في المنطقة؛ إذ أدت حرب عام 1948 إلى سيطرة الكيان الصهيوني على معظم أراضي فلسطين وتهجير مئات الآلاف من الفلسطينيين. كما أسفرت حرب عام 1967 عن احتلال الضفة الغربية، والقدس الشرقية، وقطاع غزة، وشبه جزيرة سيناء، وهضبة الجولان. ومع ذلك، استعادت مصر سيطرتها الكاملة على شبه جزيرة سيناء في عام 1982، بينما استعادت الأردن سيطرتها الكاملة على منطقتي الباقورة والغمر في عام 2019. كما بينت الدراسة المراحل المختلفة للاحتلال في جنوب لبنان وجنوب سوريا، وأوضحت التوسع المستمر للمستوطنات، بالإضافة إلى التغيرات الجغرافية التي طرأت على الضفة الغربية وقطاع غزة. وأخيراً، كشفت الدراسة عن كيفية تفسير مفهوم ما يسمى بـــ "الدولة الكبرى" من منظور تاريخي وجغرافي.

الكلمات المفتاحية : الصراع العربي الصهيوني؛ الخرائط التاريخية؛ الاستشعار عن بعد؛ نظم المعلومات الجغرافية.

Introduction

The Arab–Zionist conflict represents one of the most significant and prolonged political, military, and territorial conflicts in modern Middle Eastern history. Its historical roots date back to the late nineteenth century, particularly the emergence of the Zionist movement and the First Zionist Congress in 1897 [1 and 2]. The conflict developed through several important historical stages, including increasing Jewish immigration to Palestine, the Balfour Declaration in 1917, the British Mandate, and the United Nations Partition Plan in 1947 [3]. The establishment of the Zionist entity in 1948 resulted in major territorial and demographic changes in Palestine and marked the beginning of a new period of conflict involving neighboring Arab countries [4]. The conflict spread and involved more Arab states in the subsequent decades, most notably Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. Major territorial and political changes occurred after the 1948, 1967, and 1973 wars. In particular, the 1967 war resulted in the occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula and Golan Heights. However, the Sinai Peninsula evacuation was completed and Egypt regained full sovereignty of the region on April 25, 1982. In addition, the Zionist entity withdrew from Southern Lebanon in 2000. Finally, the special status of Al-Baqoura and Al-Ghamr in Jordan was cancelled in November 2019. There have also been major political, military, demographic, and geographical changes within the Palestinian territories. This has been most prominent in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with the expansion of settlements, dividing land, limiting movement, displacement and frequent military operations. The conflict also involved continuing territorial disputes and military developments in southern Lebanon and southern Syria [5]. This highlighted the importance of certain areas of land at borders, military points, towns, transport routes and natural geographical landmarks. In addition, different interpretations of the concept of the so-called “Greater State” have appeared in political and ideological discussions, reflecting broader debates concerning territorial expansion and regional geopolitical ambitions [6].

To understand the geographical aspect of this conflict it is important to consider what impact wars, occupation and de-militarization, plus political agreements and land changes have on the borders and geography of this area. Using historical maps, satellite images and geographical information systems (GIS) can help show how this has impacted the area, by comparing borders and showing how much land was affected.

Objective

Examining the historical and geographical evolution of the war between the Zionist entity and the Arab nations (Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan) between 1897 and 2026 is the primary goal of this study. In addition to documenting the geographical changes brought about by occupation, military operations, and territory recovery, the study seeks to identify the key historical phases of the conflict and analyze the impact of significant conflicts and political agreements on territorial borders. Along with analyzing the geopolitical significance of these territories and the idea of the so-called Greater State, it also aims to depict the evolution of occupation in the Palestinian territories, southern Lebanon, the Golan Heights, and other impacted places. Furthermore, the study seeks to provide a clear picture of the conflict's spatial and temporal development through the use of historical maps and geographical representations.

Several previous studies have examined the historical, political, military, and geographical dimensions of the Arab–Zionist conflict. These studies focus on the establishment of the Zionist entity, major Arab-Zionist conflicts, occupation, change of political borders and how historical maps can be used to understand geographical changes.

The following studies are particularly relevant to the present research. Forman [7] researched into the legal procedures taken place during and after the 1948 war to transfer Palestinian land. It looked at the laws and government policies put in place to allow former Palestinian Arab owned land to be transferred. This showed how law influenced land ownership and displacement. Levin [8] investigated the historical development of settlements in southern Palestine between 1799 and 1948 using historical maps and GIS. This authors used 375 historical maps to show how settlements, land use and geographical features have changed over time. They show how historical maps can be used with GIS techniques to provide an understanding of land/territory changes. Simpson [9] reviewed the major Arab–Zionist wars from 1948 to the present. The article contains a detailed breakdown of the background to each war, political and military opinions on the conflict and the effect that the conflict has had on the countries and people involved. It also shows how the history is viewed very differently by both sides and how this has led to many ongoing debates. Eiran [10] examined the Arab–Zionist wars between 1967 and 1973. Their study focused on the June 1967 War, the War of Attrition between Egypt and the Zionist entity, and the October 1973 War. It explained the military and political changes that occurred during this time. The importance of these wars are shown here and how they changed relations within the region. Schaffer [11] examined the reconstruction of nineteenth-century landscapes in Palestine using historical maps, particularly the Survey of Western Palestine. In order to reconstruct past geographical circumstances and examine changes in land use and land cover, the authors employed historical cartographic data. The study illustrated the use of historical maps in comprehending long-term changes in geography. Rubin [12] examined the historical and political struggle over the West Bank between 1949 and 1967. The study discussed the strategic importance of the West Bank, the political positions of Arab and Zionist leaders and factors contributing to the occupation of the West Bank during the 1967 war. It provided an important historical background for understanding the territorial developments in Palestine. Rabinovich [13] examined the development of the conflict between the Zionist entity and the Arab countries from its early beginnings to contemporary times. The study examined major historical events such as the wars of 1948 and 1967 and their impact on the territorial and political situations of the region.. It also highlighted the transition from a wider Arab–Zionist conflict toward a more concentrated Palestinian–Zionist conflict. Leuenberger [14] explored how mapping and mapping practices have been used by those with power to claim land in Palestine. The authors discussed how mapping was used in Palestine prior to and after 1948 through geographical surveys, maps and naming places to show the nation’s territory. They discussed how maps were used during the disputes over land during the 1967 war and Oslo Accords. This study is useful as it shows how maps can be used to understand the geography of the conflict. Zohar [15 and 16] reviewed the use of GIS methods within historical geography with case studies of late Ottoman Palestine and the British Mandate period. The study demonstrated how historical maps and visual sources are key in understanding geographical change and how GIS can be used to enhance the interpretation and analysis of historical spatial data. This study presented how modern geographical techniques can be useful for understanding historical land development. Pinfold [17] investigated the withdrawal of the Zionist entity's forces from the Sinai Peninsula. The study discussed the various agreements signed between Egypt and the Zionist entity such as the Separation of Forces Agreement (1974), the Sinai Interim Agreement (1975) and the Camp David Accords (1979). These are shown to have led to a gradual disengagement from Sinai and reestablishment of Egyptian control. Kassem [5] looked into the issues of the southern border of Lebanon historically and geographically. The Blue Line was created by the United Nations after the Zionist entity forces left the country in 2000. The study focused on demarcating the borders, and also land ownership, territorial disputes and local community issues. It also discusses the connection between the 1948 and 1982 conflict, the occupation of southern Lebanon and the ongoing disputes in bordering areas. This study is useful to understand the geographical changes that have taken place in southern Lebanon. Shaltami [18] investigated the spatial and temporal destruction of infrastructure in the Gaza Strip between October 2023 and 2026. This was done using satellite imagery and GIS. Landsat and Sentinel-2 were used to identify the changes in agricultural and urban land cover. Sentinel-1 was used to detect surface changes. UNOSAT was used to evaluate the damage, taking into account the devastation of roads, buildings, hospitals, schools, water infrastructure, electricity infrastructure, and transportation infrastructure. The vegetation and agriculture change was identified using NDVI. An infrastructure damage index (IDI) was developed to identify areas of infrastructure damage. The research found that there had been a large increase in destruction of buildings, particularly in high density urban areas. Roads, vital services and agriculture and vegetation had also suffered severe damage. Using satellite imagery and GIS was an effective way to identify how much infrastructure had been destroyed. Priority areas could be identified to provide aid and help plan for the future. Shaltami [19] examined the growth of settlements of the Zionist entity and the transformation of agricultural land across the West Bank, Palestine from 2011 to 2026 by using multi-temporal satellite imagery and GIS. Image classification, change detection, spatial analysis, hotspot analysis and land use change analysis was applied to determine changes within urban, agriculture, vegetation, barren land and road areas. This was particularly focused on Ma’ale Adumim, Ariel, Hebron Hills and clustering of settlements. The areas of growth within the settlements were identified around Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron, Nablus, Jericho and Qalqilya. This highlighted how the settlements have developed along with changes in land use around them, conversion of agricultural land and development of transport networks. This study showed that using remote sensing and GIS is a useful way to

monitor the growth of settlements while also analyzing the impact on agricultural land. Monitoring should be continued to help protect agricultural land, land use and environmental analysis.

Although there are many historical and political studies regarding the Arab-Zionist conflict, there remains an overall geographical study that can provide an insight into how the conflict developed historically and geographically throughout Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. Previous studies have looked at individual wars, countries, political events and occupied territories. This has meant that there hasn't been a general comparison made between how the conflict has changed throughout the Arab region from its start in 1897 (Zionist movement) until 2026. The relationship between military occupation, land recovery, border changes and expansion haven't been looked at collectively using historical maps. This study therefore aims to provide a chronological and geographical analysis by providing a series of maps and figures that show how the conflict has changed over time. It looks at the main land changes, military and geopolitical changes throughout the Arab region. It will provide an overall view to give an insight into how the conflict has developed.

Methodology

The figures were created using a combination of historical and geographical methods. Historical records, maps, satellite images and GIS tools were used to show the changes to Palestine and surrounding areas between 1948 and 2026. Major political and geographical changes were identified using historical maps, UN resolutions, Armistice agreements and reports.

Results and Discussion

Fig. 1 shows the main political and historical factors that led to the creation of the Zionist entity. This includes the Zionist movement, increase of Jewish migration, British support through the Balfour Declaration and Mandate and the 1947 UN Partition Plan. The last part of the flow chart shows how after the 1948 war the Zionist entity controlled about 78% of historic Palestine. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were displaced becoming refugees. The West Bank was taken over by Jordan, and the Gaza Strip was administered by Egypt.

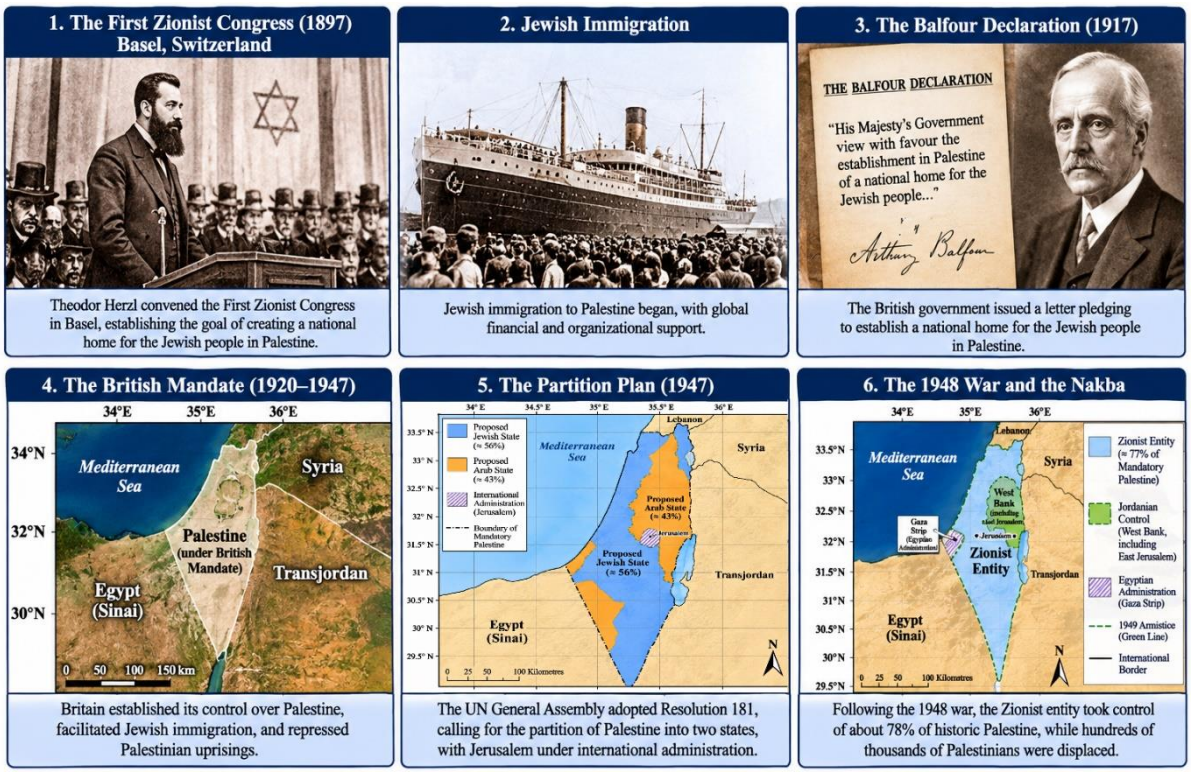


Figure 1: The six historical stages leading to the establishment of the Zionist entity in Palestine, from the First Zionist Congress in 1897 and subsequent Jewish immigration to the Balfour Declaration (1917), British Mandate (1920–1947), UN Partition Plan (1947), and the 1948 war and Nakba.

Fig. 2 compares the territorial arrangements proposed in 1947 with the situation following the 1948 war. This highlights the major change in geography throughout this time. There is an increase in land controlled by the Zionist entity, and a decrease in land allocated to the proposed Arab state. Jerusalem remained a separate issue in the original partition proposal. Major territorial changes in Palestine after the 1967 war are shown in Fig. 3. The Zionist entity took control of the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights. This made many changes to the political and geographical make-up of Palestine and

surrounding areas.

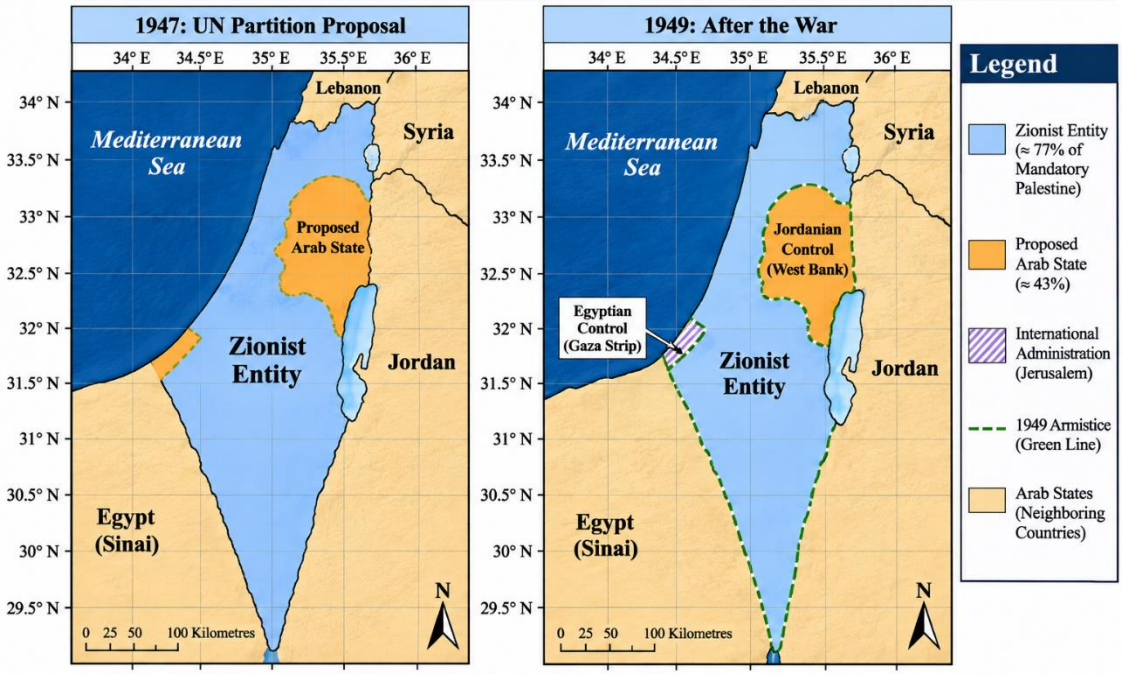


Figure 2: Comparison of the 1947 and 1949 territorial configurations.

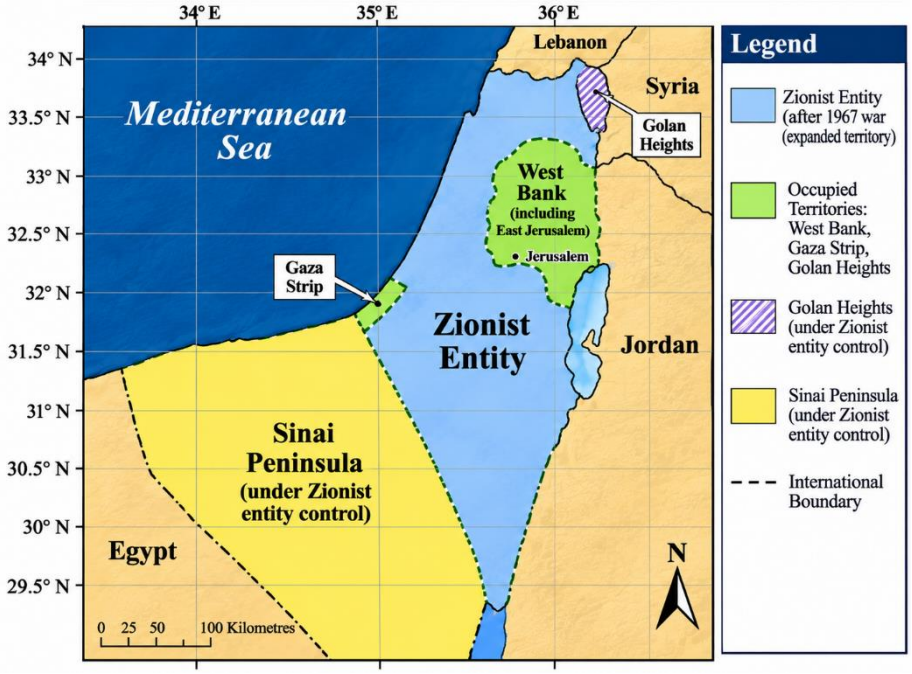


Figure 3: Territorial changes following the 1967 war.

Fig. 4 illustrates the military situation and territorial developments associated with the 1973 war. It highlights the changes in military positions, particularly around the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights. The war had a great impact on the political situation within the region leading to further negotiations and agreements over territories. The territorial changes in the Sinai Peninsula are shown in Fig. 5. The Zionist entity occupied the region during the June 1967 War. However, after the 1973 War and peace treaties were signed, Egypt regained some of the land back. The complete retreat from Sinai took place on April 25, 1982, to give Egypt full control of Sinai again. The Taba dispute is shown along with its resolution in 1989. The area of Umm al-Rashrash (Eilat) is also shown separately as it is not internationally recognized as being part of the Egyptian occupied land.



Figure 4: Military positions and territorial changes in 1973.

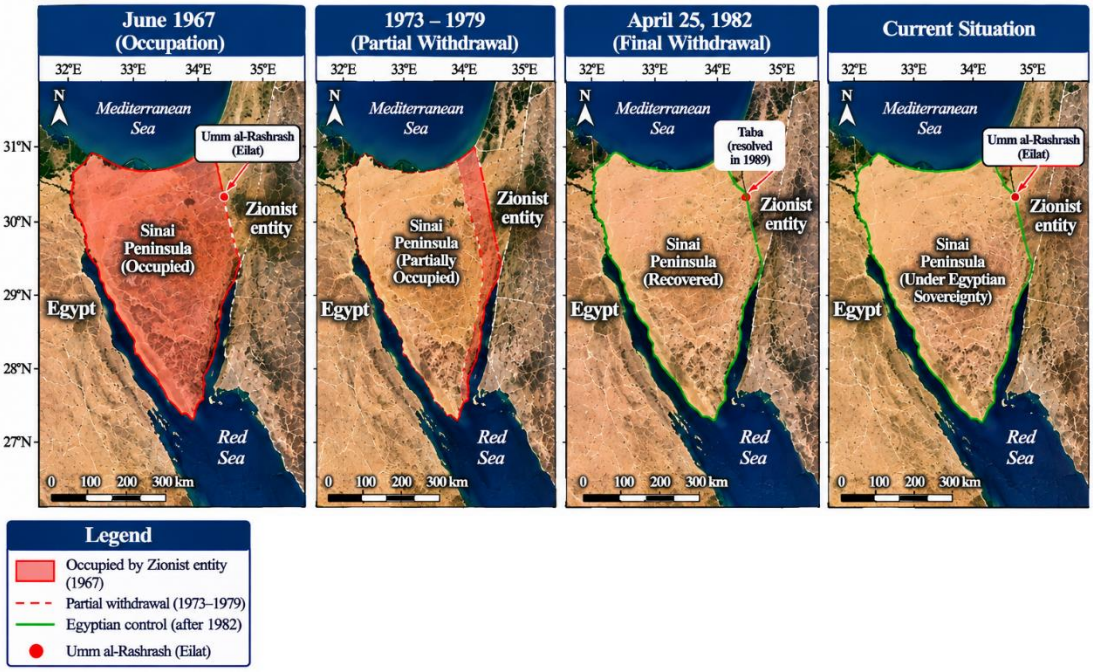


Figure 5: The Egyptian territories that were occupied by the Zionist entity and subsequently recovered.

Fig. 6 presents the geographical areas occupied by the Zionist entity in the Lebanese territories during various periods between 1948 and 2026. It shows the temporary occupation of several villages along the Lebanese borders during 1948-1949. Additionally, it shows the areas surrounding Shebaa Farms and Kfar Chouba Hills. The map also shows the military invasion of Southern Lebanon in 1978. Furthermore, it shows the large occupation of Southern Lebanon between 1982 and 2000. However, the Zionist forces withdrew from these areas on May 25th 2000, except for Shebaa Farms and Kfar Chouba. Finally, it shows the limited military intrusion during the July 2006 War and the military expansion in 2026. This was achieved by creating what is referred to as the Yellow Line South of the Litani River. The figure shows the coordinates of key villages and locations. In general, this figure shows how the geographical areas occupied in Southern Lebanon have changed over time. This emphasizes the importance of border areas and the Litani River.

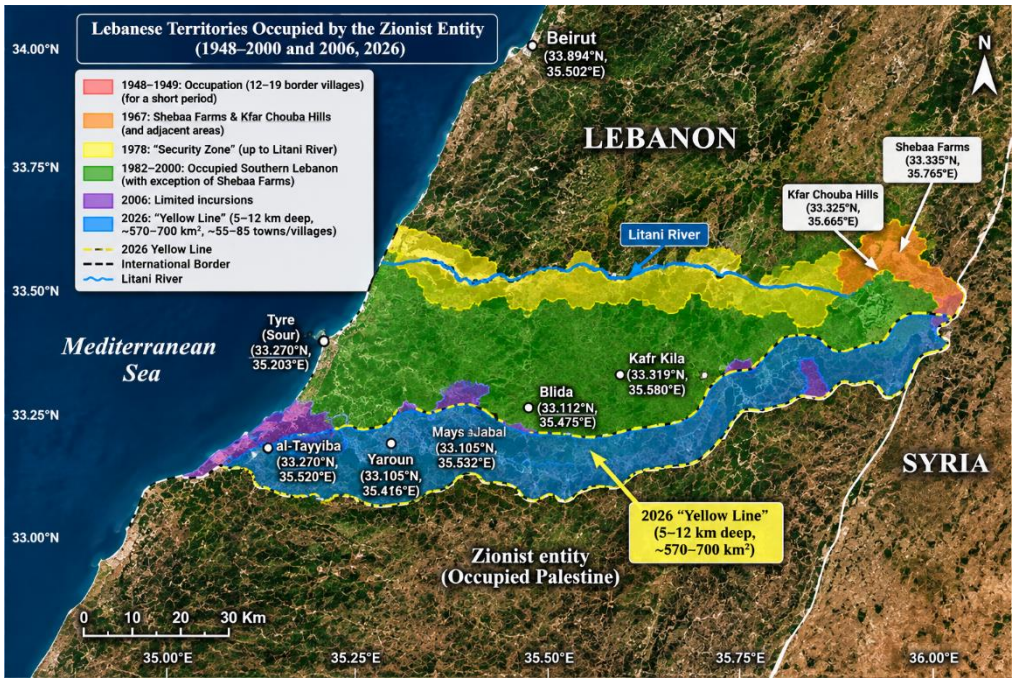


Figure 6: The Lebanese territories occupied by the Zionist entity during different historical periods (1948–2026).

Fig. 7 displays the key points related to the history of Al-Baqoura and Al-Ghamr in Jordan where they were occupied and had special agreements under the 1994 Wadi Araba Treaty. The Zionist entity was given a temporary right of use of some parts of these areas during 25 years, even though the Jordanian sovereignty was acknowledged. However, on 10th November 2019 Jordan regained full control of both areas since it decided not to renew the lease agreements. This can be seen as an important step towards regaining Jordanian control over its areas.

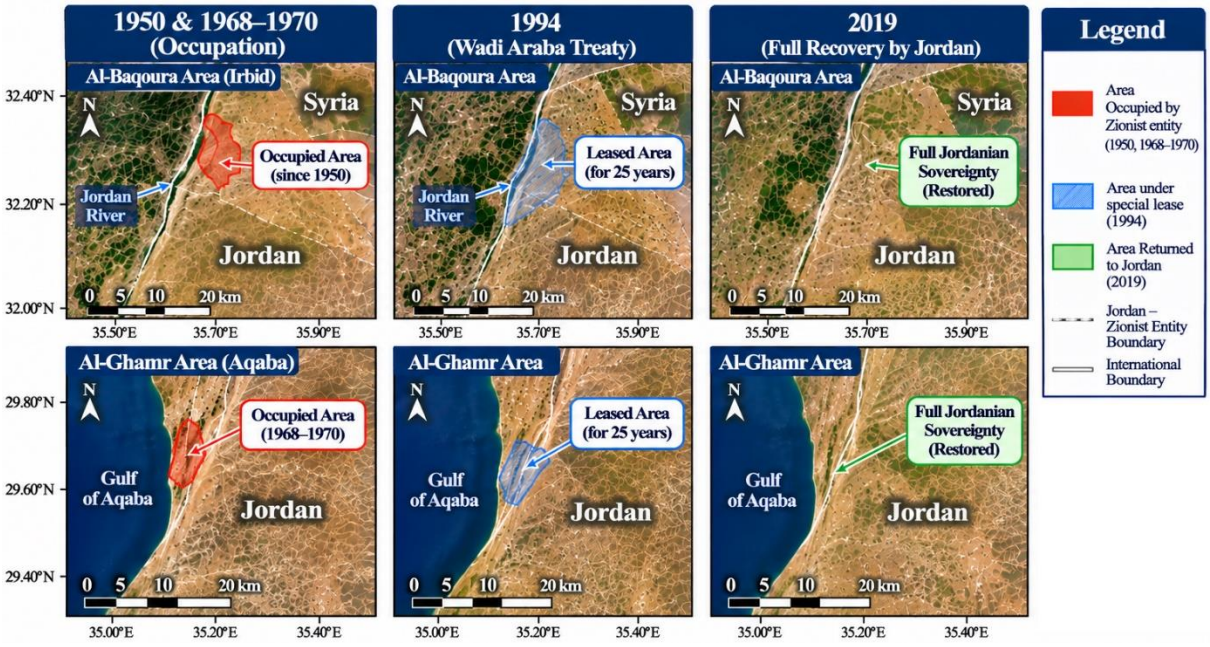


Figure 7: The Zionist entity occupation and subsequent recovery of parts of Jordan.

The geographical distribution of Syrian territory under Zionist occupation is depicted in Fig. 8, with a primary emphasis on the Golan Heights and their environs. The map shows the occupation of a large part of the Golan Heights during the 1967 War, covering approximately 1,260–1,500 km². It also highlights the limited area of approximately 60 km² returned to Syrian sovereignty under the 1974 Disengagement Agreement, while most of the occupied territory remained under the control of the Zionist entity. The figure further presents the 1981 annexation decision, which was rejected by the United Nations through Security Council Resolution 497, as well

as the establishment of settlements within the occupied territory. In addition, the map illustrates the reported expansion of military control following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, particularly around Mount Hermon (Jabal al-Shaykh) and areas of Quneitra and Daraa during 2024–2026. Geographic coordinates are provided to identify the locations of important towns and geographical features. In general, the figure demonstrates the historical development and geographical expansion of occupation in southern Syria.

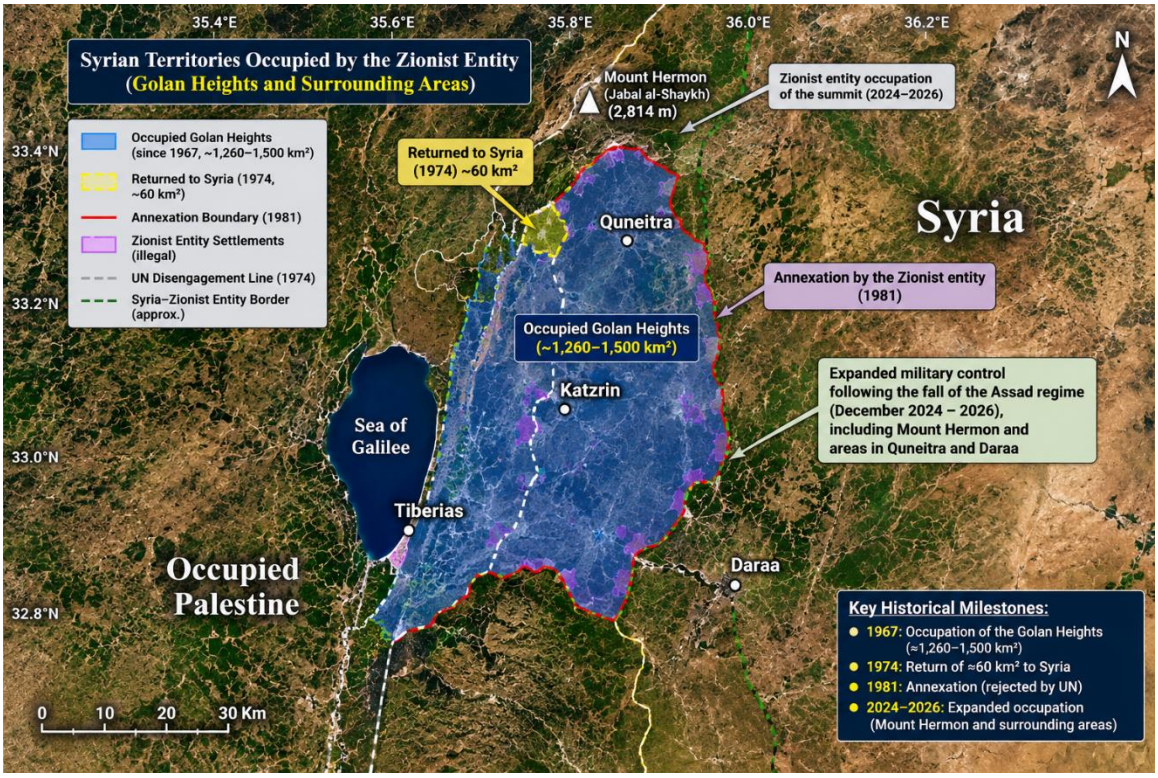


Figure 8: The Syrian territories occupied by the Zionist entity during different historical periods (1967–2026).

Fig. 9 represents the main stages of occupying the Gaza Strip by the Zionist entity during the period 1967 till 2026. The first period represents a direct occupation by the Zionist entity from (1967-1993) where there were movements of displacement, creating settlements and using the Five Fingers policy. There was the First Intifada in 1987. The Oslo Accords were implemented in the second period (1993-2005). This gave the Palestinian National Authority some responsibilities. However, settlements and military areas were still controlled by the Zionist entity. The third stage started with the removal of settlements (2005-2023). However, there was a blockade in 2007. There were major military operations in 2008, 2012, 2014 and 2021. During the last period (2023-2026), there were large scale military operations. This caused massive destruction to residential areas and displacement of the Palestinian people. Generally, this figure shows the major changes within the political, military and territory of Gaza. It also shows how there have been massive impacts on the human rights and infrastructure.

The key stages of the Zionist entity occupation of the West Bank between 1967 and 2026 is illustrated in Fig. 10:

(1) The first stage (1967-1987) consisted of direct military occupation, East Jerusalem annexation, land confiscation and settlement expansion.

(2) The second stage (1987-2000) involved the First Intifada and signing of the Oslo Accords between 1993 and 1995. This meant that parts of the West Bank were divided into Areas A, B and C. It also created the Palestinian National Authority.

(3) The third stage (2000-2005) included the Second Intifada and military activity. The separation wall started to be built in 2002.

(4) The fourth stage (2007) included the political split of Palestine into the Gaza Strip and West Bank. Hamas took control of Gaza and the Palestinian Authority controlled some areas of the West Bank.

(5) The final stage (2023-2026) involved increased settlement expansion, land confiscation, military activity and a de facto annexation. This included the E1 settlement proposal. In general, the figure shows how the West Bank has changed politically, militarily and territorially. The occupation of Palestine has had major impacts on the land, people and geographical connections within the area.

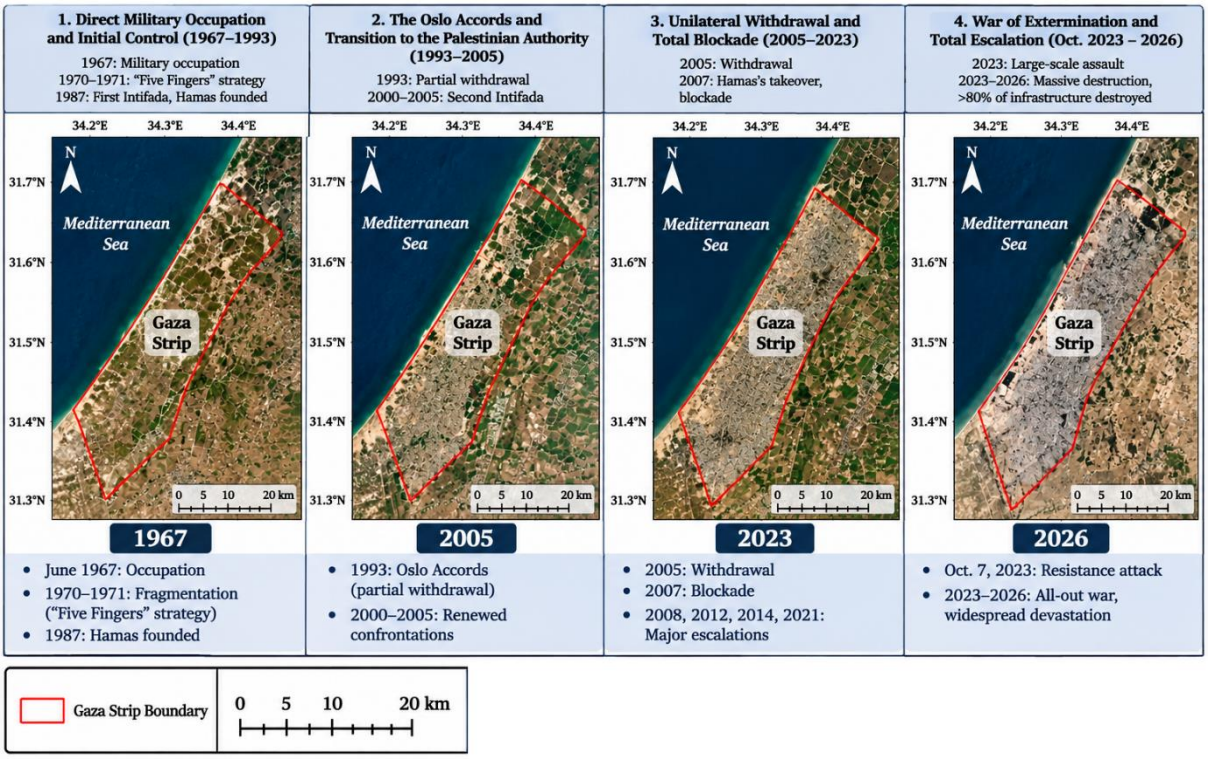


Figure 9: Stages of the Zionist entity occupation of the Gaza Strip (1967–2026).

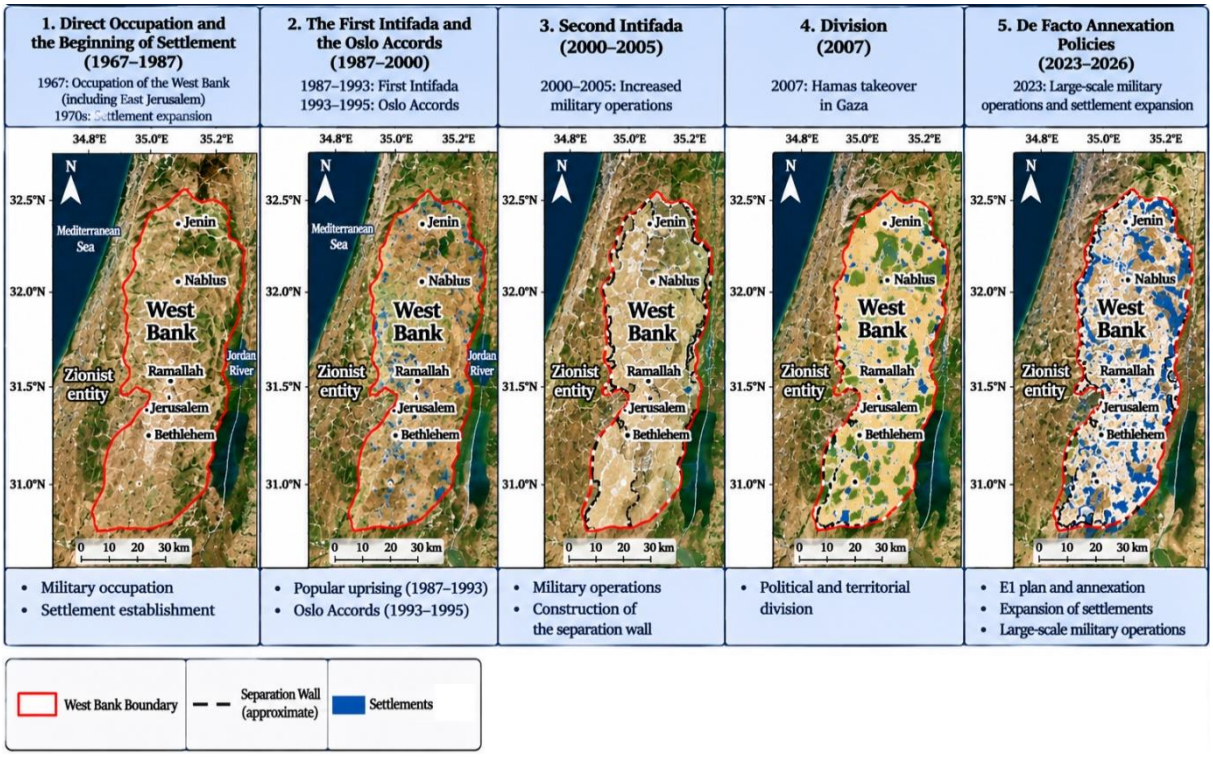


Figure 10: Stages of the Zionist entity occupation of the West Bank (1967–2026).

Fig. 11 illustrates two interpretations of the concept of the "Greater State": a narrower interpretation encompassing the territory under the control of the Zionist entity together with the Golan Heights, West Bank, and Gaza Strip, and a broader territorial concept extending symbolically from the Nile River to the Euphrates River. The map contains geographical coordinates, a scale indicator and major features to give an indication of the geographical area of interpretation.



Figure 11: Conceptual geographical representation of the two interpretations of the "Greater State" associated with Zionist expansionist ideology.

Conclusions and Recommendation

This study investigated the historical and spatial evolution of the conflict between the Zionist entity and Arab countries from 1897 to 2026. The history section demonstrated that there are several critical phases that have occurred throughout the conflict. These include the start of the Zionist Movement, establishment of the Zionist entity in 1948 and the Arab-Zionist wars. The findings showed that the 1948 and 1967 wars had a massive impact on the spatial changes within the area. The 1948 war caused massive changes to the land distribution of historic Palestine and displaced many Palestinians. The 1967 war expanded military occupation to include more areas such as the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula and Golan Heights. The study displayed that there has been changes in the control of land due to military actions, political agreements and negotiations. Egypt gained complete control of the Sinai Peninsula in 1982 and Jordan gained complete control of Al-Baqoura and Al-Ghamr in 2019. However, areas such as the Palestinian territories, southern Lebanon and Golan Heights still have issues relating to occupation, military actions, land disputes and settlement expansion. The spatial analysis of Lebanon and Syria revealed that there are still areas of strategic importance along the borders. This includes southern Lebanon, Shebaa Farms, Kfar Chouba Hills, Golan Heights and areas around Mount Hermon. There have been major changes within the Gaza Strip and West Bank including settlement expansion, land confiscation, military actions, displacement and separated areas. The study presented that using historical maps, satellite images and GIS can be an effective method of showing the historical and spatial evolution of the conflict. Using these methods together provided a better understanding of changes in land and how they relate to important events, military actions, political agreements and spatial changes. It is recommended to carry out continuous monitoring using historical maps, satellite imagery and GIS to map the changes of territory in Palestine and the surrounding Arab countries. More research should be carried out to study the expansion of settlements, land confiscation, military activity, border changes, and how this affects the population distribution and geographical links. Encouraging the use of historical data, international documents, United Nations resolutions and multi-temporal satellite imagery to create a complete geographical database for the conflict. Advanced remote sensing techniques and spatial analysis should also be carried out to monitor changes in urban areas, farmland, transport networks and borders. Further research should be carried out to study the effects of military activity on the environment and people including damage to infrastructure, farmland, water and natural environments. Lastly, collaboration with universities and international organizations should be improved to increase geographical documentation, provide future research opportunities and help protect historical, cultural and natural resources in conflict affected areas.

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