1972 Munich Games and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflicts

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One of the world’s most unpleasant conflicts is represented between Israel and Palestine. The conflict started as early as the 1800s and still continues today. Israeli and Palestinian conflicts have such a long history due the disputes over religion and territory. The conflicts initially started when Palestine land and traditions became threatened by Israel. Israel became a threat because of the Zionism movement of the 19th-century. It was their way of reviving the Jewish identity, while also forming their own Jewish state. Unfortunately, for the Palestinians they occupied the land that the Israelis wanted to call their home. The Zionism movement called for Zionist immigration to Palestine in effort to establish a Jewish homeland. “At first, this immigration created no problems. However, as more and more Zionists immigrated to Palestine – many with the express wish of taking over the land for a Jewish state – the indigenous population became increasingly alarmed” (A Synopsis of the Israel/Palestine Conflict). The constant movement of Zionist into Palestine eventually led to the Israelis gaining the Jewish state they wanted. In 1947 the United Nations partitioned 50% of Palestine into a Jewish state. Arabs did not agree with the idea and began to rebel against the situation occurring on their land.

The declaration of the Jewish state in Palestine created enormous tension causing a war to break out from 1947 to 1949. Arab nations entered the war with the intensions of breaking down the newly established state of Israel. However, Arab armies were not the successors in the war. Israel emerged from the war with a victory establishing their arrival on Palestine land. Another thing to take notice as a result of the Israeli victory is the additional land they conquered. “By the end of the war, Israel had conquered 78 percent of Palestine” (A Synopsis of the Israel/Palestine Conflict). After victory Israel controlled western Galilee and more than half of Palestine, which pretty much put them in control of Palestine land. In result 750, 000 Palestinians either fled or were made refugees near Israel’s border. Despite conquering more than half of Palestine, Israel did not stop there in terms of war efforts. In 1967 Israel defeated the military forces of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. Israel did so over a span of six days in what is known as the Six Day War. “Following the Six Day War, in which Israeli forces launched a highly successful surprise attack on Egypt, Israel occupied the final 22% of Palestine that had eluded it in 1948 – the West Bank and Gaza Strip” (A Synopsis of the Israel/Palestine Conflict). After fighting a second war the Israel State was more prominent than ever. Israel eventually entered negotiations with the UN to establish peace and justice in the Middle East. Unfortunately the peace did not last long and the violence continued.

The Palestinians eventually had enough of the violence and formed the Palestinian Liberation Group (PLO). It was formed in 1964with the goal of getting Palestine back to its independent state by destroying the Israel state. After the Six Day War in 1967, Yasir Arafat became chairman and took advantage allowing him to gain power within the PLO. Arafat and the PLO formed terrorist organization and used terrorist attack to further their goal. The goal consisted of killing Jews while also bringing their struggle to the light with devastating statements. One of the most popular groups associated with the PLO was the Black September. The Black September group was responsible for one of the most horrific terrorist attacks in history during the summer of 1972. According to Montague (2012) “I'm proud of what I did in Munich because it helped the Palestinian cause enormously ... Before Munich the world had no idea about our struggle. But on that day the word Palestine was repeated all over the world”

Both the Middle East and the sports industry experienced one of the worst days in history at the same time. The tragic day occurred over 40 years ago in Munich, Germany during the 20th Olympiad. It was the first time the Olympic Games had been held in Germany since 1936. Coincidentally, the first time the games returned to Germany the 20th Olympiad would always be known as the Munich Massacre. The events that gave the Munich Olympics its name occurred on September 5th, 1972 around 4:30 in the morning. Initially the games were supposed to provide a sense of relief for the Germans and the Middle East from the troubled tension caused by the World War II and Adolf Hitler during the Holocaust. However, all hope for relief was lost after the dreadful day of September 5th of 1972.

On September 5th eight Palestinian terrorists belonging to a PLO group called Black September invaded Olympic Village during the second week of the Munich Games. “The Palestinians were led by Luttif Afif (“Issa”), his deputy Yusuf Nazzal (“Tony”), and junior members Afif Ahmed Hamid (“Paolo”), Khalid Jawad (“Salah”), Ahmed Chic Thaa (“Abu Halla”), Mohammed Safady (“Badran”), Adnan Al-Gashey (“Denawi”), and his cousin Jamal Al-Gashey (“Samir”) (Munich Olympic Massacre, 2013). The terrorist eventually made their way into the building where members of the Israel Olympic team were being housed. After climbing a six-foot six-inch fence that surrounded the Olympic Village the terrorist proceeded to take nine Israeli athletes after killing two. Among those murdered were wrestling Coach Moshe Weinberg and weightlifter Yossef Romano. After the terrorist had taken the hostages they announced that they were Palestinians and later began to give their demands. “The terrorists then dropped a list of their demands out the window; they wanted 234 prisoners released from Israeli prisons and two from German prisons by 9 a.m” (Rosenberg, n.d.) By this time the news of the terrorist attack had already begun to spread around the rest of the world. ”Olympic events were suspended, and broadcasters filled the time on expensive new satellite connections by switching to live footage from Connollystrasse. A TV audience of 900 million viewers in more than 100 countries watched with lurid fascination. (Munich Olympic Massacre, 2013). With the Olympics being at the center of attention the devastating attack was now in the spotlight on the main stage.

According to Morrison (2007) “After a day of unsuccessful negotiations, the terrorists collected the hostages and headed for the military airport in Munich for a flight back to the Middle East.” Despite the hostages crisis being at the world’s forefront neither side was able to reach a successful negotiation to put the situation at ease. The terrorist refused to renege on their initial demands, while Israel refused to release any prisoners locked away in their prisons. When the terrorist realizes that their demands were not going to bet met they went for an alternative plan. They established a plan that would have them and the hostages flown from Firstenfeldbruck to Cairo, Egypt. When setting up this plan the terrorist were hoping to get back to their home land to have a locale help have their initial demands met. German officials went along with the plan, but they realized that they couldn’t let the terrorist leave Germany with the hostages. In an attempt to stop the terrorist German officials came up with their own plan called Operation Sunshine. It was set to take place as the terrorists and hostages arrived at the airport. The plan that the Germans carried out did not turn out to be a great success… “In the course of the transfer, the Germans discovered that there were eight terrorists instead of the five they expected and realized that they had not assigned enough marksmen to carry out the plan to kill the terrorists at the airport” (Munich Olympic Massacre, 2013). German sharpshooters attempted to kill the terrorist causing a gun battle to ensue from their tactics. As a result five of the eight terrorist were killed along with one policeman, while all the hostages were murdered. At 3 a.m., a drawn and teary-eyed Jim McKay, who had been reporting the drama throughout the day as part of ABC's Olympic coverage, announced: “They're all gone” (Munich Olympic Massacre, 2013). They were either shot to death in one helicopter or blown up by surviving terrorist in another helicopter.

In spite of experiencing one of the worst international terror attacks and a world of pain the Olympics did not come to an end. It was delayed for a pivotal 24 hours, but never cancelled. During that day the Munich Games massacre and the victims involved were acknowledged in a memorial service held at the main Olympic stadium. The IOC president, whom was Avery Brundage demanded that the games continue. His goal was to show that the Palestinians and the terrorists did not win. The decision to go on with the Munich Olympics after the tragic attack was one of the most controversial decisions in history. However, the continuance of the Munich Games brought about great achievements as it finished up.

The three terrorists that were not killed were captured and taken into custody. However, less than two months later they were released about a month later when a jet was hijacked by other Black September members demanding the Munich killers be released.

After the hijacking the Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir started the secret operation known as “Wrath of God.” The goal of the secret operation was to kill those who were responsible for the killing of the victims in the Munich Olympics. “Over the next 20 years Israeli agents killed dozens of Palestinians. They hid landmines under car seats, devised ingenious bombs, and claim to have found and killed two of the three terrorist survivors of Munich” (Munich Olympic Massacre, 2013). The operation Wrath of God created even more violence and conflict between Israel and Palestine because they felt obligated to respond.

In other words it seems as if it is inevitable to avoid confrontation between Israel and Palestine. Seeing that the conflict has a long history each side has played a part in preventing a solution. When the Jews prepared the Zionism movement they did not consider what the results could be over time. Israel moved into Palestine land without hesitation or fear causing the movement to become a takeover. Palestine was already established, but Israel basically pushed them to the back creating a future of problems for both. The wars Israel engaged in did not help the situation that was building in the Middle East. While Israel were winning wars and conquering land it seemed like it all was happening for a good cause. However, that does not seem to be the case after the way things have unraveled in the past. Then again their dominance may be the only thing that matters to them.

Whether the dominance of Israel over Palestine in the Middle East is the only thing that matters or not, it seem to be a good argument that their conflicts were the reason for The Munich Massacre. After Israel conquered the Palestine state it degraded Palestine in the Middle East. The reason being is they did not have the land or opportunities that made them independent before the Zionism movement took place. As a result Palestine grew tired over time and figured out ways to retaliate. That is what lead them to create the Palestine Liberation Organization. By creating a Palestinian organization it allowed them the chance to fight for an independent Palestinian state that they once had. Even if they couldn’t do exactly that they could at least destroy those who caused a struggle for them in the process. Therefore, Palestine created terror groups to get back at the Israelis in other words. After all the years of struggling due to the conflicts with Israel one of those groups took the main stage in 1972 at the Munich Olympic Games.

All in all, I understand why the events at the 1972 Olympics in Munich, Germany occurred. It was the Palestinians opportunity to make the whole world feel the pain and struggle they faced for multiple decades. What was a better situation then having Israel on the main stage in Germany for the first time since the holocaust? It was a defining time for Israel and their member because the Munich Games represented a new beginning in the Middle East. The Israel delegation had the chance to stand tall in front of the world after being at the mercy of Adolf Hitler during World War II. The Palestinians saw a golden opportunity to make their presence felt and carried out one of the worst attacks until this day

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