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Conflicts in the Middle East

TERMS & NAMES

- Balfour Declaration
- Suez Crisis
- Six-Day War
- Anwar Sadat
- Golda Meir
- Menachem Begin
- Camp David Accords
- Hosni Mubarak
- PLO

MAIN IDEA

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

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The conflict in the Middle East threatens the stability of the region today.

SETTING THE STAGE The division of Palestine after World War II set off bitter disputes in the Middle East. Some of the problems faced by the new nation of Israel were similar to those experienced by new nations in Africa and Asia. These included the writing of a new constitution, the merging of diverse peoples, and involvement in territorial disputes with neighbors. Palestinians who did not remain in Israel faced a disruptive life as refugees.

Palestine and Israel

The conflict between Jews and Arabs (including Palestinians) over a Palestinian homeland is one that has its roots in ancient history. To Jews, their claim to the land goes back 3,000 years, when Jewish kings ruled 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. Mixed in with the intertwined history of Jews and Arabs in the region have been more modern events. These include the persecution of Jews in Europe, the rising value of oil in the Middle East, and global politics that have influenced decisions half a world away.

Zionists—people who favored a Jewish national homeland in Palestine—had begun to settle in Palestine in the late 19th and early 20th century. At the time, the region was still part of the Ottoman Empire, ruled by Islamic Turks. Zionists at first made up only about 10 percent of the population. 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.

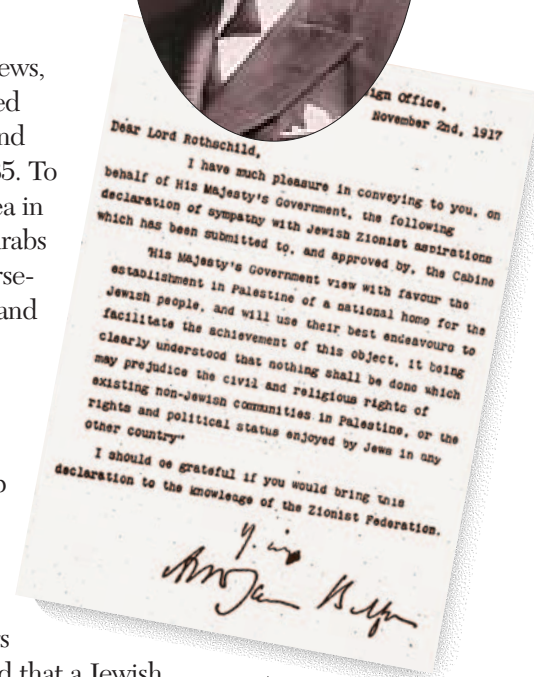
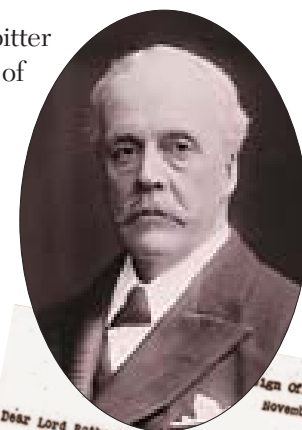
The Early Stages Palestinians feared that the increasing numbers of Jewish immigrants would result in hardships for them. Jews asked that a Jewish nation be carved out of the territory. Engaged in fighting World War I, Britain did not want to lose the support of either side. In a letter from the British foreign secretary to a Zionist supporter, Britain seemed to make promises to both sides.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

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.

ARTHUR JAMES BALFOUR, in a letter to Lord Rothschild, November 2, 1917

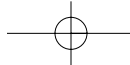
Britain found the terms of the **Balfour Declaration** to be unworkable because the two sides could not live together. Therefore, Britain called for partition of the country. Meanwhile, Nazi Germany's persecution of Jews spurred immigration to Palestine.



The Balfour Declaration is contained in this letter written by Sir Arthur Balfour (pictured above), the British foreign secretary. The letter was addressed to Lord Rothschild, head of the English branch of a banking family and a Zionist leader.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

A. Clarifying Balfour approved the establishment of a home for Jews in Palestine with what qualification?



Israel Becomes a State Britain failed in its many attempts to work out a satisfactory compromise. At the end of World War II, a weary Britain referred the Palestine issue to the United Nations. The UN recommendations, accepted by the General Assembly in 1947, called for a partition of Palestine into a Palestinian state and a Jewish state. Jerusalem was to be an international city owned by neither side.

All of the Islamic countries voted against partition, and the Palestinians rejected it outright. They objected that the UN did not have the right to partition a country without considering the wishes of the majority of its people. However, the Jews welcomed the proposal. The terms of the partition were very favorable to them, giving them 55 percent of the area even though Jews made up only 34 percent of the population. Certain nations, such as the United States and many in Europe, felt sympathy for the Jews because of the Holocaust. Such nations supported the concept of giving Jews their own nation. 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.

Israel and the 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 Arab 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. Israel depended on strong American support in this conflict, as well as in most of its other wars. Full-scale war broke out again in 1956, 1967, and 1973.

The Palestinian state that the UN had set aside for Palestinians never came into being. Israel seized half the land in the 1948–1949 fighting. Egypt took control of the Gaza Strip, and Jordan annexed the West Bank. (See map on page 903.) While the fighting raged, thousands of Palestinians fled, migrating from the areas under Jewish control. They settled in UN-sponsored refugee camps that ringed the borders of their former homeland.

The 1956 Suez Crisis The second Arab-Israeli war followed Egypt's seizure of the Suez Canal in 1956. This seizure was ordered by Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, who had led the military coup that overthrew King Farouk in 1952. French and British business interests had continued to control the canal after the coup.

In 1956, angered by the loss of U.S. and British financial support for the building of the Aswan Dam, Nasser sent his troops to take the canal. Outraged, the British and the French made an agreement with Israel. With air support provided by their European allies, the Israelis marched on the Suez Canal and quickly defeated the Egyptians. However, pressure from the rest of the world's community, including the United States and the Soviet Union, forced Israel and its European allies to withdraw from Egypt. This left Egypt in charge of the canal and thus ended the **Suez Crisis**.

The 1967 Six-Day War 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. Nasser announced, "We are eager for battle in order to force the enemy to awake from his dreams, and meet Arab reality face to face." He moved to close off the Gulf of Aqaba, Israel's outlet to the Red Sea. Convinced that the Arabs were about to attack, the Israelis attacked airfields in Egypt, Iran,

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

B. Summarizing

What recommendations did the UN make for Palestine?

HISTORY MAKERS



Golda Meir
1898–1978

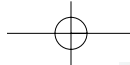
Golda Meir, one of the signers of Israel's declaration of independence, was born in Kiev, Russia, and emigrated with her family to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, when she was eight.

In those days, she was known as Goldie Mabovitch. The Mabovitch home was a gathering place for discussions among Zionists. Golda listened excitedly to the talk about Jews working for a Jewish state.

In 1921, after becoming a teacher, Golda and her husband, Morris Myerson, moved to Palestine, where they joined a kibbutz, a collective farm. In 1956, Golda Myerson began using a Hebraic form of her married name, Meir. She served Israel as ambassador to the Soviet Union, minister of labor, foreign minister, and finally prime minister.

Background

The 1952 overthrow led by Nasser marked the first time that Egypt had been ruled by native Egyptians since the 6th century B.C.



Jordan, and Syria. Safe from air attack, Israeli ground forces struck like lightning on three fronts. The war 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 occupied militarily the old city of Jerusalem, the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, and the West Bank. This was done to provide a buffer zone and improve security. Palestinians who lived in Jerusalem were given the choice of Israeli or Jordanian citizenship. Most chose the latter. Palestinians who lived in the other areas were not offered Israeli citizenship and became stateless.

The 1973 War 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. An uneasy truce was agreed to after several weeks of fighting, ending the October war.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY
C. Recognizing Effects What were some of the effects of the Arab-Israeli conflicts?

THINK THROUGH HISTORY
D. Summarizing What was the significance of the Camp David Accords?

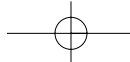
Trading Land for Peace

Since no peace treaty ended the Yom Kippur War, many people feared that another war could start. Four years later, however, in November 1977, Anwar Sadat stunned the world by offering peace to Israel. No Arab country up to this point had recognized Israel's right to exist. In a dramatic gesture, he flew to Jerusalem and told the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, "We used to reject you. . . . Yet, today we agree to live with you in permanent peace and justice." Sadat emphasized that in exchange for peace, Israel would have to recognize the rights of Palestinians. Further, it would have to withdraw from territory seized in 1967 from Egypt, Jordan, and Syria.

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 discussed the issues dividing their two countries. 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**, the first signed agreement between Israel and an Arab country, ended 30 years of hostilities between Egypt and Israel.

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





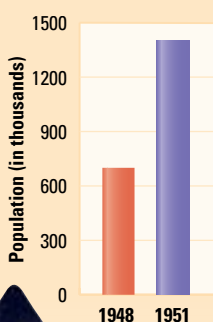
Daily *Life*: Israel, 1951

Israeli Independent News

Life on a Kibbutz

On this communal farm, women work right along with men in the fields. Children receive care from trained teachers and nurses. One young girl being raised on a kibbutz wrote her American friend about the freedom and responsibility of kibbutz life: "Among us the children's opinion is very important. We decide when and how to work and when to do a project. I study six hours a day and I work one and a half hours. I am also taking lessons in music and crafts."

Population Doubles in Three Years



Israel's Jewish population has doubled from 700,000 in May 1948 to 1,400,000 on the country's third birthday, thanks to a huge influx of immigrants. The new Israelis hail from 70 different countries, including Poland, Romania, Germany, Italy, Austria, Bulgaria, Libya, and Iraq. At a cost of about \$1,600 per immigrant, the Jewish Agency sees to all the immigrants' needs when they first arrive, from housing to health care.



Tent cities have sprung up throughout Israel to house new immigrants. Within ten years, these temporary shelters will be replaced by permanent housing.

Temporary Housing Springs Up

Near the large towns and farming areas that offer employment, transit camps called *ma'abarot* offer shelter and food for Israel's refugees. Workers quickly raise tents and canvas huts to house the refugees. Then they build wooden huts to hold kindergartens, nurseries, clinics, and employment centers. Workers can erect a *ma'abarot* within a few weeks. These camps provide welcome shelter for hundreds of thousands of needy immigrants.



A tractor driver carries a rifle slung across his back as he works to develop the land on his kibbutz.

From Culture to Agriculture

Many of Israel's eager immigrants are former lawyers, professors, or physicians. They find themselves drawn to the hard work of clearing Israel's swamps and making her deserts bloom. At one collective farm, the professors who work as farmers could probably open their own college. Now, instead of teaching math, philosophy, or psychology, they eagerly pore over the latest publications on scientific farming from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

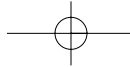
Connect to History

Synthesizing From the articles in the newsletter, what problems did new immigrants to Israel face in 1951?

SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R18

Connect to Today

Researching In the library or on the Internet, research a facet of life in modern-day Israel. You might choose the kibbutzim, Palestinian-Israeli relations, or the current status of Jerusalem.



The Palestinians Demand Independence

Peace agreements between Israelis and Palestinians were harder to achieve. Unwilling to give up territories they had seized for security, the Israelis began to build settlements on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The Intifada Palestinians living in Israel resented Israeli rule. As their anger mounted, they turned increasingly to the Palestine Liberation Organization, or **PLO**, led by Yasir Arafat (YAH-sur AR-uh-FAT). During the 1970s and 1980s, the military wing of the PLO conducted a campaign of armed struggle against Israel. Israel turned to strong measures, bombing suspected bases in Palestinian towns. In 1982, the Israeli army invaded Lebanon in an attempt to destroy strongholds in Palestinian villages. The Israelis soon 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 towards a solution. However, the civil disobedience affected world opinion, which, in turn, put pressure on Israel. Finally, in October 1991, Israeli and Palestinian delegates met for the first time in a series of peace talks.

The Declaration of Principles The status of the Israeli-occupied territories proved to be a bitterly divisive issue. In 1993, however, secret talks held in Oslo, Norway, produced a surprise agreement. In a document called the Declaration of Principles, 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 an 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 plan. Still, Netanyahu made efforts to keep to the agreement. In January 1997, he met with Arafat to work out plans for a partial Israeli withdrawal from Hebron, on the West Bank. In 1999, Ehud Barak won election as prime minister and voiced support for the peace plan. However, the election in 2001 of Ariel Sharon, a former military leader, as prime minister complicated the peace process.

SPOTLIGHT ON



Oslo Peace Agreement

In 1993, the PLO and Israel conducted highly secret talks in an isolated farmhouse near Oslo, Norway. The Palestinian and Israeli leaders showed courage in working out a peace agreement sure to be unpopular with many of their followers. Their achievement was recognized in 1994. That year, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded jointly to PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres.

In making the award, the Nobel committee said the prize was intended to "serve as an encouragement to all the Israelis and Palestinians who are endeavoring to establish lasting peace in the region."

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

E. Forming an

Opinion Political commentators have said that the Arab-Israeli conflict represents the struggle not of right against wrong, but of right against right. Do you agree or disagree? Explain.

Section 4 Assessment

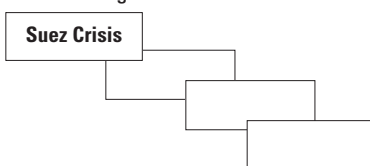
1. TERMS & NAMES

Identify

- Balfour Declaration
- Suez Crisis
- Six-Day War
- Anwar Sadat
- Golda Meir
- Menachem Begin
- Camp David Accords
- Hosni Mubarak
- PLO

2. TAKING NOTES

Draw a cause-and-effect graphic and fill in some important political and military events that occurred following the Suez Crisis.



Write a paragraph explaining which event is most important.

3. ANALYZING ISSUES

Explain the conflict between Jews and Arabs over a Palestinian homeland. What does each side believe? What other factors influence this issue?

THINK ABOUT

- the Balfour Declaration
- the ancient history of the Middle East
- the economics of oil

4. THEME ACTIVITY

Power and Authority In groups of three or four, come up with a list of ten interview questions for Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar Sadat, Yasir Arafat, or Yitzhak Rabin.