

Name: _____

Class: _____

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

By Mike Kubic
2016

Mike Kubic is a former correspondent of Newsweek. In the following article, Kubic explores the ancient history and contemporary events that have led to political friction and military combat between Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews, continuing into the 21st century. As you read, identify the central ideas of the text and the author's conclusions in regards to the future of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

- [1] The Arab-Israeli conflict is a sequel to one of the world's oldest and most unyielding contests – a struggle over the rightful ownership of Palestine, the Middle East region between the Mediterranean Sea and the river Jordan.

A land of fertile valleys, gentle mountains and exceptional beauty, the area has been dominated by a bewildering array of conquerors. Beginning around 3000 BC, the region was occupied by the Canaanite¹ civilization. Around 1800 BC, Hebrews² began migrating to the area. Their rule lasted until the 2nd Century BC, when they were defeated by invading Roman legions,³ and gradually left for other parts of the world.⁴



"Lots of Religions" by David Spinks is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

Five centuries later, Palestine fell under the sword of Arab followers of a new monotheistic⁵ religion, Islam. The Muslims,⁶ in turn, were defeated 400 years later by the Christian Crusaders from Europe. In the 13th Century, Palestine came under the rule of Mamluk sultans of Egypt and in 1516, the region was conquered by the Turkish-dominated Ottoman Empire.

1. Canaanites inhabited ancient Palestine and Phoenicia, which covered present-day Israel, the West Bank, Lebanon and much of Syria and Jordan.
2. Hebrews were an ancient group of people who practiced Judaism and lived in present-day Israel and Palestine.
3. This refers to the Jewish–Roman Wars, which are often noted as a significant shift in the history of the Jewish people. The Wars, a sequence of large rebellions by the Jews of the Eastern Mediterranean against the Roman Empire, took place between 66 and 136 AD. Once a major population in the region, Jews became a minority that was driven into different regions after the revolts came to an end.
4. Most Jews in the Diaspora remained in the Middle East and North Africa; a large population was enslaved in Rome, and from them, a large population grew in Europe.
5. A monotheistic religion is one that believes in only one god
6. Muslims are people who practice Islam

The next change of rulers – and the origins of today's Arab-Israeli conflict – dates back to the end of World War I, when the Ottoman Empire disintegrated. In 1920, the League of Nations gave Britain the mandate to administer Palestine.

"If I forget thee, Jerusalem..."⁷

- [5] The British army, which was already occupying Palestine, was handed an unenviable job. The Jews in diaspora⁸ had sworn for centuries to never forget Palestine, and they didn't. Expelled from medieval Spain and fleeing East European pogroms,⁹ they had increasingly flocked to the "Land of Zion."¹⁰ By the start of World War I, Zionist¹¹ leaders were calling for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, a demand that triggered protests and riots by the Palestinian Muslims and Christians, and by Arab states.

In 1917, British foreign minister Arthur Balfour tried to satisfy both sides by declaring that "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," but adding "it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine."

Instead of settling the controversy, the declaration unleashed a new spiral of protests and violence on both sides. Encouraged by Balfour's commitment, the Zionists greatly stepped up Jewish emigration to Palestine. The flood of refugees from Nazi Germany and pogroms in the Ukraine and Poland agitated the Arabs, but when Britain tried to stem the Jewish influx, extremist Zionist groups unleashed a wave of terror that included the bombing of the British headquarters in King David Hotel in Jerusalem and the massacre in Deir Yassin, a Palestinian village.

The violence increased pressure behind the Jewish independence movement and triggered an exodus of Arab families fearing possible attacks. The Jewish independence movement triumphed on May 14, 1948, when the United Nations ended the British Mandate and David Ben Gurion, a highly respected Zionist leader, declared "the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz Israel, to be known as the State of Israel."

The new state was promptly recognized by the United States, Britain, the Soviet Union and many other

-
7. **Here, the author is referencing Psalm 137 found in both the Torah and the Bible. It is a well-known hymn of the Hebrew Israelites, who were in exile after the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem – one of the oldest cities in the world, located in the disputed territory between the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea – in 607 BC. The poem is encouragement to remember Jerusalem, which is considered holy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.**
 8. **Diaspora** (*noun*) a group of people who live outside the region in which they or their ancestors had lived for an extended period
 9. "Pogrom" refers to the organized killing of many helpless people, usually because of their race or religion
 10. Zion is the historic land of Israel. It is the most holy place in the world for the Jewish people, seen as the connection between God and humanity.
 11. A Zionist is a supporter of Zionism, a political and nationalist movement that supports the maintenance and preservation of the state of Israel as a Jewish homeland. Originally arising in the late 1800s, the goal of establishing a Jewish homeland in the region of Palestine, where Jews could return from the diaspora, gained momentum following the persecution of the Jewish people during World War I and its aftermath.

countries but not by its neighbors. Led by Egypt, the armies of the neighboring Arab nations attacked the Jewish state only to be quickly defeated by Hagana, a military organization that Israel's Labor party had quietly organized and armed with surplus WWII weapons during the British mandate.

Building a New Nation

- [10] The 1948 Palestine War, which the Israelis call the "War of Independence" and the Palestinians remember as *al nakba* – "The Catastrophe" – was the first of several Arab-Israeli encounters in which Israel defeated opposing forces. It prompted a flight of panic-stricken Palestinians to neighboring Jordan and Lebanon. The Hagana strengthened the exodus by expelling the populations of entire towns and villages. As a result, the new state was left with only 800,000 of its original Muslim and Christian Arabs, reducing the population to the same size of the Jewish Israeli populace.

For the next two decades, Israel began a process of robust nation building. The new state replaced more than 360 evacuated Palestinian villages with scores of agricultural coops called *kibbutzim*. Israeli governments organized the immigration of hundreds of thousands of Sephardic¹² Jews from Iran and Arab countries,¹³ and put them to work in new state-owned industries. Well-educated Ashkenazis¹⁴ – Jewish immigrants from Europe and the U.S. – helped establish Israel's Weizmann Institute, Technion and other prestigious scientific establishments.

In foreign affairs, Israel allied with the West. In 1956, it invaded the Suez Canal Zone to assist Britain and France in seizing the Suez Canal Company after it was nationalized by Gamal Abdel Nasser, the second president of Egypt. The plot collapsed after it was denounced in the United Nations and by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, but Israel was nevertheless able to secure powerful Western allies. In contrast, hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees were living in abysmally poor camps run by U.N. agencies that were largely financed by the U.S.

Only one host country, Jordan, was generous in granting the refugees its citizenship. Syria and Egypt sponsored the camps' radical militant groups and urged the rest of the Palestinians to wait for the next – and this time, victorious – offensive against Israel.

Only one of the refugee groups, the Palestine Liberation Organization, was able to engage in tactical measures to fulfill its stated goal of "armed struggle for the Liberation of Palestine." But its ineffective border raids on Israel added to the growing tensions fanned by Egypt's Nasser's threats to destroy the Jewish state.

-
12. Sephardic Jews are a subgroup of Jews, with origins in Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East and their descendants.
 13. Following the formation of Israel in 1948, early 1 million Jews were ethnically cleansed from the Middle East and North Africa. Most emigrated to Israel.
 14. Ashkenazic (or Ashkenazi) Jews are a Jewish subgroup from France, Germany, and Eastern Europe and their descendants.

The Six-Day War and its Aftermath

- [15] The brewing crisis came to a head in May 1967, when Nasser ordered the U.N. troops out of Sinai, where they had formed a buffer between Israel and Egypt. He also claimed the Straits of Tiran¹⁵ were being mined in order to establish a blockade of Israeli ships, which imperiled¹⁶ shipments of Iranian oil to Israel. Furthermore, Nasser publicly announced, "The Jews threatened war. We tell them: you are welcome, we are ready for war..."

In the morning of June 5, Israeli fighter planes responded by sweeping over the airports of Egypt and Jordan and destroying their warplanes and runways. At the same time, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) –which consisted of ground, air, and naval forces – launched an offensive that in six days captured Egypt's Sinai and Gaza Strip as well as Jordan's West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Old City.¹⁷ On the last day of the war, IDF also conquered the Golan Heights, from which the Syrian army used to shell the Israeli town of Tiberias.

The IDF triumph more than tripled the territory under Israeli control, which resulted in these monumental developments:

1. The United States and United Nations became deeply involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In November, 1967, the UN Security Council unanimously demanded Israel withdraw from the occupied territories in exchange for Arab recognition of, and peace with, Israel.

In 1968, President Lyndon Johnson authorized a sale to Israel of U.S. made Phantom fighter planes. This was followed by rapidly increasing U.S. aid to Israel that has by now reached more than \$3 billion a year, 70% of which go for military equipment.

- [20] Since 1967, U.S. presidents have repeatedly guaranteed the security of Israel while trying to bring about Middle East peace. The most successful was President Jimmy Carter, who in 1978 invited Nasser's successor Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin to Camp David and persuaded them to sign the first treaty in which an Arab country recognized Israel.

2. Egypt and Jordan ceased their counteractions against Israel.

After the Six Day War, a conference of Arab countries announced a policy of "no peace, no negotiations and no recognition" of Israel, but they did not uphold these three commitments. Egypt's Sadat launched in October, 1973 a successful attack on Israeli forces in Sinai, but afterwards accepted Menachem Begin's invitation to visit Jerusalem, and in 1979 signed the peace treaty. Jordan's King, Hussein bin Talal, held secret meetings with Israeli prime ministers for several years, and in 1994 became the second Arab leader to sign a peace treaty with the Jewish State.

15. The Straits of Tiran are sea passages between the Sinai and Arabian peninsulas.

16. **Imperil (verb)** to put at risk of being harmed, injured, or destroyed

17. The Old City is an area within the city of Jerusalem that has several sites of key religious importance.

3. The Palestine Liberation Organization recognized Israel.

After the Six Day War, PLO's new leader, Yassir Arafat, launched a failed guerilla war against Israel. King Hussein expelled the PLO *fedayeen*¹⁸ from Jordan, and when they moved to Lebanon, the IDF forced them to flee as far as Tunisia. Unable to exercise a military option, Arafat entered U.S.-sponsored negotiations with Israel in 1993. In 1995, Arafat recognized the Jewish state in return for an interim self-government in the occupied territories, which would be headed by a new organization, the Palestine National Authority (PNA).¹⁹

Since Arafat's death in 2004, the PNA has been led by his successor, Mahmoud Abbas, while Israel has maintained overall control of the West Bank's 2.8 million Palestinians. Hamas, an Islamist splinter group, won the 2006 elections in Gaza and now governs the strip's inhabitants, a population of nearly 2 million.

4. Israel has embarked on major expansion of Jewish settlements.

After the Six Day War, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan prohibited Israeli civilians from remaining overnight on the occupied West Bank, but later broke his decree in the fall of 1967 by allowing a group of religious Jews to spend the Passover holiday in Hebron, a major Palestinian town.²⁰

- [25] The subsequent construction of Kiryat Arba, a nearby Israeli settlement, marked the beginning of more than 120 Israeli settlements that would be established throughout the occupied territory. Today, the settlements are home to 390,000 Jewish residents.²¹ Construction continues despite repeated objections by the U.S. and other governments.

5. Residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip have continued their resistance to Israel.

In 1987 and again in 2000, the West Bank erupted into massive, violent uprisings. Independent of the PLO, demonstrators attempted to liberate Palestinian towns and villages. The fighting, which lasted until 2005, cost 3,000 Palestinian and 1,000 Israeli lives before it was suppressed by 80,000 IDF troops.

Since then, Israel has built a wall along parts of the West Bank to prevent individual Palestinians from attacking Israeli civilians and soldiers. In recent years, IDF has repeatedly cracked down on militants in the Gaza strip who were shelling Israeli towns in the Negev.

-
18. "Fedayeen" is a reference to Palestinian guerilla fighters with nationalist views. They are often valued as "freedom fighters" to the Palestinian people, but have also been called "terrorists" by critics.
19. This recognition occurred thanks to the peace treaties known as The Oslo Accords, signed in 1993 and 1995 by PLO leader Yassir Arafat, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and future Israeli leader Shimon Peres. The three men were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts. Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated for his role in the peace process in 1995, and any future progress from the Oslo Accord negotiations died with him.
20. A small community of Jews lived in Hebron for apx. 3,000 years until the 1929 Hebron Massacre ended their presence there.
21. An additional 200,000 Israelis live in East Jerusalem.

Commenting on the Palestinian-Israeli relationship, Sari Nusseibeh, a prominent West Banker and former president of Al Quds University in Jerusalem, recently wrote:

"It is as if people on both sides decided to yield where they felt history was taking them... both sides have put on their armor, readying themselves for combat without a clear end in sight."

© 2016. *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* by CommonLit is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Unless otherwise noted, this content is licensed under the [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/)

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following statements BEST describes a central idea of the text?
 - A. The Palestine Liberation Organization is the only legitimate organization representing the Palestinian people.
 - B. It is improbable that the Arab-Israeli conflict will come to an end in the immediate future.
 - C. Palestinian refugees have received international support.
 - D. The growth of the Zionist movement did not play a central role in the establishment of Israel.

2. PART B: Which quotation from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "Zionist leaders were calling for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine" (Paragraph 5)
 - B. "Palestinian refugees were living in abysmally poor camps run by U.N. agencies that were largely financed by the U.S." (Paragraph 12)
 - C. "Only one of the refugee groups, the Palestine Liberation Organization, was able to engage in tactical measures to fulfill its stated goal..." (Paragraph 14)
 - D. "both sides have put on their armor, readying themselves for combat without a clear end in sight" (Paragraph 29)

3. In paragraph 2, the author uses the words "fertile," "gentle," and "exceptional" to...
 - A. Ensure the reader has a mental image of the region.
 - B. Explain land use in the Palestinian region.
 - C. Draw attention to some of the reasons why the region was so sought after.
 - D. Rationalize the Canaanite civilization's development.

4. PART A: In paragraph 18, the author uses the phrase "occupied territories." What does the word "occupied" most closely mean as it is used in this context?
 - A. Seized or controlled
 - B. Filled up or held
 - C. In use or unavailable
 - D. Engaged or employed

5. PART B: Which phrase from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "which resulted in these monumental developments" (Paragraph 17)
 - B. "unanimously demanded Israel withdraw from" (Paragraph 18)
 - C. "President Lyndon Johnson authorized a sale" (Paragraph 19)
 - D. "the first treaty in which an Arab country recognized Israel" (Paragraph 20)

6. Re-read the following lines from paragraph 10: "What the Israelis call the 'War of Independence' and the Palestinians remember as al nakba – 'The Catastrophe' – was the first of several Arab-Israeli encounters in which Israel defeated opposing forces." What is the purpose of the juxtaposition of language used here?

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. According to the text, both the Israelis and Palestinians regard the same region as their homeland. Do you foresee the two peoples being able to resolve this conflict? If not, why? And if so, how?
2. What region do you consider to be your homeland, and why? Are there people from other cultures who also call the same region home? Does this cause conflict in your experience? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
3. Has your right to something ever been questioned? How has that felt? How did you react?
4. In the context of this text, why do people go to war? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
5. In the context of this text, what is fair? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.