



Conflicts in the Middle East

MAIN IDEA

POWER AND AUTHORITY

Division of Palestine after World War II made the Middle East a hotbed of competing nationalist movements.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Conflicts in the Middle East threaten the stability of the world today.

TERMS & NAMES

- Anwar Sadat
- Golda Meir
- PLO
- Yasir Arafat
- Camp David Accords
- intifada
- Oslo Peace Accords

SETTING THE STAGE In the years following World War II, the Jewish people won what for so long had eluded them: their own state. The gaining of their homeland along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, however, came at a heavy price. A Jewish state was unwelcome in this mostly Arab region, and the resulting hostility led to a series of wars. Perhaps no Arab people, however, have been more opposed to a Jewish state than the Palestinians, who claim that much of the Jewish land belongs to them.

Israel Becomes a State

The land called Palestine now consists of Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. To Jews, their claim to the land dates back 3,000 years, when Jewish kings ruled the region from Jerusalem. To Palestinians (both Muslim and Christian), the land has belonged to them since the Jews were driven out around A.D. 135. To Arabs, the land has belonged to them since their conquest of the area in the 7th century.

After being forced out of Palestine during the second century, the Jewish people were not able to establish their own state and lived in different countries throughout the world. The global dispersal of the Jews is known as the Diaspora. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a group of Jews began returning to the region their ancestors had fled so long ago. They were known as Zionists, people who favored a Jewish national homeland in Palestine. At this time, Palestine was still part of the Ottoman Empire, ruled by Islamic Turks. After the defeat of the Ottomans in World War I, the League of Nations asked Britain to oversee Palestine until it was ready for independence.

By this time, the Jews had become a growing presence in Palestine, and were already pressing for their own nation in the territory. The Arabs living in the region strongly opposed such a move. In a 1917 letter to Zionist leaders, British Foreign Secretary Sir Arthur Balfour promoted the idea of creating a Jewish homeland in Palestine while protecting the “rights of existing non-Jewish communities.” Despite the Balfour Declaration, however, efforts to create a Jewish state failed—and hostility between Palestinian Arabs and Jews continued to grow.

At the end of World War II, the United Nations took action. In 1947, the UN General Assembly voted to partition Palestine into an Arab Palestinian state and

a Jewish state. Jerusalem was to be an international city owned by neither side. The terms of the partition gave Jews 55 percent of the area even though they made up only 34 percent of the population. In the wake of the war and the Holocaust, the United States and many European nations felt great sympathy for the Jews.

All of the Islamic countries voted against partition, and the Palestinians rejected it outright. They argued that the UN did not have the right to partition a territory without considering the wishes of the majority of its people. Finally, the date was set for the formation of Israel, May 14, 1948. On that date, David Ben Gurion, long-time leader of the Jews residing in Palestine, announced the creation of an independent Israel. **A**

Israel and Arab States in Conflict

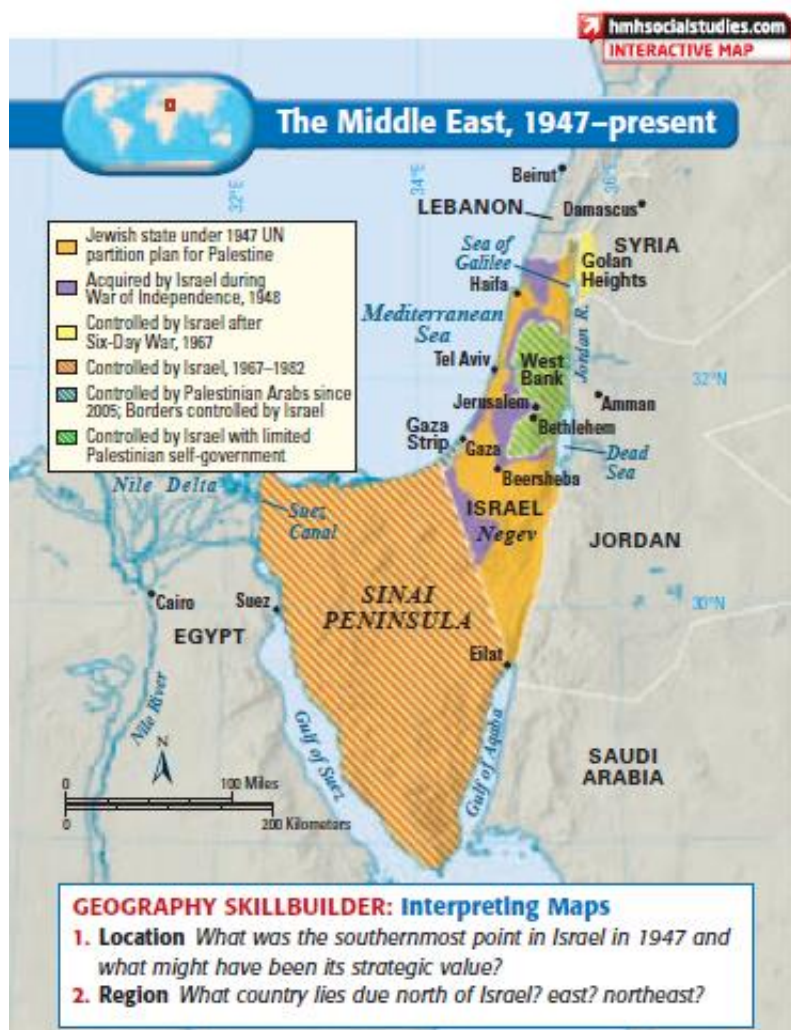
The new nation of Israel got a hostile greeting from its neighbors. The day after it proclaimed itself a state, six Islamic states—Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Syria—invaded Israel. The first of many Arab-Israeli wars, this one ended within months in a victory for Israel. Full-scale war broke out again in 1956, 1967, and 1973. Because of Arab-Israeli tensions, several hundred thousand Jews living in Arab lands moved to Israel.

Largely as a result of this fighting, the state that the UN had set aside for Arabs never came into being. Israel seized half the land in the 1948–1949 fighting. While the fighting raged, at least 600,000 Palestinians fled, migrating from the areas under Israeli control. They settled in UN-sponsored refugee camps that ringed the borders of their former homeland. Meanwhile, various Arab nations seized other Palestinian lands. Egypt took control of the Gaza Strip, while Jordan annexed the

West Bank of the Jordan River. (See the map at left.)

The 1956 Suez Crisis The second Arab-Israeli war followed in 1956. That year, Egypt seized control of the Suez Canal, which ran along Egypt's eastern border between the Gulf of Suez and the Mediterranean Sea. Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser sent in troops to take the canal, which was controlled by British interests. The military action was prompted in large part by Nasser's anger over the loss of U.S. and British financial support for the building of Egypt's Aswan Dam.

Outraged, the British made an agreement with France and Israel to retake the canal. With air support provided by their European allies, the Israelis marched on the Suez Canal and quickly defeated the Egyptians. However, pressure from the world community, including the United States and the Soviet Union, forced Israel and the Europeans to



withdraw from Egypt. This left Egypt in charge of the canal and thus ended the Suez Crisis.

Arab-Israeli Wars Continue Tensions between Israel and the Arab states began to build again in the years following the resolution of the Suez Crisis. By early 1967, Nasser and his Arab allies, equipped with Soviet tanks and aircraft, felt ready to confront Israel. “We are eager for battle in order to force the enemy to awake from his dreams,” Nasser announced, “and meet Arab reality face to face.” He moved to close off the Gulf of Aqaba, Israel’s outlet to the Red Sea.

Soon after the strikes on Arab airfields began, the Israelis struck airfields in Egypt, Iran, Jordan, and Syria. Safe from air attack, Israeli ground forces struck like lightning on three fronts. Israel defeated the Arab states in what became known as the Six-Day War, because it was over in six days. Israel lost 800 troops in the fighting, while Arab losses exceeded 15,000.

As a consequence of the Six-Day War, Israel gained control of the old city of Jerusalem, the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, and the West Bank. Israelis saw these new holdings along their southern, eastern, and western borders as a key buffer zone against further Arab attacks. Arabs who lived in Jerusalem were given the choice of Israeli or Jordanian citizenship. Most chose the latter. People who lived in the other areas were not offered Israeli citizenship and simply came under Jewish control.

A fourth Arab-Israeli conflict erupted in October 1973. Nasser’s successor, Egyptian president **Anwar Sadat** (AHN•wahr suh•DAT), planned a joint Arab attack on the date of Yom Kippur, the holiest of Jewish holidays. This time the Israelis were caught by surprise. Arab forces inflicted heavy casualties and recaptured some of the territory lost in 1967. The Israelis, under their prime minister, **Golda Meir** (MY•uhr), launched a counterattack and regained most of the lost territory. Both sides agreed to a truce after several weeks of fighting, and the Yom Kippur war came to an end. **B**

The Palestine Liberation Organization As Israel and its Arab neighbors battled each other, Arab Palestinians struggled for recognition. While the United Nations had granted the Palestinians their own homeland, the Israelis had seized much of that land, including the West Bank and Gaza Strip, during its various wars. Israel insisted that such a move was vital to its national security.

In 1964, Palestinian officials formed the Palestine Liberation Organization (**PLO**) to push for the formation of an Arab Palestinian state that would include land claimed by Israel. Originally, the PLO was an umbrella organization made up of different groups—laborers, teachers, lawyers, and guerrilla fighters. Soon, guerrilla groups came to dominate the organization and insisted that the only way to achieve their goal was through armed struggle. In 1969 **Yasir Arafat** (YAH•sur AR•uh•FAT) became chairman of the PLO. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s the group carried out numerous terrorist attacks against Israel. Some of Israel’s Arab neighbors supported the PLO’s goals by allowing PLO guerrillas to operate from their lands.

History Makers



Golda Meir
1898–1978

Meir was born in Kiev, Russia, but grew up in the American Heartland. Although a skilled carpenter, Meir’s father could not find enough work in Kiev. So he sold his tools and other belongings and moved his family to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Meir would spend more than a decade in the United States before moving to Palestine.

The future Israeli prime minister exhibited strong leadership qualities early on. When she learned that many of her fellow fourth grade classmates could not afford textbooks, she created the American Young Sisters Society, an organization that succeeded in raising the necessary funds.

> Analyzing Primary Sources

The Palestinian View

Writer Fawaz Turki articulates the view held by many of his fellow Palestinians—that the Israelis are illegal occupiers of Palestinian land.

PRIMARY SOURCE

These people have walked off with our home and homeland, with our movable and immovable property, with our land, our farms, our shops, our public buildings, our paved roads, our cars, our theaters, our clubs, our parks, our furniture, our tricycles. They hounded us out of ancestral patrimony [land] and shoved us in refugee camps. . . . Now they were astride the whole of historic Palestine and then some, jubilant at the new role as latter day colonial overlords.

FAWAZ TURKI, quoted in *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*

The Israeli View

Many Israelis, including former Israeli General Abraham Tamir, feel that controlling the disputed lands is vital to their security.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Since the establishment of the State of Israel, its national security policy has been designed to defend its existence, integrity and security, and not for expansionist territorial aspirations. Hence, if Arab confrontation states did not initiate wars against Israel or pose threats to its existence, then Israel would not start a war . . . to extend its territories . . . Our national security policy created from its very beginning the linkage between Israel's political willingness for peace and Israel's military capability to repel aggression of any kind and scale.

ABRAHAM TAMIR, quoted in *From War to Peace*

DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS

1. **Analyzing Issues** Why does Fawaz Turki refer to the Israelis as colonizers?
2. **Drawing Conclusions** What might be the best way for the Palestinians to regain control of their land, according to Abraham Tamir?

Efforts at Peace

In November 1977, just four years after the Yom Kippur war, Anwar Sadat stunned the world by extending a hand to Israel. No Arab country up to this point had recognized Israel's right to exist. In a dramatic gesture, Sadat went before the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, and invited his one-time enemies to join him in a quest for peace.




PRIMARY SOURCE

Today, through my visit to you, I ask you why don't we stretch our hands with faith and sincerity and so that together we might . . . remove all suspicion of fear, betrayal, and bad intention? Why don't we stand together with the courage of men and the boldness of heroes who dedicate themselves to a sublime [supreme] aim? Why don't we stand together with the same courage and daring to erect a huge edifice [building] of peace? An edifice that . . . serves as a beacon for generations to come with the human message for construction, development, and the dignity of man.

ANWAR SADAT, Knesset speech, November 20, 1977

Sadat emphasized that in exchange for peace Israel would have to recognize the rights of Palestinians. Furthermore, it would have to withdraw from territory seized in 1967 from Egypt, Jordan, and Syria.

U.S. president Jimmy Carter recognized that Sadat had created a historic opportunity for peace. In 1978, Carter invited Sadat and Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin (mehn•AHK•hehm BAY•gihn) to Camp David, the presidential retreat in rural Maryland. Isolated from the press and from domestic political pressures, Sadat and Begin worked to reach an agreement. After 13 days of negotiations, Carter triumphantly announced that Egypt recognized Israel as a legitimate state. In exchange, Israel agreed to return the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt. Signed in 1979, the **Camp David Accords** ended 30 years of hostilities between Egypt and Israel and became the first signed agreement between Israel and an Arab country.

While world leaders praised Sadat, his peace initiative enraged many Arab countries. In 1981, a group of Muslim extremists assassinated him. However, Egypt's new leader, Hosni Mubarak (HAHS•nee moo•BAHR•uhk), has worked to maintain peace with Israel. 

Israeli-Palestinian Tensions Increase One Arab group that continued to clash with the Israelis was the Palestinians, a large number of whom lived in the West Bank and Gaza Strip—lands controlled by Israel. During the 1970s and 1980s, the military wing of the PLO conducted a campaign against Israel. Israel responded forcefully, bombing suspected rebel bases in Palestinian towns. In 1982, the Israeli army invaded Lebanon in an attempt to destroy strongholds in Palestinian villages. The Israelis became involved in Lebanon's civil war and were forced to withdraw.

In 1987, Palestinians began to express their frustrations in a widespread campaign of civil disobedience called the **intifada**, or “uprising.” The intifada took the form of boycotts, demonstrations, attacks on Israeli soldiers, and rock throwing by unarmed teenagers. The intifada continued into the 1990s, with little progress made toward a solution. However, the civil disobedience affected world opinion, which, in turn, put pressure on Israel to seek negotiations with the Palestinians. Finally, in October 1991, Israeli and Palestinian delegates met for a series of peace talks.

The Oslo Peace Accords Negotiations between the two sides made little progress, as the status of the Palestinian territories proved to be a bitterly divisive issue. In 1993, however, secret talks held in Oslo, Norway, produced a surprise agreement: a document called the Declaration of Principles, also known as the **Oslo Peace Accords**. Israel, under the leadership of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (YIHTS•hahk rah•BEEN), agreed to grant the Palestinians self-rule in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, beginning with the town of Jericho. Rabin and Arafat signed the agreement on September 13, 1993.

The difficulty of making the agreement work was demonstrated by the assassination of Rabin in 1995. He was killed by a right-wing Jewish extremist who opposed concessions to the Palestinians. Rabin was succeeded as prime minister by Benjamin Netanyahu (neh•tan•YAH•hoo), who had opposed the Oslo Accords. Still, Netanyahu made efforts to keep to the agreement. In January 1997, Netanyahu met with Arafat to work out plans for a partial Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank.

The Israeli–Palestinian Struggle

1947 UN votes to partition Palestine into a Jewish and a Palestinian Arab state.

1949 Israel repels attack by Arab states and controls most of the territory of Palestine except the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

1967 Israel wins Six-Day War and control of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, Golan Heights, Gaza Strip, and Sinai.

1987 Palestinians intensify their resistance with start of intifada movement (see below).

1993 Israel agrees to withdraw from several Palestinian regions and the Palestinian Authority recognizes Israel as a state in historic Oslo Peace Accords.



2000 Israeli leader Ariel Sharon visits the Temple Mount; Palestinians launch the second intifada.

Peace Slips Away

In 1999, the slow and difficult peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians seemed to get a boost. Ehud Barak won election as Israeli prime minister. Many observers viewed him as a much stronger supporter of the peace plan than Netanyahu had been. The world community, led by the United States, was determined to take advantage of such a development.

In July of 2000, U.S. president Bill Clinton hosted a 15-day summit meeting at Camp David between Ehud Barak and Yasir Arafat. The two men, however, could not reach a compromise, and the peace plan once again stalled. Just two months later, Israeli political leader Ariel Sharon visited Jerusalem's Temple Mount, a site holy to both Jews and Muslims. The next day, the Voice of Palestine, the Palestinian Authority's official radio station, called upon Palestinians to protest the visit. Riots broke out in Jerusalem and the West Bank, and a second intifada, sometimes called the Al-Aqsa intifada, was launched.

The Conflict Intensifies The second intifada began much like the first with demonstrations, attacks on Israeli soldiers, and rock throwing by unarmed teenagers. But this time the Palestinian militant groups increasingly used suicide bombers. Their attacks on Jewish settlements in occupied territories and on civilian locations throughout Israel significantly raised the level of bloodshed. As the second intifada continued through 2007, thousands of Israelis and Palestinians had died in the conflict.

In response to the uprising, Israeli forces moved into Palestinian refugee camps and clamped down on terrorists. Troops destroyed buildings in which they suspected extremists were hiding and bulldozed entire areas of Palestinian towns and camps. The Israeli army bombed Arafat's headquarters, trapping him inside his compound for many days.

Arab-Israeli relations did not improve with Israel's next prime minister, Ariel Sharon. Sharon, a former military leader, refused to negotiate with the Palestinians until attacks on Israelis stopped. Eventually, under intense pressure from the world community, Arafat agreed to take a less prominent role in peace talks.

In early 2003, the Palestinian Authority appointed its first-ever prime minister, PLO official Mahmoud Abbas. Shortly afterward, U.S. president George W. Bush brought together Sharon and Abbas to begin working on a new peace plan known as the "road map." But violence increased again in 2003, and talks stalled.

Shifting Power and Alliances In the summer of 2005, Israel unilaterally evacuated all its settlers and military from the Gaza Strip. Then in 2006, Hamas, a militant terrorist group intent on replacing Israel with an Islamic state, won majority control in Palestinian Authority elections.

Israel refused to recognize the new Hamas government. Instead, in August 2007, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert began a series of formal talks with Mahmoud Abbas. In 2010, indirect talks resumed between Abbas and Olmert's successor, Benjamin Netanyahu. U.S. envoy George Mitchell acted as go-between, shuttling between the two leaders, but little progress had been made by mid-year.



▲ A U.S. magazine cover highlights America's involvement in the Middle East crisis.