

MIDDLE EAST CAUCUS
Topic A: Containing the
Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

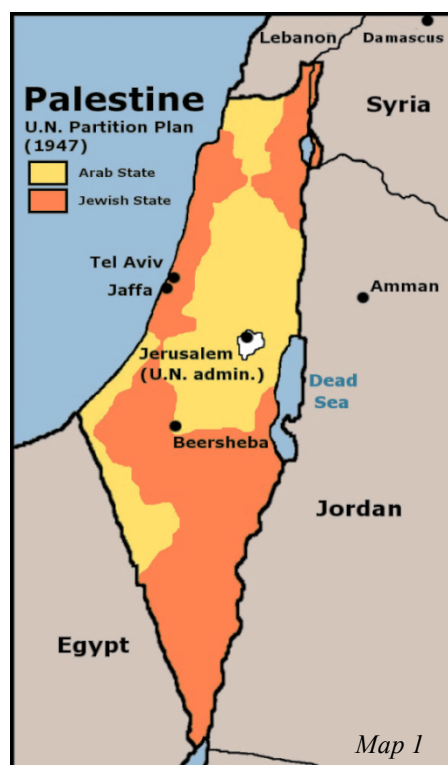
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INDEX

Background Information.....	3
Timeline.....	8
Key Terms.....	10
Guiding Questions.....	11
Further Research.....	12

Background Information

The struggle between Israelis and Palestinians is one of the most enduring and explosive conflicts in the world, and it is rooted on a clash of ideologies. In the aftermath of World War I, the European powers awarded Britain the right to decide Palestine's yet undefined fate. In 1937, desperate to diminish the already turbulent relationship between Jewish and Arabs (which is based on the struggle for possession over the "Holy Land", considered consecrated for both religions) Britain recommended the partition of Palestine into two sovereign states. The Arabs rejected



what they saw as conceding land to yet another colonial power. After World War II and the Holocaust, however, in which an estimated six million Jewish people were killed, the desire for a Jewish country was escalated; Jewish refugees, coming from Europe and Arab lands, streamed into Palestine, intensifying the conflict between both communities. It is important, however, to understand that Jews were already widespread in the region, but they shared an ongoing aspiration to return to what they saw as their rightfully belonging territory, the Holy Land. So in 1948, with the support the United Nations Partition Plan created in 1947, the two sides went to war; Israel fighting for partition, and Palestinians fighting against it.

When the war for partition ended, Gaza was controlled by Egypt and the West Bank, by Jordan. The over 700,000 Palestinians in what was now official Jewish land, Israel, became refugees under Israeli, Egyptian or Jordanian rule. Although these were

encouraged to flee to Palestinian territory, at times they were forcibly evicted by Jewish fighters. Eventually, the area that had been designated as Palestinian territory was conquered by Jordan's Arabian monarchy. Jerusalem was left a war zone and there has not been an independent Palestinian state ever since.



Relations between Israel and its neighboring Arab nations worsened after the Suez Crisis, which destabilized even further the conflict, and there was a growing discontentment with the idea of Israel as a sovereign state. Thus, Arab nations, led by

Egypt and Syria, aligned against Israel in order to obtain the necessary support for a battle against the Jewish state. This political unrest translated into Egypt's sending of troops to the Sinai Peninsula. It was the last straw for the beginning of a second war.

The conflict exploded in June 5th 1967 and in simply 132 hours Israel defeated the Arab military troops and conquered the territories of Jerusalem, Gaza, the Golan Heights and the West Bank. The cease-fire was signed by Egypt and Syria in the 10/7, resulting in the temporary growth of Israel's territory from 20,300 km² to 102,400km², ultimately consolidating the Israeli State in the far from friendly Middle East.

In 1973, Egypt and Syria, unable to regain the territory they had lost in 1967 through diplomatic means, launched offensives against Israel on the Jewish Festival known as Yom Kippur. Hence, the third war between Israelis and Arabs began, the Yom Kippur War. However, it was Israeli forces that pushed on into Syria beyond the Golan Heights, regained territory in Egypt and advanced to the western side of the Suez Canal. The United States, USSR and United Nations all made diplomatic interventions

to promote ceasefire agreements between the rivals, including the passing of Resolution 338 [see Key Terms] in October, by the UN Security Council.

The war left Israel more dependent on the US military, diplomatic and economic support. Moreover, shortly after the war, Saudi Arabia led a petroleum embargo against states that supported Israel, which resulted in steep rises in petroleum prices and fuel shortage all around the world, lasting until March 1974. As a result of Western countries refusal to ship oil into nations which had supported Israel during the Yom Kippur War, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) [See Key Terms] gained great international influence.

In December 1987, the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza began a mass uprising against the Israeli occupation. This uprising, or *intifada* (which means “shaking off” in Arabic), was not started or orchestrated by the PLO [see Key Terms] leadership in Tunis. Rather, it was a popular mobilization that drew on the organizations and institutions that had developed under occupation. The *intifada* activism consisted of many forms of civil disobedience, including demonstrations, strikes and boycotting Israeli products. Israel, in turn, responded with massive arrests and the unrestricted use of force towards demonstrators and Palestinian leaders, ultimately suppressing the popular uprising. The *intifada* had a profound impact in the ongoing conflict for its international recognition and unprecedented regional mobilization, paving the way for the negotiation process in the late 80’s.

In June 1992, with Yitzhak Rabin becoming the Prime Minister of Israel, a period of Israeli-Arab peacemaking was triggered. The Palestinians consented to recognize Israel in return for the beginning of a phased dismantling of Israel's occupation. Negotiations culminated in the signing of the historic Oslo I Accord [see

Key Terms] in 1993, sealed with a historic first handshake between Rabin and Yasser Arafat (PLO Leader).

At this point, the Palestinians took control of Gaza and the West Bank was split between them and Israel. On the surface, things looked mildly positive, until the Hamas [see Key Terms] won elections in 2006, replacing the Fatah power in Palestine. In a much more violent stand, the Hamas refused to recognize Israel as a country and intended to use violence in order to regain what had originally been Palestinian land. Since then, Israel has held Gaza under a blockade.

This year, on June 10th, the murder of three Israeli teenagers, their bodies found in the West Bank, has triggered yet another intense war. Israel conducted a major manhunt in Palestinian territory, alleging that the teenagers had been abducted and murdered by the Hamas. On July 2nd, a Palestinian teenager was found murdered, for which six Israeli police officers were blamed. On July 17th, Israel invaded Gaza with the intent of destroying the tunnels Hamas had built from Gaza into Israel (which were primarily used to allow Hamas to attack Israelis). After several very bloody days of fighting, which left parts of Gaza devastated, Israel withdrew its troops on August 5th. Israel and Hamas attempted peace talks in Cairo, with the Egyptian government mediating the talks. The negotiations, however, crumpled on August 19th, and a day later, war began once more, raising the death toll in Gaza above 2,000 in a single day. Additionally, the current war has been remarkable for the accusation that Hamas is deliberately allowing its civilians to die while Israel has been accused of disproportionately attacking civilians. Until this point of the war, the issue has been called Operation Protective Edge; there were 73 Jews/Israelis killed and 664 wounded along with 2,100 Arabs/Palestinians killed and 11,000 wounded. Furthermore, Israel is using a new technique to protect civilian called the Iron Dome, which is an air defense

system used to intercept and destroy short-range rockets, artillery shells and mortars fired from a distance of up to 45 miles.

So now, both nations are hiding behind the justification that they have a right to defend themselves in order to go on with the conflict. At this point, the war has become much more than a fight over territory, and even over ideology. The situation is subject to “claim and counter-claim, rhetoric and counter-rhetoric, deep division, and entrenched opinion on both sides”.

Timeline

1947 → United Nations Partition Plan (which gave 56.47% of Palestine to the Jewish state and 43.53% to the Arab state)

May 1948 → Establishment of Israel

1956 → Suez Crisis (intensified tensions between Arab states and Israel)

1959 → Clandestine foundation of the Fatah [see Key Terms]

1964 → Formation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) [see Key Terms]

June 1967 → Six-Day-War (Israel seizes Jerusalem, Gaza, the Golan Heights and the West Bank) and the UN issues resolution 242

1973 → Yom Kippur War (Egypt and Syria jointly lost an estimated 8,500 soldiers in the fighting, while Israel lost about 6,000)

1972 → Munich Olympics in 1972 in which 11 Israeli athletes were killed (PLO factions and other militant Palestinian groups had launched a series of attacks on Israel earlier in the 70's also under his leadership)

1974 → Yasser Arafat's first appearance in the UN; he condemned the Zionist project [see Key Terms] and attempted to make the international community recognize their cause.

1977 → Israel, under new leadership, intensified Israeli settlement in Gaza and the West Bank to prevent any future territorial compromise from the land they had capture in 1967.

1979 → Israel and Egypt make peace; the Sinai Peninsula is returned to Egypt

1981 → Sadat (Egyptian leader) is assassinated.

1982 → Israel invades Lebanon with the intent of evicting Palestinian guerrilla bases near Israel's northern bases, although Israeli Defense Minister pushed all the way to Beirut (Lebanon) and expelled the PLO from the country.

1987 → Palestinian *Intifada*

1988 → US began dialogue with PLO, but Israel continued to view the group as terrorist and denied to negotiate.

1993 → The Oslo I Accord was signed and sealed with the historic hand shake between Arafat and Rabin watched by 400 million people around the world.

1995 → Oslo II Accord [see Key Terms for more details] is signed, dividing the West Bank in three zones (A, B and C).

1996-99 → Hamas suicide bombings in Israel; three-week bombardment in Lebanon by Israel; Israeli handing over of 80% of Hebron (important Palestinian town) and further West Bank territory to Palestinian control; release of 350 Palestinian prisoners.

2001 → Second *Intifada*, caused by Ariel Sharon's (Prime Minister of Israel) visit to Temple Mount [see Key Terms], which was perceived by Palestinians as highly provocative.

2002 → Palestinian militants campaigned attacks in Israeli territory for three months. In response, Israel sent tanks and troops to re-occupy almost all of the West Bank.

2003 → The US proposed the creation of a Palestinian state at peace with Israel, but after seven weeks of relative calm, Palestinian suicide bombings crumbled the truce.

2004 → Israeli airstrikes kills two Hamas leaders and, in the same year, PLO leader Arafat dies. Mahmoud Abbas replaces Arafat as PLO leader

2005 → Abbas is elected president. He agrees to a ceasefire in Gaza and Israeli soldiers, settlers and protesters withdrawal from the territory.

2006 → Hamas wins Palestinian parliamentary elections by vast majority. Israel and Lebanon go to war (which lasts for a month, until a ceasefire takes effect)

2007 → Hamas takes over Gaza. There is turmoil until the Annapolis Peace Conference, mediated by the US, where both Israel and Palestine agree on a two-state solution for the conflict.

2008 → The truce does not hold and Israeli invasion and bombardment of Gaza resurges with greater intensity.

2009 → Benjamin Netanyahu is elected prime minister of Israel and President Obama gives historic speech in Cairo; he calls on Palestinians to renounce violence, on Arabs to recognize Israel's right to exist, and for an end to settlement construction.

2011 → Fatah and Hamas sign a reconciliation accord, citing the common cause of opposition to the Israeli occupation and President Abbas requests a bid for statehood at the UN Security Council, which never passes.

2012 → Militant groups in Gaza fire rockets into Israel with increasing frequency. Israel responds with one of its biggest attacks on Gaza since 2008 until both sides agree to end hostilities toward each other; Israel says it will open Gaza border crossings, allowing the flow of products and people into Gaza. The UN General Assembly promotes Palestine from an observer to a non-member state.

2013 → Israelis and Palestinians officially begin peace talks in Jerusalem.

2014 → Peace talks deadline passes without an agreement (April); the murder of three Israeli teenagers and one Palestinian spark war (July-August).

Key Terms

Gaza Strip: The section of land along the eastern Mediterranean Sea, bordering Egypt and Israel. It officially (according to the UN Partition Plan of 1947) belongs to Palestine (controlled by Hamas). [See maps 1 and 2]

West Bank: Territory near the Mediterranean coast of West Asia; it forms the bulk of what is officially (according to the UN Partition Plan of 1947) Palestine territory (controlled by Fatah). [See maps 1 and 2]

Hamas: Palestinian Islamist political organization and militant group. It is an acronym for Islamic Resistance Movement, in Arabic. It is considered one of the most important fundamentalist groups in Palestine. In Arabic, Hamās stands for “cordiality, heat, ardor and enthusiasm”.

Fatah: One of Hamas’s major rivals. It is an acronym for Palestinian National Liberation Movement, in Arabic. Yasser Arafat was Fatah’s founder and leader. Although Hamas is a more aggressive group, Fatah constantly disputes authority in Gaza with them, generating armed conflicts amongst both.

PLO: Acronym stands for Palestinian Liberation Organization. Recognized as the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and unites the movements and parties who fight for these people (the Hamas and Fatah included).

Resolution 338: called for the cease of all firing and military activity “[and start of] negotiations between the parties concerned under appropriate auspices aimed at establishing a just and durable peace in the Middle East”.

Oslo I Accord: Officially named the Declaration of Principles (DOP). It includes an agreement on the withdrawal of Israeli military forces from the Gaza Strip and Jericho area and an economic cooperation between Palestine and Israel.

Oslo II Accord: West bank division: Zone A= 7% went to full Palestinian control (main Palestinian towns, excluding Hebron and East Jerusalem); Zone B= 21% jointly under Israeli and Palestinian control; Zone C= stayed as Israeli territory, but Palestinian prisoners were released. Israel retained control over 35% of the Gaza Strip, which contained Jewish settlements and the roads leading to them; the rest was turned over to the Palestinian Authority.

Zionism: A nationalist movement of Jews and Jewish culture, supporting the creation of a Jewish homeland (the Land of Israel)

Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC): An international organization whose mission is to coordinate the policies of oil-producing countries with the intent of securing a steady income to its member states.

Temple Mount: One of the most important religious sites in the Old City of Jerusalem. It is a precious site for both Judaic and Islamic religions.

Guiding Questions

- How was Israel created and how did this resonate to its neighboring countries?
- What are they fighting over?
- What has intensified the already unstable relation between Arab states and Israel?
- What has been done to solve the problem and why did these attempts work/fail?
- What are seen as the only three options that can lead to a resolution to this conflict and what are their consequences? Which one does the country you are representing support and why?
- What has happened in the past few years, especially this year, and what are currently the best options to reach a resolution to this conflict (according to the country you represent)?

Further Research

Answers to basic questions related to the conflict:

<http://www.vox.com/2014/7/17/5902177/9-questions-about-the-israel-palestine-conflict-you-were-too>

<http://www.bustle.com/articles/30938-what-is-going-on-in-israel-7-questions-about-the-current-conflict-answered>

Brief overview of what has happened in the past few years:

<http://abcnews.go.com/International/israel-gaza-conflict/story?id=24552237>

<http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/israel-and-palestine>

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28294498>

Great timeline for the conflict:

<http://www.infoplease.com/world/countries/israel-palestine-conflict/timeline-2000-present.html#2009>

The always helpful news websites:

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/israel>

<http://edition.cnn.com/MIDDLEEAST>

Great background of religious roots of the conflict:

<http://seattletimes.com/news/nation-world/mideast/roots/>