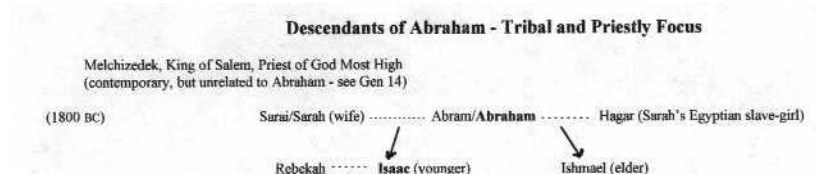


## Unit 17.5: Israel & the Middle East



The conflict between **Palestinian Arabs** and **Jews** is a modern phenomenon, which began around the turn of the 20th century. Although these two groups have

different religions (Palestinians include Muslims, Christians and Druze), religious differences are not the cause of the conflict. It is essentially a struggle over land. Until 1948, the area that both groups claimed was known internationally as **Palestine**. But following the war of 1948-49, this land was divided into three parts: the state of Israel, the West Bank (of the Jordan River) and the Gaza Strip.

Jewish claims to this land are based on God's Biblical promise to **Abraham** and his descendants through **Isaac**, on the fact that this was the historical site of the Jewish kingdom of Israel (which was destroyed by the Roman Empire), and on Jews' need for a haven from European anti-Semitism. Palestinian Arabs' claims to the land are based on continuous residence in the country for hundreds of years and the fact that they represented the demographic majority. They reject the notion that a Biblical-era kingdom constitutes the basis for a valid modern claim. If Arabs engage the biblical argument at all, they maintain that since Abraham's son **Ishmael** is the forefather of the Arabs, and then God's promise of the land to the children of Abraham includes Arabs as well. They do not believe that they should forfeit their land to compensate Jews for Europe's crimes against them.

Because Jews were spread across the world (in **Diaspora**), their national movement, **Zionism**, entailed the identification of a place where Jews could come together through the process of immigration and settlement. Palestine seemed the logical and optimal place, since this was the site of Jewish origin. The Zionist movement began in 1882 with the first wave of European Jewish immigration to Palestine.

By the outbreak of World War I (1914), the population of Jews in Palestine had risen to about 60,000, about 33,000 of whom were recent settlers. The Arab population in 1914 was 683,000. In 1917, the British Foreign Minister, Lord Arthur Balfour, issued a declaration (**the Balfour Declaration**) announcing his government's support for the establishment of "a Jewish national home in Palestine." Palestinian Arabs opposed the British Mandate because it thwarted their aspirations for self-rule, and opposed massive Jewish immigration because it threatened their position.

Foreign Office.  
November 2nd, 1917

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet.

"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object. It being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country"

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

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Prior to World War II there were several conflicts between the Palestinian Arabs and Jews regarding settlement of lands and the holy site of the **Wailing Wall**, the sole remnant of the **second Jewish Temple** and one of the holiest sites for the Jewish people. But this site is also holy to Muslims, since the Wailing Wall is adjacent to the **Temple Mount** (the Noble Sanctuary in the Muslim tradition). On the mount is the site of the **al-Aqsa Mosque** and the **Dome of the Rock**, believed by Muslims to mark the spot from which the **Prophet Muhammad** ascended to heaven on a winged horse.

The British had crushed an Arab revolt, caused by resentment of Jewish settlement, from 1936—1939. They issued a White Paper (a statement of political policy) limiting future Jewish immigration and land purchases to keep the peace in Palestine. The Zionists regarded this as a betrayal of the Balfour Declaration and a particularly egregious act in light of the desperate situation of the Jews in Europe, who were facing extermination by the Nazis. The 1939 White Paper marked the end of the British-Zionist alliance.

Zionism gained adherents among Jews and support from the West as a consequence of the murder the Nazi genocide (mass murder) of European Jews during World War II, and this disaster enhanced international support for the creation of a Jewish state.

Following World War II, escalating hostilities between Arabs and Jews over the fate of Palestine and between the Jewish militias and the British army compelled Britain to relinquish its mandate over Palestine. The British requested that the recently established **United Nations** determine the future of Palestine.

A UN-appointed committee of representatives from various countries went to Palestine to investigate the situation. Although members of this committee disagreed on the form that a political resolution should take, there was general agreement that the country would have to be divided in order to satisfy the needs and demands of both Jews and Palestinian Arabs. At the end of 1946, 1,269,000 Arabs and 608,000 Jews resided within the borders of Mandate Palestine.

On November 29, 1947, the UN General Assembly voted to **partition** Palestine into two states, one Jewish and the other Arab. The UN partition plan divided the country in such a way that each state would have a majority of its own population, although some Jewish settlements would fall within the proposed Palestinian state and many Palestinians would become part of the proposed Jewish state.



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The territory designated to the Jewish state would be slightly larger than the Palestinian state (56 percent and 43 percent of Palestine, respectively) on the assumption that increasing numbers of Jews would immigrate there. According to the UN partition plan, the area of Jerusalem and Bethlehem was to become an **international zone**.

The Palestinian Arabs and the surrounding Arab states rejected the UN plan, regarding the General Assembly vote as an international betrayal, and attacked. Fighting began between the Arab and Jewish residents of Palestine days after the adoption of the UN partition plan. The Arab military forces were poorly organized, trained and armed. In contrast, Jewish military forces, although numerically smaller, were well organized, trained and armed. By the spring of 1948, the Jewish forces had secured control over most of the territory allotted to the Jewish state in the UN plan.

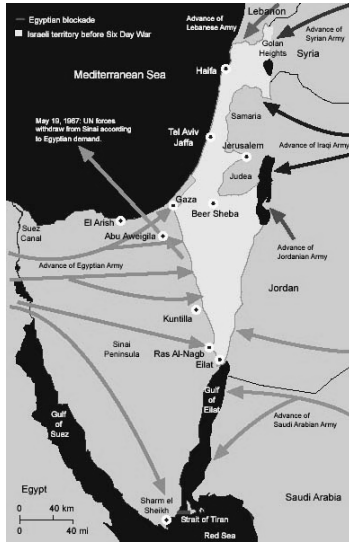
On May 15, 1948, the British evacuated Palestine, and Jewish leaders proclaimed the state of **Israel** (Above). Neighboring Arab states (Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq) then invaded Israel claiming that they sought to “save” Palestine from the Zionists. In fact, the Arab rulers had territorial designs on Palestine and were no more anxious to see a Palestinian Arab state emerge than a Jewish one. During May and June 1948, when the fighting was most intense, the outcome of this **First Arab-Israeli War** was in doubt. But after arms shipments from Czechoslovakia reached Israel, its armed forces established superiority and conquered territories beyond the UN partition plan borders of the Jewish state.

In 1949, the war between Israel and the Arab states ended with the signing of armistice agreements. The country once known as Palestine was now divided into three parts, each under separate political control. The State of Israel encompassed over 77 percent of the territory. Jordan occupied East Jerusalem and the hill country of central Palestine (the West Bank). Egypt took control of the coastal plain around the city of Gaza (the Gaza Strip). The Palestinian Arab state envisioned by the UN partition plan was never established.

As a consequence of the fighting in Palestine/Israel between 1947 and 1949, over 700,000 Palestinian Arabs became refugees. The precise number of refugees and questions of responsibility for their exodus are sharply disputed. After 1949, although there was an armistice between Israel and the Arab states, the conflict continued and the region remained imperiled by the prospect of another war.

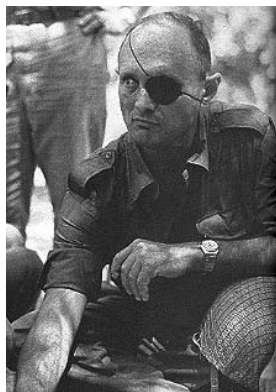


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In the spring of 1967, the Soviet Union misinformed the Syrian government that Israeli forces were massing in northern Israel to attack Syria. There was no such Israeli mobilization. But clashes between Israel and Syria had been escalating for about a year, and Israeli leaders had publicly declared that it might be necessary to bring down the Syrian regime if it failed to end Palestinian commando attacks against Israel from Syrian territory.

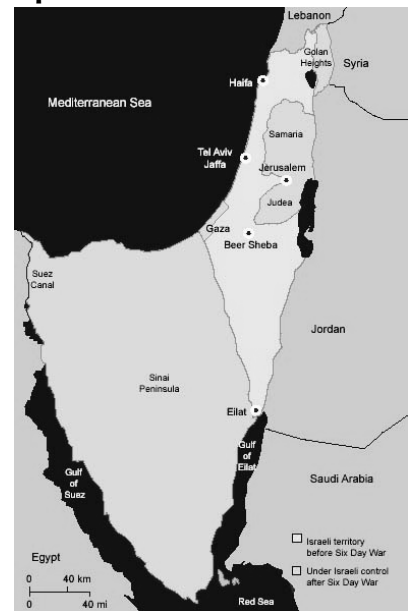
In May 1967 Egyptian, Syrian, and Jordanian troops mobilized with Egyptian forces entering the Sinai Peninsula bordering Israel. A few days later, Egyptian president **Gamal Abdel-Nasser** (1918—1970) demanded the UN observer forces stationed between Israel and Egypt to evacuate their positions. The Egyptians then occupied Sharm al-Shaykh at the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula and proclaimed a blockade of the Israeli port of Eilat on the Gulf of Aqaba, arguing that access to Eilat was through Egyptian territorial waters. These measures were seen as a *casus belli* (just cause) for war by the Israeli government, which believed it was in danger of annihilation without a **preemptive strike** against the planned invasion.



As the military and diplomatic crisis continued, on June 5, 1967 Israel preemptively attacked Egypt and Syria, destroying their air forces on the ground within a few hours. Jordan joined in the fighting belatedly, and consequently was attacked by Israel as well. The Egyptian, Syrian and Jordanian armies were decisively defeated, and Israel captured the **West Bank** from Jordan, the **Gaza Strip** and the **Sinai Peninsula** from Egypt, and the **Golan Heights** from Syria. Israel captured **East Jerusalem** from Jordan and annexed it. It reaffirmed its annexation in 1981.

(Above Israeli Defense Minister General Moshe Dayan)

**The 1967 war**, which lasted only **six days**, established Israel as the dominant regional military power. The speed and thoroughness of Israel's victory discredited the Arab regimes. In contrast, the Palestinian national movement emerged as a major actor after 1967 in the form of the political and military groups that made up the Palestine Liberation Organization (**PLO**) under Yassar Arafat calling for the liquidation of Israel.



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In the 1960s, the PLO's primary base of operations was Jordan. In 1970—71, fighting with the Jordanian army drove the PLO leadership out of the country, forcing it to relocate to Lebanon. When the Lebanese civil war started in 1975, the PLO became a party in the conflict. After the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the PLO leadership was expelled from the country, relocating once more to Tunisia. (Source: The Middle East

Research & Information Project)

The **Yom Kippur War** started with a surprise attack on two fronts from Egypt and Syria began on October 6, 1973, which was Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year for the Jewish people. Egypt's forces swiftly crossed the Suez Canal and overran the Bar-Lev line. Syria moved into the Golan Heights and nearly reached the 1967 border with Israel (overlooking the Hula Basin). Israel was outnumbered in the north nearly 12 to 1 (there were 1,100 Syrian tanks versus 157 Israeli tanks); therefore, the first few days of the war saw Israeli counterattacks fail as Israel suffered hundreds of casualties and lost nearly 150 planes.

The tide of the war began to turn on October 10. The Syrians were pushed back and Israel advanced into Syria proper. The Soviet Union responded by sending airlifts to Damascus and Cairo, which were answered on October 12 and 13 by massive US airlifts to Israel. Israeli forces crossed the Suez Canal and surrounded the Egyptian Third Army on October 21.

The war started an international crisis when the Soviet Union responded to a plea from Egypt to save its Third Army by threatening to send troops to assist Egypt. Henry Kissinger, the US Secretary of State, went to Moscow to negotiate a cease-fire. The result was UN Resolution 338, an immediate cease-fire that reinstated Resolution 242, which "aimed at establishing a just and durable peace in the Middle East". This cease-fire was broken and again the Soviets threatened to intervene. However, the US pressured Israel into accepting a second cease-fire on October 25, 1973.

The war's repercussions were far-reaching. An estimated 8,500 Arab soldiers were killed, and economic losses equaled the GNP for one year. The war also increased the Arabs' dependency on the Soviet Union. Approximately 6,000 Israeli soldiers were killed or wounded in 18 days, and Israel's losses were equivalent to their annual GNP. Internationally, the war emboldened the organization of petroleum exporting countries (**OPEC**) to double its oil prices. The US experienced gasoline shortages because of an **embargo** placed on countries that assisted Israel. The rise in oil prices began a trend of worldwide inflation and a recession in 1974—1975. (Source: The Yom Kippur War edited by: Dana Thompson, researched by: Darlene Duncan, written by: Robin Trautman North Park University)



### Unit 17.5: Israel & the Middle East



A major breakthrough for peace in the region came with the **Camp David Accords** in 1978. This was a direct result of **Anwar Sadat** (1918—1981) visiting Israel on November 19, 1977. Sadat became the first Arab leader to officially visit Israel when he met with Israeli Prime Minister **Menachem Begin** (1913—1992) and spoke before the **Knesset** (Israeli Parliament) in Jerusalem. He made the visit after receiving an invitation from Begin and sought a permanent peace settlement (much of the Arab world was outraged by the visit).

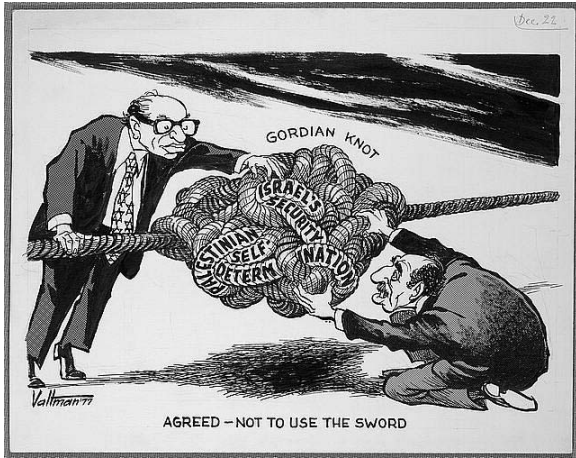
Sadat changed the course of Egyptian foreign policy from leader of **pan-Arab nationalism**, established by his predecessor Nassar, to pursuing Egypt's particular foreign policy interests that had previously been sacrificed for Nassar's vision. President Carter of the United States invited Sadat and Begin to **Camp David** (Presidential retreat in Maryland) to negotiate a settlement. After 12 days of secret negotiations a settlement was reached to return Sinai to Egypt for peace and a framework to negotiate Gaza and the West Bank. 6 months later Egypt signed a peace treaty (a state of war had existed since 1948) with Israel and recognized their existence as the 1<sup>st</sup> Arab nation to do so.

The Palestinians and other Arabs felt betrayed by Sadat. Without Egypt as the most influential and powerful of the Arab states, a united Arab front against Israel disintegrated and directly led to Sadat's assassination in 1981. Important negotiations since include the **Oslo Accords of 1993**, the **Israel—Jordan Peace Treaty of 1994**, and the **Camp David 2000 Summit**. The Oslo Accords and Camp David 2000 Summit have not solved the Palestinian—Israeli conflict. *Intifadas* (Uprisings), terror bombings of Israeli civilians, Palestinian Authority corruption and seeming complicity (Unable of unwilling to stop) with attacks on Israel have left the conflict unresolved. Israeli settlements on Arab claimed areas, incursions into the Palestinian Authority "controlled" territory to strike at the organizers of the bombings, and concrete defensive wall have further complicated the current situation.



During US-brokered negotiations 1999—2000, Israel offered to return most of the **Golan Heights** to Syria in exchange for peace and full recognition. Syria refused. Syria offered full recognition and peace in exchange for a complete return to the pre-1967 borders. Israel refused. In late 2003, **Syrian President Bashar al-Assad** said he was ready to revive peace talks with Israel. Israel demanded from Syria first to disarm **Hizbullah** that launched many attacks on northern Israeli towns and army posts from Syrian and Lebanese territory. Peace talks were not initiated. (Source: Wikipedia)

Unit 17.5: Israel & the Middle East



What does the 1978 political cartoon to the left mean?

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1. What is the essential source of conflict between Palestinians and Jews? \_\_\_\_\_

2. On what Biblical basis do the Jews claim Israel? \_\_\_\_\_

3. On what Biblical basis do the Palestinians claim Palestine? \_\_\_\_\_

4. What is the term for the dispersion of Jews? \_\_\_\_\_

5. What is the sole remnant of the second Jewish Temple? \_\_\_\_\_

6. What do Muslims believe happened at the Dome of the Rock? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Why did the British limit Jewish immigration to Palestine in 1939? \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Unit 17.5: Israel & the Middle East*

8. Who did the British request to establish the future of Palestine after World War II?

\_\_\_\_\_

9. What was the U.N. plan for Palestine in 1947? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

10. How did the Palestinians and other Arabs react to the U.N. plan of 1947? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

11. When was the state of Israel declared? \_\_\_\_\_

12. What became of the Palestinians after losing the 1<sup>st</sup> Arab—Israeli War? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

13. What prompted Israel to make a preemptive strike in May of 1967? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

14. What 4 territories did Israel conquer from the Arabs in the 1967 War?

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

d. \_\_\_\_\_

15. What does PLO stand for, what did they call for regarding Israel, and who was its leader?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_