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MCC Essay

### Peace that Passes Understanding

What would you do if men with guns ordered you to leave your home and would not allow you to return? What if those men continued to terrorize you and your family, and you were forced to live your life under the constant threat of violence? This is the reality for many people living under the shadow of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. While the armies carry out their government issued orders, many citizens are caught in the crossfire. Congress strongly supports Israel with military aid, and the Israelis are putting much of this aid towards the Israeli Military Occupation of the Palestinian territories. The Palestinians are living under a shadow of oppression and violence, and we need to do whatever we can to make sure these people can live safely. While ensuring the short-term safety of the Palestinian people, we need to do whatever we can to bring this conflict to a peaceful end.

The Jewish claim to the land of Israel dates back to Pre-Roman era. Jews have lived there since Moses led them there. Since their expulsion from Israel by the Romans, Jews have lived scattered all over the world, but they never let go of the hope that they could one day return to their land of Israel. The Palestinian claim to Israel dates back to when the Jews were driven out of Israel by the Romans and the Palestinians were allowed to move in. After World War II, the United Nations decided, after witnessing the horror of the Holocaust, to create a Jewish Nation. The plans for Israel would split Palestine in half, creating two nations. The UN declared the new nation of Israel, and the very next day six surrounding Arab countries attacked the newly formed nation. This is known as the War of 1948. Israel won the war due to having organized a militia in

advance of the attack. During this war, all of Palestine's land was claimed by Egypt, leaving Palestine with no country for its citizens to live in.

In 1922, Congress passed the Lodge Fish Resolution. This declared Congress's support of a Jewish nation in Palestine. From 1976 to 2004, no country has received more foreign aid from the United States than Israel has (Raymond). In his Congressional Report on foreign aid to Israel, published September 16, 2010, Sharp, a specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs, states: "Almost all U.S. bilateral aid to Israel is in the form of military assistance." Later in the report, Sharp explains that in August 2007, the Bush administration declared that it would increase its military assistance to Israel by \$6 billion over the following decade (Sharp). In his congressional report on U.S. Foreign Assistance to the Middle East, Sharp states: "U.S. aid policy has gradually evolved from a focus on preventing Soviet influence from gaining a foothold in the region and from maintaining a neutral stance in the Arab-Israeli conflict, to strengthening Israel's military and economy and using foreign aid as an incentive to foster peace agreements between countries in the region," (Sharp).

Sending Israel weapons is not the right way to show support. More weapons will only fuel the conflict. The presence of Israeli military personnel in Palestinian territories promotes dominance and inequality. This hinders the establishment of mended relationships between Palestinians and Israelis.

The issue that the U.S. Government should be most concerned with right now is the conditions under which the people affected by this conflict are living, because a peaceful relationship between Palestinians and Israelis must start with meeting the needs of the people, especially the Palestinians in Gaza whose resources have been cut off by the Israelis. Our

involvement should start by solving immediate issues, such as water and food distribution, making sure the refugees are cared for, and making sure people have access to medical care.

Congress has begun this by funding several programs that encourage Arab-Israeli cooperation. The Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) program, established in 1979, promotes cooperation between Arab and Israeli scientists who are both trying to solve the same problems, such as water issues. USAID's Middle East Regional Program (OMEP), which began in 1950, promotes Arab Israeli cooperation over boundary issues and water usage. These programs are exactly what the U.S. government should be concerning itself with: the safety and care of the people affected by this conflict. (Sharp, U.S. Foreign Assistance to the Middle East, 2010)

Many of these people are refugees who were forced by the war to flee their homes. The war resulted in thousands of Palestinian refugees who fled from Israel. Some have waited years to be allowed back to their lands, and now hope that their children or grandchildren might one day return to the farms and villages that their ancestors once called home. Since the war two Palestinian territories have been established, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Palestinians in these areas are living under oppressive Israeli Military Occupation, but we rarely hear about the sufferings of the Palestinians on the news (Gold).

The media favors Israel just as much as congress does. Tom Fenton of Global Post says, "A group of American college students was asked, 'Who is occupying the occupied territories and what nationality are the settlers?' Fairly simple questions, but only twenty-nine percent knew the correct answers." The American Israeli Public Affairs Committee, or AIPAC, has a lot of control over what the media publishes. New York Times is especially influenced by this (Fenton).

Not only Congress and the media support Israel, but many U.S. Christians, particularly Evangelical Christians, do as well. Christians United for Israel, started in 2006, is, according to their website, “a national organization dedicated to giving Christians an opportunity to speak with one voice in support of Israel.” These Christians believe that Jewish people have a right to the land of Israel (Christians United for Israel). Something these Christians often overlook is the existence of Palestinian Christians. They forget that not all Palestinians are Muslim; at one time both Christians and Jews lived there as well, but many have fled. According to Abe W. Ata, a Palestinian Christian, the reason for so many emigrants is that they have given up hope of safety. She asks, “Why do American Christians stand by while their leaders advocate the expulsion of fellow Christians?” This point of view is further expressed in the letter received by MCC from several Palestinian Church leaders. MCC representative Darryl Byler says, “The document reflects the sense of isolation the Christian leaders feel as they remind the global church community that the mission of the church is to walk in solidarity with oppressed people around the world.” This letter is a reminder that the Mennonite church needs to do whatever it can to help resolve the Palestinian Israeli conflict in a peaceful way (Terichow).

MCC has been very involved with the Palestinian Church. They have a team of six dedicated people placed in Palestine, as well as partnership with seventeen different Palestinian organizations (Our Team). These organizations deal with everything from the rights of refugees and Palestinians to developing plans for water rights and land rights. Bethlehem Bible College trains future Church leaders for Arab countries (Bethlehem Bible College). The Latin Patriarchate School of Zababdeh organization promotes Christian education in and around The Holy Land. According to their website, the Palestinian Center for Rapprochement “works to bridge the gap between Palestinians and peoples from all around the world, informing the public

about the reality in Palestine, and empowering the community through nonviolent direct action,” (The Palestinian Center for Rapprochement Between People). These organizations are all dedicated to nonviolence and Christian theology.

What we must keep in mind throughout this conflict is that whether they are Palestinian or Israeli, Muslim, Christian, or Jewish, they are all people and have the same needs as people everywhere have. Our job is to make sure these people have the ability to fill those needs and live in safety rather than under the constant threat of violence.

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